



## Introduction to the special issue of electoral Studies in memory of Harold D. Clarke

Paul Whiteley<sup>a,\*</sup>, Jeff Gill<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> University of Essex, Colchester, Essex, UK

<sup>b</sup> Departments of Government and Mathematics/Statistics, Center for Data Science at the American University, USA

This special issue of *Electoral Studies* in memory of Professor Harold Clarke acknowledges his longstanding contribution to the journal as an editor from 1995 to 2017. During this period he was committed to promoting substantive and methodological innovation in the study of elections and public opinion. One of the most rewarding things about working with Harold on an academic project was his unbounded enthusiasm for research in political science, together with his wide-ranging interests in the discipline. This of course made him a great editor as well.

He was interested in many questions, but two broad topics took pride of place in his research interests. The first was theoretical and empirical innovation in the study of elections and public opinion. The second was his interest in methodological innovation applied to elections and to public opinion research. He enthusiastically followed new methodological developments in the field and was keen to adopt approaches which move the discipline forward.

His organisational engagement with the discipline of political science was extensive. He was a principal investigator for the Canadian National Election study from 1974 to 1980, and subsequently an investigator in the Political Support in Canada project. He was the co-director of the British Election Study from 2001 to 2012. Other activities included serving as Director of the Social and Economic Sciences Division of the National Science Foundation and membership of the NSF's Future of the American National Election Study Advisory Panel.

The papers in this special issue reflect the scope of his research interests. They are written by authors who collaborated with Harold on various projects and also published articles and books with him. They are diverse but have two common features: focusing on theory building on the one hand and methodological innovation on the other.

In relation to political methodology his main interest was in time series analysis and the dynamic modelling of public opinion, particularly focusing on the relationship between voting behaviour and economic performance over time. As well as using these methods extensively in his

own research he was an influential teacher at the University of Texas at Dallas and at summer schools at the Universities of Essex, Oxford and Concordia University in Canada. Through these efforts he touched the lives of countless students and colleagues.

Turning to the papers in this special issue, Jeff Gill, Selim Yaman and Abdullah Atalan address an important question in computer based statistical inference which has wider implications beyond political science. Computer based inference allows predictive modelling with very large numbers of variables, referred to as 'high dimensional analysis' in the literature. This can give rise to issues of problems of over-fitting, multicollinearity and the inclusion of spurious effects in unsupervised machine learning exercises. The latter refer to situations in which the algorithms seek out predictors in a modelling exercise which analysts do not determine in advance. Researchers are aware of the problems arising from this approach and use shrinkage methods such as lasso regression to change the weighting or importance of different variables in the modelling.

The paper addresses a conundrum which can arise from this exercise, namely the down-weighting of theoretically important variables at the expense of less important ones that contribute mainly or purely to prediction accuracy in a classical machine learning setting. This paper introduces for the first time a Partial Protection Bayesian Lasso (Least Absolute Shrinkage and Selection Operator) that introduces a weighting procedure for analysing large numbers of covariates using a Bayesian framework. The operator ensures that the impact of the theoretically important variables is controlled by the researcher. The paper makes an important contribution to the wider methodological literature on this issue and applies the tool to election data.

The paper by Matthew Lebo, Ellen M. Key and Michael Driggers develops and extends a seminal paper published by Harold and Marianne Stewart in 1995 called 'Economic Evaluations, Prime Ministerial Approval and Governing Party Support: Rival Models Reconsidered'. This paper challenged a conventional wisdom widespread at the

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [whiteley@essex.ac.uk](mailto:whiteley@essex.ac.uk) (P. Whiteley).

time that leadership was not an important factor in influencing public opinion and voting in British elections. It did this by showing that there was a long-run interaction between support for the current Prime Minister and voting intentions for their party, known as a cointegrating relationship. This meant the variables were in a long-run equilibrium relationship. The paper showed how important leadership effects are for public opinion and voting behaviour over time.

The original analysis raised a series of important methodological questions such as whether the variables in the modelling are stationary (fluctuate around an overall mean with constant variance), whether there is evidence of cointegration between them; and the causal status of their interaction. All these issues bear upon questions about the robustness and stability of the results in the long run, which is still an area of investigation in the literature. Lebo, Key, and Driggers examine these issues by replicating the original analysis and then subsequently updating the modelling to 2022. The results show that the original analysis has indeed stood the test of time. The paper draws the following conclusion: 'Like so much of their work, Clarke and Stewart's Economic Evaluations, Prime Ministerial Approval and Governing Party Support made major contributions to the study of British politics while also demonstrating transparent and careful time series modelling'.

The paper by Lawrence LeDuc and Jon H. Pammett, coauthored with Harold, addresses an important topic in comparative politics, namely the rise of populism across the democratic world. It uses Canada as a case study, relying on Canadian Election Study data from the 2019 and 2021 Federal Elections. The authors show that while populism has had an impact in Canada, it has not received the kind of support achieved elsewhere, notably in the United States when Donald Trump was elected President in 2016.

A new Canadian populist 'People's Party' fought the two Federal Elections but failed to win any seats in Parliament. The authors show that some populist themes such as nativism and authoritarianism have not resonated with the voters in Canadian elections as they have elsewhere in North American and Europe. But at the same time distrust of elites, which is a major feature of electoral support for populist parties, does resonate in Canada. For example, only 24 per cent of respondents in the 2019 survey agreed with the statement that 'Politicians are Trustworthy', while 60 per cent agreed with the statement 'Politicians care only about the rich and powerful'. Despite this, the authors think that public approval for immigration and the government's handling of the Covid19 pandemic make it unlikely that a populist party will be successful in that country any time soon.

