



NUI MAYNOOTH
Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad

Who Votes?

***An Exploration of the Factors Influencing Turnout Propensity in
Fingal County***

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Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements of the M.Litt degree,
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September 2007

This research was funded by the Fingal Development Board.



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ABSTRACT

Irish elections in recent decades have been marked by considerably low turnout levels with voter turnout rates varying from place to place. This thesis addressed this issue with respect to the county of Fingal in an attempt to identify the factors that influence individual turnout propensity. Data was collated through a county-wide questionnaire survey which was complemented with interview data from politicians, local councilors, political candidates and party workers. The data was subsequently analysed using SPSS along with qualitative analysis of the interview data, supplemented by the use of ArcView 3.2 to create maps, and Census data to conduct aggregate analyses.

This research confirmed the existence of an amalgamation of influential factors on turnout propensity. There were found to be a number of demographic influences on individual turnout propensity with age and marital status proving to be particularly influential. There were also found to be a number of socio-structural influences on turnout propensity in Fingal. However, these influences, which included social class, housing tenure and educational attainment, were found to exist only at the aggregate level. Length of residence was found to be particularly influential with findings on residential stability suggesting the existence of this association at the aggregate level also. The research findings suggested the existence of a “habit” of voting in Fingal. It was also found that an individual sense of political efficacy, understanding of political issues, interest in politics, newspaper readership and feelings of civic duty all influence turnout propensity with many of these factors being interrelated.

In addition, there were found to be numerous place variations in relation to the strength of each of the influential factors.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The pursuance of this research would have undoubtedly resulted in defeat was it not for the help and support of a number of people, who, whether they knew it or not, kept me sane throughout the last two years!

I would like to acknowledge the support of my family over the last two years who, even though they weren't interested, always found the time to ask me how I was getting on! So I would like to say a special thank you to Teresa Kelly, Denis Kelly, Niamh Fanning, Emma Kelly and the other halves, Matthew Fanning and Carl Higgins for their support. Also, I would like to say thanks to Sean Rudden for all the contact details, and Declan O'Callaghan for always managing to ring when I was right in the middle of something!!

Somebody who deserves special acknowledgement is my boyfriend, Shane Kiely. Thanks Shane for your unyielding support, for always listening and for never pointing out the obvious! Thanks for always managing to restore perspective when I felt like I had the world on my shoulders. And also, sorry for giving out when you couldn't answer my interrogations after switching off during one of my half hour ramblings about what I was doing!

I'd like to say a HUGE thank you to Fionnuala Ni Mhordha and Adrienne Hobbs, my "office-mates", for all the funny emails over the last two years! These two were great company and great empathisers and always made me laugh!

I'd like to thank all the staff of the Geography Department in NUI Maynooth. In particular, thanks to Mick Bolger for his technical expertise, and thanks to Mary Weld and Gay Murphy. I'd also like to thank Shelagh Waddington and Dennis Pringle for employing me and keeping me above the bread line! Thanks also to Conor McCaffrey for the help and advice re. said employment.

I would like to acknowledge the support given to me by all at the Fingal Development Board, especially Hilary Kendlin (now at South Dublin Co. Co.) and Ciarán Staunton.

Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Adrian P. Kavanagh, my research supervisor. Thanks Adrian for giving me the opportunity to pursue this degree and thanks for all the advice given over the last two years...and I'm sorry for always managing to walk in when you were in the middle of lunch! (You did always say you'd be there during lunch hour though!).

Denise Kelly

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AEC	Australian Electoral Commission
CEO	Chief Electoral Office (New Zealand)
CSO	Central Statistics Office
CSPE	Civic, Social and Political Education
DRO	District Returning Officer
EA	Electoral Area
EC	Electoral Commission (New Zealand)
ED	Electoral Division
EEC	Electoral Enrolment Centre (New Zealand)
FF	Fianna Fail
FG	Fine Gael
GOTV	Get Out The Vote
ICTs	Information and Communication Technologies
IDEA	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
IRI	International Republican Institute
LEA	Local Electoral Area
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
MMP	Mixed Member Proportional
NICTs	New Information and Communication Technologies
NIRSA	National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis
Non-P	Non Party
NUI	National University of Ireland
NYCI	National Youth Council of Ireland
PC	Personal Computer
PD	Progressive Democrats
PR	Proportional Representation
PR-STV	Proportional Representation – Single Transferable Vote
SF	Sinn Fein
SMS	Short Message Service
SP	Socialist Party
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
TD	Teachta Dála
UCD	University of Dublin
VVAT	Voter Verifiable Audit Trail

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

A recurring and persistent issue on the political agenda in recent decades is that of voter turnout. Of particular concern are the low and declining levels of turnout that seem to have become an established feature of Irish elections and indeed, of elections in many other western democracies. Low turnout is a perturbing issue as it is often taken as an indicator of disaffection, disgruntlement and even indifference with the political system and political process.

According to scholars researching the field of voter turnout, one of the most pressing problems with low turnout is that it implies unequal influence (Lijphart, 1997; Lassen, 2005; Rosenstone and Hanson, 1993; Burnham, 1987). The activity of voting has the potential to become the most equal form of participation. For this to happen however, turnout must be maximized; but this is rarely the case. Why is it that some people just do not vote? This is a question of vast complexity. Perhaps it would require only a simple answer if there were but two types of electors; voters and non voters. However, as with most other politically related notions, this is not the case. Rather, there are many different types of voters and non-voters. It appears that certain societal groups are prone to abstention with non-voters sharing many similar characteristics. As a consequence of this, political representation is skewed in favour of those who cast a vote, and against those who choose to abstain, leaving the consistent non-voters, i.e. the same particular societal groups, as persistently unrepresented in the political arena.

Even where turnout is high, the motives of voters are questionable. Fiedler (1959: 184) summarises this by asking; “Do they vote to make a choice or make a choice in order to be able to vote; that is, is voting an act of social conformity, a symbolic gesture of belonging rather than a way of influencing government?”.

More recently, voter turnout in Ireland appears to have deviated from the established trend of low and declining levels which have become an expected and normal feature of our democratic and electoral system. National turnout at the local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections held in 2004 was just under 60%; an increase on the turnout levels recorded at the previous local and European elections held in 1999 and the previous referendum election held in 2002. Turnout figures for the most recent general election held in May 2007 indicate that approximately 67.61% of the electorate turned out to vote, also an increase from the turnout level recorded at the previous general election held in 2002. Addressing the increase in turnout at the 2004 elections, Kavanagh (2004: 83) states that it “may ultimately prove to be a temporary aberration, representing a brief reversal of a general turnout trend of continued turnout decline”. This statement may also be applicable in the case of the increase recorded at the 2007 General election. Hitherto, it is not feasible to determine whether the increases are a reversal of the established trend of declining turnout levels or a temporary circumstantial aberration.

While turnout levels seem to have increased slightly over the past few years, the levels remain far from optimal with between 30% and 40% of the electorate still choosing not to vote. Ellis et al. (2006: 12) describe voting as being the easiest form of political participation and the activity that engages the majority of citizens. They state however, that “given this, the reasons why people appear to

be increasingly willing to abstain from voting remain far from totally explained”. This is the area where there is much scope for research. Owing to marked register data, we now have the potential to create in-depth accounts of turnout at recent local and general elections for every constituency, local electoral area and electoral division in the country. These spatially acute accounts are extremely useful in identifying low and high turnout areas and can also be used in conjunction with census data to try to determine what factors cause the patterns that emerge on an aggregate level. However, what is lacking and what is needed are studies into the factors that influence the individual turnout decision to accompany these spatially acute turnout accounts and aggregate analyses. In order for something to be done to alleviate or solve the “turnout problem”, it is essential that the motivations behind turning out to vote and the reasons for abstention, along with the factors that influence the turnout decision are fully understood. It is difficult to try to explain the electorate’s reasons for turning out to vote or their reasons for abstaining, particularly because often the decision is not a conscious one. However, this is a task that this research endeavours to achieve.

1.2 SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

This research is implicitly concerned with identifying the factors that influence the decision to vote at the individual level in Fingal County. The justification for this study lies in the expectation of place-specific political behaviour as suggested by Flint and Taylor (2007). Flint and Taylor (2007: 286) propose that “if places are unique then we should expect different forms of political behaviour in different places”. Tam Cho (1999: 1149) reiterates this stating that “each

community must be understood as a separate entity". Therefore, in order to understand political behaviour in one particular place, a study of the relevant behaviour in that area must take place. Within Fingal itself, place specific differences might also be identified with regards to the different local electoral areas. However, it might be argued that the geographical units within Fingal are too small to detect place specific changes, and that differences observed between these small geographical units are a result of factors other than place.

This research is concerned with conducting a place based study of the motivations leading people to vote and with identifying the factors that influence the turnout decision in the county of Fingal. It also aims to provide an account of some of the reasons why voters vote and why non-voters do not vote within the county of Fingal. Fingal encapsulates six Local Electoral Areas (LEAs); Balbriggan, Swords, Malahide, Howth, Mulhuddart and Castleknock. It cannot be presumed that the factors that influence the turnout decision elsewhere also apply within these local electoral areas. This gives rise to the need for place specific research to be undertaken which will identify the factors that influence the turnout decision within the county of Fingal. Given that places are characterised by differing forms of political behaviour, and that the factors influencing turnout differ from place to place, it is proposed that the information yielded from this research be applied only to the county of Fingal. However in saying this, it is expected that this research will add to the general body of research on the topic of individual influences on turnout propensity.

The objective of the research is to uncover the main factors influencing turnout propensity in Fingal. This objective will be met owing to a number of research

hypotheses which will be developed in chapter two, subsequent to a review of the turnout literature.

1.3 LAYOUT OF THESIS

The thesis is divided into a total of ten chapters. With the exception of chapters one and ten, (the introduction and the conclusion) the following is an account of the information and topics covered in each of the chapters.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Chapter two lays out the main contentions of the literature with regards to the factors that may positively or negatively influence turnout propensity. A theoretical account of political participation in general is provided before the focus shifts to the activity of voting. Three encompassing models of voting are presented followed by a discussion of the main types of voters and non-voters that are thought to exist. In the second half of the chapter, the factors that comprise each of the voting models are individually discussed with the aim of developing an understanding of the various influences that are thought to exist on turnout propensity. Finally, the importance of place, a central aspect of this research, is discussed before the development of a number of research hypotheses to be explored throughout the main body of the work.

Chapter Three: Voter Mobilisation

Chapter three is concerned with international and Irish initiatives that have been implemented in an attempt to promote voter turnout. To begin with, an account of the different categories of mobilising activities is presented with respect to

those categories identified by Ellis et al. (2006). Following this, an account of some international voting initiatives is given. In particular, compulsory voting in Australia, the alternative voting methods piloted in the UK in 2002, the Student Vote program in Canada, Rock Volieb in Slovakia and Elections New Zealand in New Zealand are discussed. Subsequent to this, similar Irish initiatives are discussed before the effectiveness of the respective initiatives is evaluated.

Chapter Four: Methodology

Chapter four deals with the research methodology and begins with providing an account of the study area, Fingal, in terms of geographical characteristics, constituency boundaries and the population contained within. The different research methods employed are discussed along with other methods that were intended for use but never actually operationalised. The advantages and shortcomings of the main research method (a questionnaire survey) are noted, before the rationale behind each of the questions included on the questionnaire is given along with an account of the outcome of the pre-test and pilot studies that were conducted. Following this, an account of the second primary method employed (interviews) is given along with a list of questions that were asked of all interviewees. A discussion of the secondary data used is then presented with the main focus on the types of area based data that exist along with the analysis of such data and the limitations of using area based data.

Chapter Five: Voter Turnout

Chapter five provides a background to the topic of voter turnout and a context in which the remaining chapters may be understood. It begins with an account of

the Irish PR-STV electoral system intended to act as an introduction to the topic of voter turnout. Following this, a brief account of national turnout levels in all elections from 1981 to 2007 is given along with a more in-depth discussion of turnout at the 2002 General election and at the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections. The focus of the chapter then shifts from turnout at the national to turnout in Fingal with an account of turnout at both of the aforementioned elections presented. The second half of the chapter deals with different initiatives aimed at promoting voter turnout that have been implemented both in Ireland and around the western world. The initiatives discussed were carefully chosen to parallel one another, that is, where an educational initiative is discussed in relation to Ireland, an international educational initiative is also discussed and so on.

Chapter Six: Influences on Turnout in Fingal

Chapter six begins by profiling the survey respondents in terms of sex, age, marital status, occupation, the age at which full time education ceased, and residential stability. A brief profile of respondents under the same headings is then presented in relation to each of the six local electoral areas in Fingal. The remainder of the chapter is dedicated to dealing with some of the influences that appear to exist on turnout in Fingal and discusses these in the context of three of the hypotheses developed in chapter two. In the case of ¹H₁ and H₂, the analysis is also conducted according to electoral area. This is in accordance with H₅, i.e. that the factors influencing turnout vary on an electoral area by electoral area basis.

¹ See section 2.6 Research Themes and Hypotheses

Chapter Seven: Voting and Non-Voting

Chapter seven deals with reasons for voting and reasons for not voting as stated by survey respondents. It also includes supplementary interview data where appropriate. A discussion of the reasons stated for voting and for not voting is presented with reference to specific elections. This is followed by a synopsis of the reasons presented in general, tying together the main findings of the previous sections. Following this, the types of voters and non-voters that appear to exist in Fingal are deduced based upon the reasons previously stated and the different types of voters and non-voters identified in the literature review in chapter two. The remainder of the chapter deals with barriers to voting on a number of levels including the problems that exist with the electoral process and the provision of information regarding voting and the electoral process from different sources.

Chapter Eight: Politics and Politicians

Chapter eight is concerned with political issues and interest in politics. It begins with a discussion of the level of understanding of politics that appears to exist, along with the effect that political engagement has on understanding politics. The relationship between turnout and understanding political issues is then addressed and an account is given of the issues that the electorate deem to be important. Following this, a discussion of interest in politics is presented. Chapter seven concludes with an account of candidate recognition in each of the local electoral areas in Fingal and in each of the general election constituencies.

Chapter Nine: Identity in Fingal

Chapter nine deals with the issue of identity in Fingal on three different levels. Using survey data, party identity, group identity and place identity are discussed. The main focus of the chapter is on place identity in Fingal and is of particular interest what with Fingal being a relatively new administrative area. The topic of identity with Fingal itself is discussed separately at the end of the chapter. Place identity within Fingal is then linked to voter turnout levels with respect to each of the local electoral areas contained within Fingal.

The chapter structure above lends itself to a holistic study of turnout behaviour in Fingal. While the main concern of this research are the individual level influences on voter turnout, it was realised that the most effective manner of studying turnout behaviour was to approach it in a holistic fashion. Therefore, following a review of the literature on turnout behaviour, aggregate level influences are studied. Subsequent to this, individual level influences on turnout are examined along with self-reported reasons for turnout and abstention. This allows an inclusive picture of turnout behaviour in Fingal to be developed, and accommodates a greater understanding of the factors influencing turnout propensity in Fingal.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

“The death of democracy is not likely to be an assassination from ambush. It will be a slow extinction from apathy, indifference, and undernourishment”

(Hutchins, 1952:80)

Hutchins suggests that democracy as we know it is dying slowly, and that its death will be attributable to a total disregard for one of its most fundamental conditions, political participation. O’Toole (2007) refers to democracy as a system that is capable of solving its own problems. In order for this to happen, he contends that citizens need to be aware of their power and that the citizens of Ireland feel either too complacent or too marginalized to be connected to the democratic system. Democratic political systems rely heavily on active citizen participation of some sort, and according to Bennett and Resnick (1990), a decline in activity must therefore entail a decline in democracy.

Political participation and political equality are two compatible, correlated and interdependent ideals. The problem with these concepts however, is that unless all people participate, or unless those who do participate are a representative cross-section of the electorate, participation will be highly unequal. According to Lijphart (1997:1):

“Unequal participation spells unequal influence – a major dilemma for representative democracy...and a serious problem even if participation is not regarded mainly as a representational

instrument but as an intrinsic democratic good”.

The problem with unequal influence is that the political system and polity in general is “systematically biased in favour of more privileged citizens...and against less advantaged citizens” (Lijphart, 1997:1). This has the result of leaving the less well off in society as highly under-represented in the political arena, a problem that increases with declining levels of participation. This point is reiterated in an article by Lassen (2005) in which he refers to political participation as an instrument of representation. Unequal participation therefore has the effect of distorting the pattern of representation and consequently, adversely affecting policy outcomes. Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) refer to the relationship between declining participation and inequality when suggesting that the smaller the number of political participants, the greater the likelihood of inequality. If people do not participate in political activities, the more likely it is that political influence and policy will be skewed against the interests of the non-participants. Burnham (1987: 99) colloquially summarizes the unequal participation/unequal influence literature in his statement, “If you don’t vote, you don’t count”.

So what is the relevance of unequal participation in Ireland? With the exception of the most recent elections held in 2004 and 2007, voter turnout rates in recent years have been following an established trend of low and declining levels of participation. What are the reasons why people decide to vote or not to vote, and what is thought to influence this decision? This chapter is concerned with reviewing the literature on these queries. It deals with the main contentions of the literature with regards to political participation, and in particular, the factors that influence turnout propensity. To begin with, a theoretical account of participation

in general is presented, detailing different models of participation as suggested by various academics. The focus is then shifted from the study of general political participation to the activity of voting, the main concern of this thesis. Three encompassing models of voting are presented followed by a discussion of the main types of voters and non-voters that are thought to exist by researchers in the field of political geography. In the second half of the chapter, the factors which make up each of the models are individually discussed in detail. Each factor is discussed separately with the aim of developing an understanding of the various influences on turnout propensity and to aid coherence and comprehension in later chapters. To end with, the importance of place as a central theme is discussed before the presentation of a number of research hypotheses to be explored in later chapters.

2.2 THEORETICAL ACCOUNT OF PARTICIPATION

This section will detail the different modes of participation from a theoretical perspective. It will then present an account of five contrasting models of participation, as well as an account of a more encompassing theory regarding individual incentives to participate. It will conclude with an introduction to voting as a mode of participation as advanced by universal suffrage.

2.2.1 Modes of Participation

Six categories of participatory activities have been identified in the literature. These can be grouped into three opposing sets of categories. The first of these categories encapsulates the notion of active participation and passive participation. The second category consists of conventional and unconventional

participation while the third category consists of symbolic and instrumental participation.

The different participatory activities can be theoretically classified and categorised as belonging to at least three of the six different categories.

2.2.1.1 Active and Passive Participation

Active participation, as the term suggests, involves partaking in an activity that is essentially observable. This type of participation encapsulates activities such as writing a letter to a government official, or voting. On the other hand, passive participation involves some manner of participation that is not readily observable. It is much more intrinsic in nature and concerns less obvious activities such as following an election campaign or merely being aware of issues relevant to a specific election.