The paper by Helmut Norpoth uses a very long time series from 1828 to 2020 to forecast Presidential Elections in the United States. The forecasting model is described as the 'Primary Model' which takes advantage of information from primary elections as well as drawing on evidence of long-term cycles in Presidential support to forecast outcomes. The cycle suggests that between 1828 and 2016 a party typically held on to the White House for about ten years, which a remarkable finding given the multitude of events occurring during that period in the United States. However, as the author points out, the forecasting model posted in March 2020 gave Donald Trump a Trump a 91% chance of winning the presidential election with a prediction that he would win 362 Electoral College votes. As we know Joe Biden was elected president with 306 Electoral College votes. This is possibly an indication of major shifts taking place in American politics as long-standing norms are broken and the electorate shifts to a notably more polarized configuration.

The author attributes the failure of the prediction to events which occurred after the March prediction was made, something which is commonly referred to as 'October Surprises'. Chief among these was the arrival of the Covid19 pandemic, although other factors played a role as well. The impact of the pandemic was illustrated by the collapse in presidential approval ratings beginning in May of that year when the seriousness of the pandemic became apparent. He argues that the 2020 election is a rare case where the Primary Model got it wrong. It was rare

because over the course of all presidential elections from 1912 to 2016 in-sample predictions were correct in 25 out of 27 elections. Forecasting can be wrong, but this illustrates how useful it can be by improving on a coin tossing exercise, which will of course fail 50 per cent of the time.

The paper by Stegmaier, Jokinsky and Lewis-Beck provides an overview of the history of election forecasting in Britain since the 1970s. It shows how the research was linked to developments in election forecasting in other countries, particularly in the United States. The models utilised vary a lot with some forecasting vote shares using poll data over time, others using predictors linked to incumbent party economic performance. Yet more combined past voting data with polling data to make predictions based on combined short-term and long-term data. Finally, another approach is to use survey-based data on citizen forecasts of election outcomes rather than on voting intentions.

The most striking feature of the paper is the table summarizing the successes and failures of the various forecasting models over this period of half a century. From the 1970s up to the 2010 general election the great majority of models were accurate in their predictions of election results. However, this changed rather dramatically in 2015, with almost all forecasters failing to see the Conservative victory and opting instead for a hung Parliament. In their conclusion the authors point out that much of the forecasting literature has now moved to the blogosphere, mainly because the relatively long delays in publishing academic papers make it quite hard to make a forecast prior to the date of the actual election.

The paper by Whiteley looks at long term trends in age-related voting compared with class-related voting in Britain over a period of more than fifty years.

The focus is on identifying differences between age, period and cohort effects as part of an overall analysis of the impact of the interaction between age and social class on voting in all elections since 1964. The methodological approach uses a modified version of Hierarchical-Age-Period-Cohort modelling to separate out effects. This long-run analysis shows that the class model of party support, developed by Butler and Stokes in the 1960s, has considerably weakened over time in contrast with age effects which have become much stronger.

The focus of the analysis was on Labour and the Conservatives as the two parties of government in Westminster. In a fully specified individual level model of voting described as the 'standard model' both parties were affected by age and social class effects. In addition, there was evidence of some period effects playing a role in voting support. But the main difference between the two parties related to cohort effects. These were largely absent for Labour but played a very strong role in explaining declining support for the Conservatives among young voters. The paper concludes that the traditional socialisation agencies which underpinned Conservative support such as families, communities and the party organisation itself have now ceased to work. This suggests that the party will gradually lose support as a result of generational replacement in the future.

The final paper in the special issue by Ali Kagalwala, Thiago Moreira and Guy Whitten focuses on the problem of estimating the effects of emerging cross-cutting cleavages on voting behaviour in multi-party systems. In a two-party system this poses few problems because one party's gain is the second party's loss. But in a multi-party system where many choice pathways are available to voters it is more difficult to estimate dynamic effects. The central focus of the paper is to estimate the effects of a new cleavage in British politics emerging from the 2016 referendum on UK membership of the European Union. The 'Brexit cleavage', as it has been referred to, cross cuts, age, class and other demographic variables in constituency level voting in Britain. The paper looks at the effects of this on party support in the subsequent 2017 and 2019 general elections.

The authors use a compositional variable to identify effects, which involves using ratios of vote shares for each combination of parties to measure effects. They then estimate the effects of unemployment as a signature variable for economic performance across different contests at

the constituency level. In addition, they investigate the effects of the Brexit cleavage on party incumbency, showing how this improved support for Labour in some constituencies but had the reverse effect in others. Overall, the paper shows that the complexities of multi-party systems are no barrier to investigating quite complex interactions in voting support in these systems.

In sum, these various papers highlight the varied substantive and methodological interests which Harold had in his research. It would be impossible to cover the huge range of interests, discoveries, and achievements in his long and successful career. The topics are, however, focused on his favourite topics of electoral politics in the UK and North America, as well as the methods necessary to study them. We are both

honoured see this collection of papers dedicated to Harold Clarke. They are a worthy tribute to a valued colleague who we will miss.

**Declaration of competing interest**

None

**Data availability**

No data was used for the research described in the article.