2.2.1.2 Conventional and Unconventional Participation

Conventional activities involve behaviour that is both accepted and expected of political participants. As suggested by Verba, Nie and Kim (1978), the activities that fall into this category are campaigning for a particular candidate or party, contacting government officials, contributing money to a political party or campaign and working informally to promote a certain candidate or party. Unconventional activities, on the other hand, involve behaviour that is either legal but socially unacceptable, or behaviour that is deemed to be illegal. According to Marsh and Kaase (1979), activities that would be categorised as unconventional include raucous demonstrations, unscheduled boycotts and

strikes and the occupying of buildings. Generally, activities that are classified as unconventional are those which disrupt daily life in some form.

2.2.1.3 Symbolic and Instrumental Participation

Activities which are seen to be symbolic in nature involve the displaying of some degree of partisan preference. The activities that comprise this category include flying a flag – national or otherwise, or of singing a national anthem. Instrumental activities are carried out in pursuit of a personal gain and encapsulate any activity that is carried out for this reason. An example of an instrumental activity would be voting in favour of a particular candidate as that candidate's policies and manifesto promises are most favourable.

2.2.1.4 Modes of Participation and Voting

There is some degree of overlap between the different theoretical categories. For example, the classifications of “active” and “conventional” may seem quite similar in nature. In addition, an activity may be classified as belonging to two opposing strands in a single category, as belonging to both symbolic and instrumental for example. Voting is an example of this type of activity. It is categorised as being an active, conventional, symbolic and instrumental activity.

2.2.2 Models of Participation

Leighley and Vedlita (1999) outline five different models of political participation. Each of these models act as standalone explanatory theories, but may also be used in conjunction with another in explaining political

participation. The individual elements in each theory will be discussed as separate entities later in the chapter.

The five models are;

1. Socio-Economic Theory
2. Theory of Psychological Resources
3. Theory of Social Connectedness
4. Group Identity and Consciousness Theory
5. Group Conflict Theory

2.2.2.1 Socio-Economic Theory

Verba and Nie (1972) suggested that the reasons driving political participation were socio-economic in nature. According to Leighley and Vedlita (1999:1094), “individuals with high levels of socio-economic resources...are more likely to adopt psychological orientations that motivate their participation in the political system”. The high levels of socio-economic resources that they refer to include having a high level of income, belonging to one of the higher social classes and having a higher than average level of educational attainment.

2.2.2.2 Theory of Psychological Resources

The theory of psychological resources leans towards an individual's psychological orientation as an explanation for political participation. From this perspective, it is the degree of political interest, political efficacy, trust in the government and civic duty that offers the best explanation of why people decide to participate in political activities.

Political interest refers to the person's individual interest in political matters and in participatory activities such as protest rallies, demonstrations or election campaigns. Political efficacy refers to the individual's interpretation of how effective their participation will be in achieving change. Trust in the government refers to the level of trust the individual has in the government to achieve goals set during election campaigns and to govern openly without cause for concern while civic duty refers to the extent to which an individual feels an obligation to vote (Pattie et al., 2003).

2.2.2.3 Theory of Social Connectedness

The theory of social connectedness refers to issues of social and community importance in explaining political participation. Three such issues are length of residence, home ownership and marital status. The length of residence component of the theory states that the length of time spent living in a particular community affects the propensity to participate (Gimpel et al., 2004b). Research on home-ownership has found that those living in owner-occupied housing are more likely to participate than those in private rented, affordable or social housing (Johnston and Pattie et al., 2001; Hoffmann-Martinot et al., 1996). The significance of marital status as a factor influencing participation is that those who are married are more likely to engage in political activities than those who are single, divorced or no longer married (Crewe, Fox and Alt, 1992).

2.2.2.4 Group Identity and Consciousness Theory

According to Millar et al (1981), group identification is based on the individual's perception of their location with a social stratum and the psychological feeling of

belonging to a particular stratum, while group consciousness relates to an individual's identification with a particular group and an awareness of that group's political ideology along with a devotion to achieving that group's interests. Millar et al (1981) relate this theory to marginalized groups such as ethnic minorities, groups of women and the economically disadvantaged. It is suggested that those who conform to group consciousness are aware of fundamental differences that exist between their own group's interests and the interest's of another dominant group, and so become motivated to participate to honour those interests.

2.2.2.5 Group Conflict Theory

Group conflict theory is similar in content to the theory of group identity and consciousness. Leighley and Vedlita's (1999: 1097) explanation of group conflict theory is as follows:

"...as the threat to the dominant group from the minority group increases, individuals belonging to the dominant group will act to protect their interests"

The motivation to participate in political activities is provided by the threat of influence that another group poses. The group conflict theory points, in a sense, to the fight for survival.

Leighley and Vedlita (1999) suggest that the theories which offer the best prediction of participation are the first three theories mentioned here, namely Socio-Economic Theory, the Theory of Psychological Resources and the Theory of Social Connectedness. Specifically, they suggest that a combination of these three theories best explains patterns of participation.

2.2.3 Individual Incentives

An alternative to Leighley and Vedlita's (1999) five models of participation is offered in the Individual Incentives Theory (Perea, 2002).

Perea's (2002) Individual Incentives Theory has three levels; the level of individual resources, the level of social integration and the level of political involvement. The level of individual resources encapsulates factors such as age, education and income, while the second level, the level of social integration involves issues of a social nature i.e. marital status and so forth. The final level, the degree of political involvement, concerns an individual's interest in politics and group membership.

The above sections were intended by the author to act as a background to the issue of political participation with participation spoken of in a more general sense. The participatory activity that this thesis is most concerned with however is that of the activity of voting. Therefore, for the remainder of this chapter, and indeed for the remainder of this thesis, the focus will be on the activity of voting, and in particular, the factors that influence people to turn out to vote.

2.3 THE ACT OF VOTING

The act of voting requires two fundamentally essential decisions to be made. The first decision is to choose between rival parties, candidates and issues pertaining to a particular election. The second decision is to choose whether or not to make this first choice, whether or not to vote. Discovering the motivations behind this second choice is an extremely complex operation, and is central to this thesis. The psychology behind voting cannot be considered with indifference. Campbell

et al (1964: 13) refer to Walter Lippmann's vivid depiction of the psychology of voting when stating that "the voter has a picture of the world in his head, and the nature of this picture is a key to understanding what he does at the polls". The electorate makes 'sense' of different political issues, to see them not actually as they are, but as they are perceived. The manner in which these political issues are perceived impacts on the second choice above, that is, the choice of whether or not to vote.

Lassen (2005: 103) states that "a defining feature of advanced democracies is universal suffrage: everyone has the right to vote. However, not everyone exercises this right". Why is this so? This question requires a complex answer and one which this thesis seeks. Consider first the origins of the term "universal suffrage". The basis of the term itself stirs connotations of hardship, of suffering, of a struggle to obtain a 'right' for all. So why is something that was so difficult to secure in the first place ignored in many present day democracies? To begin with, only the elite classes and landowning men were awarded the franchise of the vote. Women were universally excluded until quite recently. Australia extended the franchise to women in 1902 with Sweden allowing women to vote since 1861. In most Western European countries, women were not permitted to vote until after World War 1. France and Italy did not extend the franchise to women until 1944 and 1945 respectively. Switzerland did not allow women to vote until 1971 with Liechtenstein excluding women from voting until 1984. In Ireland, 1918 marked the extension of the voting franchise to the unpropertied and to women over the age of 30 (Mair, 1987), and in 1921, the Irish Free State gave women equal voting rights to men. The constitution was later amended to allow all those over the age of 21 to vote, and finally, the franchise was extended

to all those over the age of 18 (Fourth Amendment of the Constitution Act, 1972). In addition, in 1984 the right to vote in local and European elections was extended to non-Irish nationals (Ninth Amendment of the Constitution Act, 1984).

Rokkan (1962) sees voting as being a unique form of political participation comprising three different elements. Universal suffrage guarantees the first of these elements, universality of access. The second element, equality of influence, owes itself to the “one man-one vote” concept where each eligible citizen, regardless of social background, age, sex or ideological orientation is given one vote which carries equal influence for all. The final element, unaccountability, refers to the privacy and anonymity that voting is based upon. While it is recorded if a person has turned out to vote, the content of that vote is strictly confidential and a ballot paper cannot be traced back to any particular voter. In this way, a person is not accountable to others for how they vote. Rokkan (1962) refers to the term “irresponsibility” in conjunction to unaccountability. According to Rokkan (1962: 67), irresponsibility is the “absolute freedom that the individual must have in order to choose among the different political options”.

2.3.1 Models of Factors Influencing Turnout

Three contrasting models of the factors which influence turnout will be discussed in this section, namely, “the Michigan model”, the “Rational Voter model”, and the “Civic Voluntarism model”.

Each of these respective models attempt to categorise voters and non voters by providing socio-economic and psychological explanations as to why a person

may be or choose to be a voter/non-voter. It is unlikely that any one model will capture the various influences on voting, and so as already mentioned, the individual elements in each theory will be discussed separately later in the chapter

2.3.1.1 The Michigan Model

The Michigan model offers a social psychological perspective of the turnout decision (Himmelweit et al., 1981; Lawrence, 2001). The model was advanced in “The American Voter” by Campbell et al. (1964) who suggested that social and group factors are indirect determinants of the vote. The acquisition of information from the political environment is a fundamental element in the model. The social and group interests of the individual impact on the manner in which this information is absorbed and interpreted, and depending on how this happens, the individual develops partisan orientations toward particular parties and candidates. According to the Michigan model, party identification is the most fundamental factor in influencing turnout propensity owing to the mobilizing influence that partisan identification has on the individual elector.

2.3.1.2 The Rational Voter Model²

The rational voter model represents an economic view of vote choice. According to Pattie and Johnston (2004: 1191), “the paradox of voting is that a rational elector should never vote as the marginal benefits of individual participation are far outweighed by the costs”. This model was first introduced by Anthony Downs in 1957 in his book “An Economic Theory of Democracy”. This theory

²This section includes a discussion of the rational voter and the rational abstainer referred to in section 2.3.2.2 The Rational Voter and section 2.3.3.6 The Instrumental Abstainer

views the voter as a rational decision maker and hence as a rational abstainer. According to Downs (1957), political behaviour is based on a rational calculation of self interest which seeks to “maximise utilities and minimise regret” (Himmelweit et. al, 1981: 6). The rational individual undertakes a personal cost-benefit analysis when choosing whether or not to vote. When there is absolutely no cost of voting, any returns, no matter how small they may be, make it rational for the individual to vote and irrational to abstain. Conversely, when costs to voting do exist, they may easily outweigh the returns making rational abstention possible, even for individuals with a partisan alignment. Downs (1957: 265) viewed time as being the main cost of voting;

“Time is the principal cost of voting: time to register, to discover what parties are running, to deliberate, to go to the polls, and to mark the ballot. Since time is a scarce resource, voting is extremely costly.”

A secondary cost of voting pertaining to the time costs mentioned above is money. The only direct monetary cost incurred is the cost of transportation to and from the polling station. However, a less obvious monetary cost is the utility income lost by devoting time to the act of voting rather than to another activity. If the time taken to vote is taken out of working hours, the cost in terms of income loss may be a significant demobilizing factor. According to Downs, in this case, the higher income groups have an advantage due to their increased ability to meet any monetary costs incurred. These costs play a more prominent role when the returns of voting are quite small. If both these costs are high, partaking in the activity of voting cannot be rationally justified. Downs (1957) refers to each citizens “vote value” which is the perceived value each person applies to his/her vote. A person develops a sense of vote value by the expectations they have regarding the numbers who may turn out to vote. If the

person expects many others to vote, his/her own vote value will be quite small and will be easily outweighed by a very small cost of voting. Similarly, a vote value may be perceived to be small in the case of close electoral contests where the results are thought to be forgone conclusions, for example, in “strong” Labour or Conservative constituencies in Great Britain.

Given this competent argument regarding rational abstention, why do people vote at all? Downs (1957: 267-268) offers two scenarios in answer to this. The first states that “rational men in a democracy are motivated to some extent by a sense of social responsibility relatively independent of their own short-run gains and losses”. The second states that “if we view such responsibility as one part of the return from voting, it is possible that the cost of voting is outweighed by its returns for some but not for all rational men” which in turn leads to voting.

Downs rational actor theory contends that while it is rational to abstain pertaining to a cost-benefit analysis of the voting procedure, the sense of social responsibility inherent in some counteracts this rational abstention causing some, but not all, to vote.

The rational voter model has different connotations for groups. The argument made in group majority voting models is that “voting may be rational for a group of ‘like’ individuals, since the expected benefit can exceed the costs of voting at the group level” (Filer et. al, 1993:64). In this instance, the casting of many votes is more likely to result in change making it irrational for group members to abstain.

2.3.1.3 The Civic Voluntarism Model

The civic voluntarism model offers a socio-economic perspective of vote choice comprising four main aspects; 1. Individual resources, 2. Individual efficacy, 3. General involvement in politics and 4. Mobilisation.

Individual resources relate to the individual attributes that each person has. In particular, education, affluence and class position are considered to be influential determinants of turnout propensity. Individual efficacy refers to the perceived value one places on his/her participation, that is, how likely it is that his/her actions will have an influence on election outcomes, policy or decisions. According to Pattie et al. (2003), party identification and political engagement are the best indicators of gauging an individual's general involvement in politics. They speak of political engagement as the interest the individual has in issues of a political nature. The more interest there is in politics generally, the more likely it is that the individual will be politically engaged. The final aspect of the model is mobilisation. Pattie et al. (2003: 466) believed this to be the most fundamental aspect of the model stating that, "left to their own devices, people are not particularly likely to become active citizens. But when they are asked to participate...they are likely to do so", concluding that "if you don't ask, you don't get".

2.3.2 Types of Voters

Why is it that one of these models cannot claim to explicitly represent or encapsulate all of the factors or influences on the individual's turnout decision? An answer for this may be found in the fact that there are many different types of voters and non-voters. The vote is often regarded as volatile and as lacking

stability. Himmelweit et al. (1981: 33) point to how “consistency [is often] proved to be the exception and variability the norm”. Given the many different types of voters and abstainers that exist, this is not surprising. Nor is it surprising that no one single model can account for the individual voter’s motivations. Rather, it is more likely that each model will contribute to the development of a single all encompassing explanation.

The following is an explanation of the different types of voters and non-voters that are thought to exist.

2.3.2.1 The Issue Voter

According to Dunleavy (1990), a large part of the variance in voting can be explained by the attitudes of the electorate to particular issues at election time. More often than not, voters are preoccupied by issues that have been catapulted onto the agenda during the election campaign, or by already existing issues that they feel should be addressed. Issues such as health, public transport provision, satisfaction with the government, or in the case of the 2004 elections in Ireland, citizenship, all motivate members of the electorate to turn out to vote in the name of that particular cause. Issue voting is also especially pertinent in the case of referendum elections. According to Stokes (1966), political parties respond to the issue concerns of voters in two ways. Firstly, in response to position issues, the main political parties offer different and distinctive policy goals that they aim to achieve to address certain issues. Secondly, in response to valence issues where common goals are shared, the political parties compete over which leadership team is most competent to deliver on the issues. Those individuals who are characterised by issue voting, vote for the party that best addresses whatever

particular issue is of most concern to them at the time of the election. In contrast to Dunleavy (1990), Campbell et al (1964: 98) suggest that issue voting is a rare occurrence as in order for an issue to motivate a voter, “he must be aware of its existence and must have an opinion about it”. They suggest that “sheer ignorance” limits the occurrence of issue voting.

2.3.2.2 The Rational Voter³

As discussed in section 2.3.1.2 The Rational Voter Model, the rational voter undertakes a cost-benefit analysis when choosing whether or not to vote. Taking into account one’s individual vote value along with the relative costs of voting, it may be concluded rational to abstain. Inherent in the rational voter however is a strong sense of social responsibility and moral duty which counteracts this rational abstention making it rational to vote.

2.3.2.3 The Tactical Voter

According to Catt (1989), tactical voting is a highly significant phenomenon worldwide. It involves having a negative voting orientation towards one party, and voting selectively rather than “expressing blind support for the most preferred party”. Tactical voting assumes that the voter is aware of local electoral conditions and strategically plans their vote choice. Tactical voting is thought to be computationally difficult in PR-STV electoral systems such as the Irish one. It involves calculating the likelihood that a preferred candidate will receive enough first preference votes to be elected and awarding a first preference to a candidate

³ See section 2.3.1.2 The Rational Voter Model for an in-depth discussion

likely to be eliminated making the second preference the counted vote. The second preference is then awarded accordingly to the preferred candidate.

2.3.2.4 The Negative Voter

Negative voting describes the situation when the voter has no positive feelings towards any particular party but votes regardless. The voter displays negative voting when they have no particular longing for the political party or candidate that they have voted for. Dunleavy (1990: 461) believes that “negative voting motivations are...widespread”. They are often overlooked by analysts who equate all votes received for a particular party or candidate as support for that party or candidate. Dunleavy (1996) points to the fact that voters’ choices are limited to whatever options are available. They can only choose one of a number of options over which they have no control. Therefore, often a choice is made not as support, but as it is required to be made in order to be able to vote. Fiedler (1959: 184) summarises the impetus behind negative voting when he poses the question; “Do they vote to make a choice, or make a choice in order to be able to vote?”.

2.3.2.5 The Consistent Voter

As the term suggests, consistent voters are stable in their voting patterns and choices. They are not swayed by political campaigns leading up to an election and do not fluctuate in their turnout decision. They are characterised by set voting patterns and partisan alignments, deciding on their voting choices prior to the commencement of the election campaign.

2.3.2.6 The Floating Voter

Floating voters are the opposite in nature to consistent voters. They change their decisions from one election to the next. In contrast to consistent voters, this type of voter waits until the election campaign has begun before making any decisions. According to Himmelweit et al (1981), there are three main reasons which explain the occurrence of “float voting”. The first of these relates to the voters’ perception of the differences that exist between the relevant political parties. The second reason is the notion of party attachment. Those who fall into the category of “floating voters” are less likely to identify with any particular party. The final reason suggested for the occurrence of float voting relates to the voter’s liking of the relevant parties. If the voter is indifferent, it is likely that he/she will be a floating voter. The floating voter may also be referred to as the systematic voter, voting differently at different types of elections

2.3.2.7 The Complacent Voter

The complacent voter is the person who takes their opportunity to vote for granted. They do not dwell on election matters and would abstain if voting became an inconvenience. Owen (2005) described complacent voters as posing a threat to democracy and has accused Irish voters as having become complacent about using their vote.

2.3.2.8 The Class Voter

According to Campbell et al (1964: 201), “the class oriented voter...perceive[s] that differences exist between the parties that are relevant to class interests”. The class voter is aware of the issues that are of importance to his/her specific class

position and votes on the basis of these issues. The political parties who address such issues or who direct their election campaigns towards a specific social class are the favoured parties, hence leading to the occurrence of class voting. Those who do not perceive or realise these class differences between the political parties are much less likely to engage in class voting.

2.3.2.9 The Protest Voter

The protest voter experiences negative voting motivations in using his/her vote to express opposition to majority rule. According to Lassen (2005: 105), “local referendums may serve as institutional outlets for protest [voting]”. In this case, the protest voter utilises his/her vote to oppose new policy or propositions which are seen as unfavourable.

2.3.2.10 The Guilty Voter

Blais (2002) reviewed voting research in France, Britain and the United States of America and found that guilt plays a factor in motivating some people to vote. Those who are swayed by the guilt factor feel that voting is a moral obligation of the electorate; hence, not voting would bring on feelings of guilt. In order to avoid these negative emotions, the guilty voter turns out to vote.

2.3.3 Types of Abstainers

Just as there is more than one type of voter, there is more than one type of abstainer. Voters are motivated and influenced by many different factors. Similarly, there is an array of factors which may cause an individual to abstain (Pattie & Johnston, 2004). Crewe (2002) identified six different categories of

non-voters; voluntary, involuntary, apathetic, alienated, indifferent and instrumental.

2.3.3.1 The Voluntary Abstainer

The voluntary abstainer is the most straight-forward type of non-voter. In this case, abstention is by choice and the non-voter purposefully chooses not to go to the polling station.

2.3.3.2 The Involuntary Abstainer

The non-voter who falls into this category abstains due to uncontrollable circumstances. The involuntary abstainer includes those who are immobile due to illness on the day of the election, those who are away from home and those who have no means of transportation reducing the possibility of reaching the polling station within the required time.

2.3.3.3 The Apathetic Abstainer

The apathetic abstainer is marked by indifference. This type of non-voter is simply not interested in politics, political parties, election candidates or electoral issues. Given the level of disinterest, this type of non-voter chooses not to vote. To the apathetic abstainer, the election outcome is of little importance.

2.3.3.4 The Alienated Abstainer

The alienated abstainer chooses not to vote as a result of the limitations posed by the political system. To this type of non-voter, the political system cannot and does not deliver what he/she wants. As a result, the alienated abstainer chooses to

opt out of participating on Election Day as it is believed that he/she has nothing to gain from partaking.

2.3.3.5 The Indifferent Abstainer

The indifferent abstainer may be interested in politics and may like to use his/her vote. However, he/she perceives there to be no differences between the competing political parties. Therefore, making a choice would require much deliberation. As no differences are observed, the indifferent abstainer sees little point in awarding his/her vote to any particular party and so chooses to abstain.

2.3.3.6 The Instrumental Abstainer⁴

The instrumental abstainer is the rational non-voter described previously in section 2.3.1.2. This type of non-voter calculates the costs of voting in terms of time and monetary losses. If these costs outweigh the benefits gained from partaking in the voting process, the non-voter decides not to vote as being the rational option. The likelihood of their one vote causing significant change is minute, and, if the costs of voting are perceived to be greater than the benefits, the instrumental abstainer cannot rationally justify turning out to vote.

The many different types of voters and non-voters are identifiable owing to voters' specific reasons for turning out to vote and for abstaining. These reasons (which will be addressed in later chapters) are formed as a result of varying influences on individual turnout propensity. The next section will discuss the

⁴ See section 2.3.1.2 The Rational Voter Model for an in-depth discussion

findings of the literature in relation to some of the factors that have been found to influence turnout propensity.

2.4 INFLUENCES ON VOTING

The act of voting, described by Rokkan (1962) as the most unique form of political participation, has many different dimensions leading to an amalgamation of influential factors on voting itself. These factors not only influence the act of voting, but also the individual level decision to vote. Perea (2002) states that abstention has traditionally been associated with a specific socio-demographic profile where abstainers tended to be overrepresented among women, the young, and the underprivileged. However, it is not as deterministic as this. Agnew (2002) suggested that people are subject to a myriad of influences including their economic situation and the social groups to which they belong, along with the cultural match between their everyday lives and the interests of politicians.

Given the complexity of the activity of voting, it is unsurprising that there are so many influences on turnout propensity. Pattie and Johnston's (2004) work on the British Election Study for example, found the factors of age, educational attainment, partisan alignment, political identity, political interest and political efficacy to positively influence turnout. The factors that influence turnout are presented in this chapter on two broad levels. The first set of factors is taken from an institutional perspective and they influence turnout by either complicating or facilitating the process of voting. The second set of factors are those factors which influence the decision to vote at the individual level, as modeled by the various models presented in section 2.3.

2.4.1 Institutional Factors

2.4.1.1 The Electoral System

The electoral system used in Ireland in multi seat constituencies in all general, European and local elections is referred to as the PR-STV system; Proportional Representation by means of a Single Transferable Vote (Electoral Act 1992, Section 37.1). The concept of a transferable vote was first proposed by Thomas Wright Hill in 1821. A transferable vote system was first used in an election in 1856 in Denmark following a proposal by Carl Andrae to implement such a system in 1855. The system of Single Transferable Voting as it stands today in Ireland was developed by Thomas Hare in the UK in 1857. It is regarded as a very facilitative system allowing unconstrained choices. Voters are permitted to rank as many or as few candidates as desired.

The first preference on the ballot sheet is counted with the transfer of votes coming into play when a particular candidate has reached the quota required to gain a seat, or when a candidate with few first choice preferences has been eliminated. In these instances, the second preference choice on the ballot is counted unless, as with the first preference, the second choice candidate has been elected or eliminated, in which case the third preference is taken into account and so on.

The PR-STV system is regarded as highly facilitative as it does not restrict the voter's choice in any way. It allows the voter to rank as many candidates as desired, a choice which is unconstrained by party lists. It is thought to be a system which encourages rather than discourages voter turnout. It is expected that the Irish electoral system has a positive influence on voter turnout.

A more detailed discussion of the impact of the Irish electoral system on voter turnout is presented in chapter 6.

2.4.1.2 Electoral Procedure

There are numerous electoral issues beyond the control of the individual which may adversely influence his/her decision to vote. Firstly, there are procedural obstacles that may be faced. These include occurrences such as not receiving a polling card before Election Day, being sick on polling day, or being away from home on the day of the election. The actual day of polling itself may prove problematic to some. Weekday polling, coupled with restrictive polling hours, may curb the ability of some working commuters to make it to the polling station on time. Likewise, distance to the polling station may pose an adverse influence to some. Those living in remote areas un-serviced by public transport may find it difficult to get to the polling station. Those lacking full mobility may also encounter transportation problems if the polling station is not nearby. Registration procedures may also prove to be problematic in some cases. Simply getting your name onto the electoral register may prove daunting to some, and once the registration deadline has passed, lack of knowledge regarding getting your name onto the supplementary register may prevent some individuals from voting. The registration procedure is of increased difficulty to those lacking proficiency in the English language. The actual process of voting itself assumes a certain degree of literacy. Those with literacy difficulties may therefore decide that the only option available to them is to abstain. All of these issues may have the effect of influencing the decision to vote in an adverse manner with the end result of encouraging abstention rather than turnout.

2.4.1.3 Prevailing Circumstances

The political relevance of an election has much to do with the circumstances prevailing leading up to an election. This is referred to as a periodic effect on turnout. Elections and electoral participation are highly influenced by the social, economic and cultural climate and by issues on the public agenda at the time of an election. Sanders & Galvin (2004) comment on how the domestic economy exerts a powerful influence on levels of party support as voters are either retrospective or prospective and either egocentric or sociotropic. Retrospective voters look to the past to see what has been achieved while prospective voters look to the future, to see what needs to be done and how it might be realised. Egocentric voters think in terms of their own best interests, while sociotropic voters consider what is best for society as a whole. As a result of this, the manner in which the relevant political parties address economic conditions surrounding election periods has much influence on the voter. The individual voter is highly influenced by his/her own concerns which usually correlate strongly with those issues that received high media coverage not only on the run up to the election but in inter-election years also. A person may be influenced by their degree of economic satisfaction, by how concerned they are about health related issues, or by their concerns regarding immigration policy and procedures, among many other things.

2.4.1.4 Systemic Influences

Systemic influences refer to election specific features such as the closeness of an election⁵ and party competition as possible influential factors on turnout

⁵ Marginality is dealt with in more detail in Section 2.4.3.1 Political Mobilisation

propensity. How close an election is perceived is in large part a function of media coverage. Election polls advertised in various media convey a picture to the general public of the marginality of the electoral competition. If what is depicted illustrates a close contest, of which the outcome is unclear and contested, this will have the effect of positively influencing the individual to turn out by increasing his/her relative vote value and sense of political efficacy. The level of party competition may also influence the decision to vote. A hotly contested competition relayed through manifesto promises and party campaigns increases the individual's awareness of each of the respective parties. If two or more parties are strongly opposing, the individual may be encouraged or even feel forced to align with one particular party, hence creating a specific party identification. If this happens, it is likely that he/she will turn out to vote on the day of the election.

2.4.2 Individual-Level Factors

2.4.2.1 Demographic Factors

2.4.2.1.1 Age

The influence of age on turnout is perhaps one of the most widely cited factors in the turnout literature. The relationship between age and turnout is curvilinear in nature with turnout being low in the youngest age cohorts, increasing in the middle age cohorts and declining late in life. Those belonging to the 18-30 age group are typified by low levels of political participation with Gimpel et al. (2004a) commenting on the muted political influence that those in this cohort have. An explanation for this relationship between age and turnout can be found in the life-cycle effect which states that the likelihood of an individual voting

depends on the stage he/she is at in the life-cycle. As one first enters the electorate, the issues that are of concern are not particularly politicized ones, and so there is no motivation to vote. However, as one moves up through the youngest age cohorts and into the middle age cohorts, one becomes concerned about political issues and issues that can be addressed by the political system. Issues such as taxation and childcare costs, for example, become important and those in the middle age cohorts become motivated to vote to represent their opinions. As voting is thought to be an activity sustained by habit, these people continue to turn out to vote until they enter the older age cohorts, at which time intermittent factors such as illness and immobility are thought to adversely influence turnout propensity.

According to Blais et al, (2004: 221);

“[the life-cycle effect begs to question whether] younger citizens [are] less likely to vote because they happen to be young – the implication being that their propensity to vote will increase as they get older – or because they belong to a generation that is less willing to vote – the implication being that their participation rate will always be lower than that of previous generations?”

The question posed by Blais et al. (2004) introduces the notion of the generational effect. The generational effect points to turnout differences that exist between generations and in particular, between comparison cohorts that are at similar stages in the life cycle. The generational effect suggests that while turnout is generally lower for the youngest age cohorts, it is in fact decreasing across all cohorts with passing time. This finding was reiterated by Teixeira (2002), who in his study of non-voting in America found that older age groups tend to have higher turnout rates than younger age groups and also that this gap is widening with time. According to Teixeira (2002), in 1964 there was a 20% difference in turnout rates between the 21-24 and 65-74 age groups. By 1988,

turnout had declined by 13% for those in the 21-24 age group and by 6% for those in the 55-64 age grouping.

The relationship between age and turnout propensity results in the young and the elderly assuming a subordinate position in terms of power to the middle age cohorts (Millar et al., 1981). Why do those in the youngest age cohorts resolve to accept this subordinate position? What are reasons for low turnout in this group? Buckley (2000) refers to a high degree of voter apathy among the American youth in trying to account for low youth turnouts. The same does not apply to Ireland however as research by the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI, 1999), in conjunction with the Central Statistics Office (CSO) found that non-registration as opposed to voter apathy was the most frequently cited reason why young people do not vote. Speaking of turnouts in the Referendum elections on the Good Friday and Amsterdam treaties, the NYCI (1999) found turnout amongst the 18-25 age group to be 38%, compared to an average turnout of 56%. Of those surveyed by the NYCI, 44.19% of those in the 18-25 cohort stated non-registration as being their reason for failing to turn out to vote. These abstainers may be indicative of apathetic non-voting. Accidental non-voting accounted for 23.6% of abstainers while cynicism and lack of interest accounted for 14.58% of urban non-voters and 8.77% of rural non-voters. Lack of information was also a stated reason with 6.25% of urban non-voters and 1.75% of rural non-voters using this as a reason.

The Democracy Commission (2006) suggests that young people can identify with issues but not with political parties, and that the larger more influential parties do not address the issues of the young. Smaller parties, however, do tend to embrace youth issues but with little consequence due to their lack of influence.

The Democracy Commission (2004) also addresses the issue of trust suggesting that while young people are interested in political issues, their mistrust of politicians tends to de-motivate them. Geographical mobility is also an influential factor in turnout propensity among the young. Those in the youngest age cohorts are more likely to be away from home on the day of an election. They are more likely to be attending college or traveling than those in the other age cohorts.

Plutzer (2002) points to “habit” as being the most influential factor in youth voting. According to Plutzer (2002), those in the youngest age cohorts are less likely to vote as they have yet to develop the habit of voting which characterises those in the middle age groups.

2.4.2.1.2 Sex

The voting franchise was extended to women in Ireland in 1918 and since then the differential effects of sex on voting have been diminishing. The general trend is for men to be slightly more likely to vote than women. With regards to direct involvement in politics, there is a stark male/female divide which becomes more pronounced at higher levels. Table 2.1 illustrates the number of women in the lower house in each EU country. In no EU country does the number of women elected to the lower house exceed the number of men.

Burns et al. (1997: 374) found that “the higher up the political ladder, the more severe is the under-representation of women”. Ideology has much to answer for in this regard in the role played by beliefs regarding gender roles. According to feminist theorists, women will not be equal in politics until they are equal in the home. An unequal division of labour in the home with women assuming a

disproportionate share of the domestic and childcare responsibilities restricts the amount of time available to the woman to vote; time which, according to Downs (1957) is a valuable resource. It is suggested that by using time to vote, the woman reduces her personal sense of efficacy, as her influence in the political realm is much less efficacious than her influence in the home.

Table 2.1: Women in the Lower House, EU Countries

	Election Year	Total Number	No. of Women	No. of Women(%)
Hungary	2002	386	35	9.1
Malta	2003	65	6	9.2
Cyprus	2001	56	6	10.7
Italy	2001	617	71	11.3
France	2002	577	70	12.1
Slovenia	2004	90	11	12.2
Greece	2004	300	40	13.3
<i>Ireland**</i>	2007	166	22	13.3
Czech Republic	2002	200	34	17.0
Slovakia	2002	150	26	17.3
Portugal	2005	226	44	19.5
United Kingdom	2005	646	128	19.8
Poland	2005	460	94	20.4
Lithuania	2004	141	29	20.6
Latvia*	2002	100	21	21.0
Estonia*	2007	101	22	21.8
Luxembourg	2004	60	14	23.3
Germany	2005	614	195	31.8
Austria	2002	183	62	33.9
Belgium	2003	150	53	35.3
Spain	2004	350	126	36.0
Netherlands	2003	150	55	36.7
Denmark	2005	179	66	36.9
Finland*	2007	200	84	42.0
Sweden	2006	349	165	47.3

SOURCE: Global database of Quotas for women (unless otherwise stated)

*Figures taken from "Women in National Parliaments", Inter Parliamentary Union

** Figure taken from The Irish Times (28th May 2007)

However, findings by Burns et al. (1997: 376), suggest that "men and women differ little in the amount of time they have available after they have honoured their commitments to a job, household and school". They found that a woman who believes there is equality at home is more likely to turn out to vote,

concluding that “control over resources [time and money] matter for men; beliefs about equality matter for women” (Burns et al., 1997: 384).

The effect of these sex differentials decreases with increasing levels of educational attainment among women. In a study of the effects of sex on participation, Di Palma (1970) found that while women were confined to “politically passive” roles, participation amongst women increased with age and educational attainment in three of the four countries studied.

2.4.2.1.3 Marital Status

In their research on the effects of marital status on turnout, Crewe, Fox and Alt (1992: 24) found that “the state of being unmarried or no longer married clearly lessens the likelihood of regularly turning out on Election Day”. This finding was reiterated by Straits (1990) who observed higher turnout rates for those were married as opposed to those who were single or separated concluding that in general, married couples either both vote or both abstain. Leighley and Nagler (1992) refer to marriage as a life experience which reduces voting information costs and increases incentives to vote. It is thought that married people motivate each other to vote by engaging in political conversation with each other. Political issues are discussed which increases clarity for the married voter. Also, voting is an activity which may be carried out together reducing the costs of voting on leisure time. Those who are single, separated or no longer married however, are less likely to be provided with the opportunity to engage in politically related conversation, making opinion formation more arduous while increasing information costs. Also, the time taken to vote is taken directly from leisure time as voting is not a shared activity for those who are single. While the state of

being married increases turnout propensity, this finding is not constant across the sexes. Blondel et al. (1998) found a sex differential between married and co-habitant men and married and co-habitant women which showed that married and co-habitant men were more likely to vote than their female counterparts.

2.4.2.2 Socio-Economic Factors

Analysts in the 19th and early 20th centuries believed the well off, the better educated and the more prosperous in society would make the rational choice not to vote (Lijphart, 1997). Those with a wealth of socio-economic resources were thought to be more likely not to vote than those who were less well off or than those who were uneducated. More recent research however has often proved the opposite to be true. Research by Pattie and Johnston (2001: 294) for example, found that “the more affluent, and those with more formal education are generally reported as having higher participation rates than are those with fewer educational qualifications or with fewer material resources”. It is worth noting however, that socio-economic influences on voter turnout exist mainly at the aggregate level. As will be addressed in chapter six, socio-economic factors appear to influence turnout rates in accordance to areas as opposed to on an individual level basis.

2.4.2.2.1 Education

The relevance of education as an influential factor on turnout propensity has roots in cognitive mobilisation (Flickinger and Studlar, 1992). This implies that those who achieve a high level of educational attainment mobilise themselves to turn out to vote. Attaining a high level of education is thought to increase

information processing skills by aiding the understanding and comprehension of different issues. Political information becomes much easier to absorb and analyse for the educated citizen and reduces the possibility that he/she will be deterred by obstacles to the procedure of voting itself.

As far back as 1927, the importance of education in relation to turnout propensity was realised with Gosnell (1927: 98) deducing that “the more schooling the individual has, the more likely he is to register and vote in presidential elections”. Campbell et al. (1964: 251) speak of how “the educated person is distinct from the less educated not only in the number of facts about politics at his command, but also in the sophistication of the concepts he employs to maintain a sense of order and meaning amid the flood of information”. According to Tam Cho (1999), education enhances turnout propensity in three ways. The first is by facilitating learning about politics via the cognitive skills developed during years of education. The second relates to the gratification the better educated feel by participating in electoral contests, and the third is by helping citizens to overcome bureaucratic obstacles related to the voting process. Hall (2002) refers to the established concept that each additional year of education increases the propensity of an individual to participate politically, whether it be joining an association or turning out to vote. Numerous studies have reiterated the consensus of the literature in this regard. Marsh (1991) found that 58% of long term non-voters left school before the age of sixteen compared to 37% of voters (a large proportion of whom would be in the oldest age cohorts) and 27% of short term non-voters. Sigelman et al (1985) found that education has emerged as a foremost predictor of voting with the likelihood of voting increasing with increasing levels of formal education. Berelson and Steiner

(1964) found that the higher a person's educational level, the higher his/her interest in politics will be and hence, the greater the propensity to turn out to vote.

In a study of electoral mobilisation in Berkeley, McNulty (2005) found that the citizens of Berkeley, a high turnout area, were highly informed, probably pertaining to the fact that Berkeley itself comprises a highly educated community. Although this relationship between education and turnout propensity has been proven to exist in many cases, the advent of research in the 1990s paradoxically shows a weakening correlation between the two. According to Buckley (2000: 25), "non-voting has transcended all educational boundaries", with the trend now running counter to what one would expect, that is, decreasing levels of turnout among a better educated electorate (Neimi and Weisberg, 1992). In his 1995 study of 16 European countries, Richard Topf found the least educated cohorts to actually have slightly higher turnout than the most highly educated groups concluding with a rejection of any generalised education effect for voting. In Britain, the highest general election turnouts occurred in the 1950s when education levels were quite low, while the lowest turnout occurred in 1997 among a highly educated electorate (Pattie and Johnston, 2001). In Ireland, the relationship between education and turnout can be explained by reference to the age factor. The introduction of free secondary school education in 1967 made formal education accessible to all. From the late 1970s on, the youngest age cohorts were emerging with considerably higher rates of education than the middle and oldest age cohorts. However, as discussed in the previous section, the youngest age cohorts (18-30) turn out to vote in lesser proportions to the middle and older age cohorts. Paradoxically, the lesser educated older and middle aged

cohorts turn out in higher proportions than the better educated younger cohorts, in contradiction to the relationship between turnout and education that has been suggested to exist elsewhere.

2.4.2.2.2 Social Class

Social class occupies a transitional position between the purely social and the purely economic. As a result of this, there are different ways of approaching the issue of social class. Some who take the social perspective of social class come from a subjective point of view in looking for evidence of a psychological orientation or identification with a particular social class. Others, who approach the topic from an economic perspective, are objective in assigning social class according to some criterion such as income, occupational status or education (Campbell et al., 1964). Whatever approach is taken to the study of social class, be it social or economic, what arises is that class has a bearing on the voting behaviour of the individual. Fiedler (1959: 194) speaks of the implicit nature of social class when he states;

"It is not, for instance, how much money a man makes that places him in a certain class (for our classes as they effectively function seem to be clearly 'cultural' rather than economic) but what kind of ties, say, he would buy if he had money enough to make a free choice. What kind of clothing, what sort of house, which magazines, which books (if any) would he own? Would he drink beer or Martinis? Would he go to wrestling matches or polo matches? These are the matters that count."

In relation to voting, Sinnott (1995) views social class as a fundamental element of party support. Different issues affect people of different social classes. While unemployment may be the chief concern of one particular class, taxation may concern another. Certain parties realise the importance of the untapped lower class/ working class vote and so direct their interests towards these people.

Socialist Party members in Dublin, for example, became implicitly involved in the dispute over the environmental levy on refuse collection in 2003, an issue of concern to the working class who found these extra costs difficult to meet. If there is no political party to address the needs and concerns of a particular social class grouping, there may be reason for that group to vote. The lack of a strong left-wing presence in recent years led to widespread abstention among the lower social classes. This suggests that the social class-turnout relationship is tied to prevailing political parties which may indeed be the case. Shields and Goidel's (1997) research on the National Election Studies of mid-term elections in the USA found that a class-turnout relationship does indeed exist with those in the highest class brackets recording an average turnout of 75% compared to 42% for those in the lowest classes.

2.4.2.2.3 Income

An inter-related notion to the concept of social class is income. The general findings of the literature suggest that those in the higher income brackets are more likely to vote than those who are less affluent. As the monetary costs of voting are minimal, the rationale for this may be psychological in nature. Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980) found that those in the lowest income brackets are likely to experience some degree of financial hardship. These people become preoccupied with their economic status in relation to their financial difficulties which has the effect of reducing their attention to political matters and the likelihood of absorbing political information. Pattie et al. (2003: 461) found household income levels to be a significant factor in all types of political participation;

“the more affluent people’s households are, the more likely they are

to undertake some form of individualistic action and the more activities they will engage in overall. But people from affluent households are less likely than those from poorer ones to engage in contact and collective activism”

2.4.2.2.4 Housing Tenure

Previous research has found that those residing in owner occupied housing are more likely to turn out to vote than those in private rented, affordable or social housing. Johnston and Pattie et al. (2001) note considerable turnout differences between those residing in owner-occupied housing and those in local authority housing in England and Wales. Hoffmann-Martinot (2006) notes the influence of home ownership on turnouts in local electoral contests in Great Britain and France. In Ireland, Sinnott and Whelan (1991) found housing tenure to be a key predictor of turnouts in the 1984 European elections with housing tenure viewed to be a function of both social class and income. Deriving from this, those in owner occupied housing are most likely to be higher income earners belonging to a higher social class while those in social housing, for example, are likely to be among the lowest income earners belonging to the lower social groupings.

2.4.2.3 Length and Place of Residence

The results of a study on turnout variability across neighbourhoods by Gimpel et al (2004b: 350-351) found that people are “less likely to turn out in areas of high in-migration” and that “partisans [are] less likely to vote in neighbourhoods where they [are] surrounded by supporters of the other party”. The results of this study point to the importance of length of residence and of place of residence as factors which may influence turnout.

2.4.2.3.1 Length of Residence

According to the literature, the length of time spent living in a particular place affects the propensity to vote. In areas that are fast expanding the tendency is for low turnout to dominate. This may be due to large numbers of new residents who are not affiliated with the area as of yet, or due to a characteristic young population who have yet to be mobilised and become habitual voters. Participation rates are much higher among well-established residents than among recent residents (Gimpel, 1999; Leighley and Vedlita, 1999). Gimpel (1999) attributes this to the slow acquisition of the habit of voting in a new location. The longer a citizen is resident in a particular place, the more community oriented that person becomes and the more concerned they become about issues affecting that place. Caldeira et al. (1990: 194-5) suggest that “those who have lived in a place for a longer time become more integrated and involved and thus participate more”. They develop a stake in the community and so become more likely to turn out to vote on Election Day in the name of local causes. The length of residence factor ties in closely with the factor of place identity, which will be addressed later in the chapter.

2.4.2.3.2 Place of Residence

According to Gimpel et al. (2004b: 345), “where citizens live at least partly determines what they learn and know”. Johnston et al.’s (2004) research on the effects of neighbourhoods on voting behaviour in Britain found neighbourhood effects to be one of the strongest influences on voting behaviour. According to Marsh (2002), the neighbourhood acts as a major experiential source. In particular, domestic situations play a highly influential role in the formation of

attitudes and partisan alignments (Dunleavy, 1990). The act of living together increases the possibility of political rhetoric. Assuming that “those who speak together converge on the majority alignment” (Dunleavy, 1990: 459), the influence of the domestic situation crystallizes. Agnew (2002) speaks of how living together creates shared experiences and this, along with the inevitable social interaction that results from not living alone, provides motivation to participate politically.

Agnew (2002) refers to the distance-decay theory of Scottish philosopher David Hume. This theory reiterates the importance of neighbourhoods on turnout propensity by suggesting that voting intentions are intrinsically local in nature. Concern for others diminishes with distance. People tend to be most concerned about their immediate nuclear family, their extended family and their neighbourhood before considering the city or country as a whole. Although a concern for the local is thought to be the general trend in the study of politics and place, the way in which people vote in these places differs. There is a geographical twist in the patterns of voting with “similar people voting differently in dissimilar places” (Gimpel et al., 2004: 364). This points to the explicit importance of each individual place in affecting various aspects of voting behaviour including turnout propensity. According to Huckfeldt and Sprague (1992), the micro-environment in which we carry out our everyday lives is extremely influential. There are very few environments which can be said to be genuinely politically balanced. Hence, we are always part of either a political majority or minority. This arises from the skewed nature of each of our micro-environments. Huckfeldt and Sprague (2002: 72) refer to how “our neighbourhoods are tilted one way, our workplaces another, and our cities

perhaps another”. The political diversity of each of these micro-environments can influence turnout, either positively or negatively. An area characterised by an array of political orientations can cause an increase in the amount of political knowledge and discussion in that particular place creating information flows that cause increased efficacy (Gimpel et al., 2003). Conversely however, a mix of political orientations in one particular place may have an adverse effect on turnout. Residents may experience cross-pressures as a result of conflicting political signals from the main partisan strands and hence become disorientated and abstain.

Living in an area which is dominated by a different political party may have two effects according to Gimpel et al. (2004b). Firstly, it may cause a reduction in the perceived efficacy of supporting the preferred party’s candidate and secondly, it may cause the person to withdraw from politics completely and abstain from voting with a view to avoiding “cognitive dissonance and...interpersonal conflict” (Gimpel et al., 2004b: 346).

2.4.2.4 Psychological Factors, Identity and Political Socialisation

The turnout decision is often related to and influenced by a range of psychological factors, identification with a particular political party and membership of social groups and labour unions (Campbell et al., 1964; Lipset and Rokkan, 1967; Butler and Stokes, 1969). Group identity and attachment to a party are regarded as being affective phenomena and hence as psychological in nature with roots in the individual’s past (Himmelweit et al., 1981). Having a sense of civic duty and political efficacy increases turnout propensity, as does

interest in politics and social capital. Likewise, pertaining to a particular group, place or party identity also increases turnout propensity.

2.4.2.4.1 Civic Duty

Cialdini's (1993) "principle of social proof" states that people view behaviour as correct to the extent that they see other people doing it. Social conformity therefore, is "an alignment of people's thinking or behaviour with a societal or group norm" (Coleman, 2004: 77). From a voter turnout perspective, the main evidence for the existence of social conformity is the widespread belief that voting is a civic duty. Civic duty refers to the degree or extent to which an individual feels an obligation to vote (Campbell et al., 1964). Many people vote only to conform to the social norm that voting is a civic duty, an obligation as a citizen.

2.4.2.4.2 Political Efficacy

The development of a sense of political efficacy is integral in developing the habit of voting. Political efficacy refers to the sense an individual has of the utility of his/her vote. If an individual feels that his/her vote has been efficacious in causing change or in maintaining the status quo, they will become motivated to vote again and will easily develop the habit of voting. However, people with a low sense of political efficacy are unlikely to vote in the first place as they feel their vote will have no impact whatsoever. Teixeira (1987) found political efficacy to be strongly correlated with educational attainment. Those with higher levels of education tend to be characterised by a greater sense of political efficacy.

2.4.2.4.3 Political Interest

It is thought that there is an association between turnout propensity and the level of interest an individual has in politics and political matters. Certain issues, such as the citizenship issue in the 2004 elections, may spark an interest in the individual and increase his/her likelihood to vote. The more interested the person is in politics generally, the more likely it is that that person will be an active citizen (Pattie et al., 2003).

2.4.2.4.4 Issue Attitudes

Attitude strength refers to “the extent to which an attitude is stable, resistant to change, impacts information processing and guides behaviour” (Miller and Peterson, 2004: 847). According to Dunleavy (1990), issue attitudes account for much of the variance in voting and vote choice. Some concerns which have dominated Irish election periods over the past 20 years are inflation, unemployment, labour relations and more recently, the health system. The degree to which an attitude exists regarding each of these is an indicator of individual turnout propensity. If an individual upholds a strong standing with regards to an issue of electoral concern, it is likely that he/she will turn out to vote to express and represent that viewpoint.

2.4.2.4.5 Social Capital

The term “social capital” was first coined by L. Judson Hanifan in 1916 who defined it as being an asset which satisfies social needs (Putnam and Goss, 2002). The basic idea behind social capital is that contact with an individual’s family, friends and associates accumulates a stock of social capital which may be

called on in a crisis or simply enjoyed for its own sake. Having a stock of social capital which may be accessed by all improves living standards in the whole community. Maintaining a social capital stock requires regular association with those in the community through informal settings such as dinners or coffee breaks to more formal institutions such as attending group meetings. According to Hall (2002), social capital in Britain has been sustained by means of increasing female participation in the community attributable to greater female access to higher education, greater numbers of females in the labour force, and through changes in the attitudes towards women and the social standing of women in general. The implication of social capital on turnout is linear in nature with turnout propensity increasing in conjunction with social capital. The greater the stock of social capital in a community, the greater the likelihood of higher turnout levels. According to Stolle and Hooge (2004), the consequences of declining social capital are visible today. The younger age cohorts were socialized in the economically prosperous 1960s and onwards and hence have less of a stake in community life and in politics in general. Stolle and Hooge (2004) believe that as long as the younger age cohorts are replacing the older more civic generations the social capital stock will diminish resulting in low and declining turnout levels.

2.4.2.4.6 Group Identity

Those who are actively involved in non-political voluntary groups are more likely to turn out to vote than those who are not members of such groups (Cassel, 1999). The reasons for this are many and varied in the literature. It has been suggested that being involved in these groups increases essential social

interactions which promotes the activity of voting (Olsen, 1972). Verba and Nie (1972) believe the reasons for the increase in turnout have to do with the socialisation associated with being a member of a group in which political discussion is facilitated. Cassel (1999) notes how Pollock (1982) explains the increased turnout with group membership via an international increase in the essential characteristics of the voter, namely, political interest, political efficacy and civic duty.

Identification with a particular group is often an assumed explanation of minority voting behaviour. Groups of migrants and the underprivileged, for example, are often thought of as voting in accordance with each other pertaining to group identity. Schram and Van Winden (1991) suggest that every individual belongs to a social reference group. The decision to turn out to vote is subject to inter- and intra-group influences and reference is made to common group interests when making political decisions. The motivation to vote is provided for by the want to promote the groups' needs, address the groups' concerns and secure or dismiss policy favourable or unfavourable to that particular group.

2.4.2.4.7 County and Place Identity

Agnew (2002) offers three theoretical viewpoints to the study of place and identity creation. Firstly, from a spatial-analytical approach, he suggests that existing boundaries are influential in creating and/ or re-enforcing political identities. Social and jurisdictional boundaries "help to define political identities" (Agnew, 2002: 125). Secondly, from a political-economic perspective, it is the processes of spatial inclusion and exclusion which work to create identities, whereby those in similar circumstances acquire similar identities. Finally, from a

postmodern perspective, your individual identity creates a place that you may then identify with. According to Hummon (1986), “the strongest forms of bonding are still local...when asked where they come from, or where they...belong, people respond in terms of social reference”.

Agnew (2003: 611) comments on how, in an increasingly globalised world, “‘located places’ have often become *more*, not less important in peoples lives”. ‘The local’ is of utmost importance and identities are stressed in terms of neighbourhoods, towns and counties. Mackenzie (1976) suggests that by default, people who identify with a particular place also identify with each other.

In the Irish context, the county developed as one of the first pillars of identity. Primarily established for administrative purposes, the function of the county as an administrative region lessened over time and the county emerged as a fundamental element in place identity. The county upholds a major function regarding the creation of specific place identities. The importance of ‘the local’ in creating individual identity is conveyed via various “badges of identity” that exist (Duffy, 2003: 28). Such “badges” include the existence of local newspapers and local radio stations. Borders, administrative or otherwise, play a large part in the creation of place specific identities. This is based upon the “expectation that people will accept [a] merging of their identity with a specific place” (Brady, 2003: 107). Residents in an area, for example, are fully aware of a number of “identity divides”; housing estate boundaries, the east-side of the town and the town itself are all instrumental in creating place identities.

The significance of place identity with respect to turnout relates to the concept of attachment to place. Those who identify strongly with a particular place become concerned about issues affecting that place and work to preserve or change the

existing situation to benefit that specific place. If these issues can be dealt with in the political arena (as is often the case), those with a strong attachment to place become motivated to vote. With regards to election-specific decisions and choices, place also has a role to play with Sinnott (1995) referring to how the selection of election candidates is locally dominated. This introduces the notion of party identification.

2.4.2.4.8 Party Identity

According to Coleman (2004), not all votes received for a party can be regarded as support for that party as turnout behaviour is subject to what he termed, “the bandwagon effect”. The bandwagon effect suggests that new electors or first time voters will vote for the party that is most likely to win a given election. Also, if a preferred or supported candidate is expected not to win, the voter who succumbs to the bandwagon effect will switch his/her choice to the winner/expected winner. Not all vote choices are attributable to this bandwagon effect. Some votes cast do represent genuine support for a political party and can be attributed to party affiliation or party identity.

According to Himmelweit et al. (1981), there are two aspects to party identification, persuasion and projection. They refer to persuasion as the “...portion of the voters’ evaluations of candidates and issues [that] can be attributed to the candidates and policies themselves” (Himmelweit et al., 1981: 192). Those whose behaviour is influenced most by the factor of persuasion are more likely to be affected by the bandwagon effect and change allegiances between election periods. Their choices are less attributable to party identification. Those who align strongly with a particular party however are more

influenced by the aspect of projection which Himmelweit et al. (1981: 193) refer to as the "...portion of the voters' evaluations of candidates and issues [that] can be attributed to a spill-over effect of the individuals' affective identification with a party". Political parties provide a link between people and the political system. Therefore, the strength of an individual's party identification is almost certainly indicative of their involvement in political affairs and voting. Party identification is a psychological attachment which "raises a perceptual screen" through which the individual views all matters choosing options favourable to his/her chosen orientation. The lack of a partisan preference is a de-mobilising factor which has an adverse influence on turnout propensity.

De-alignment is the term used to describe the decaying of partisanship whereby identifiers give up their party allegiances without choosing to support another party. Hauge and Miller (1987) found that in the UK, de-alignment occurs among voters of all ages, of both sexes and of all classes. Voters may also change attachments from one party to another. This is termed realignment (Millar et al., 1990). According to Campbell et al. (1964), realignment, or changes in partisanship, may be associated with a change in social milieu such as marriage, changing jobs or moving house. Each of these may place the individual in an alien environment as far as political ideology is concerned, and may pressure the individual to conform to political values and political orientations different from his/her own.

The extent to which party identification exists in Ireland is contested in the literature. On the one hand, Carty (1981) and Marsh (1985) present arguments suggesting that party voting is prevalent. Both suggest that many Irish electors are party voters who display strong partisan allegiances. On the other hand

however, Inglehart and Klingeman (1976) found that Ireland recorded the lowest level of party attachment in their study of nine European Community countries in 1973. Mair (1984) also provides an argument against the existence of partisan alignment. On measuring levels of party identification, he found the level in Ireland to be dropping, with a drop of 12.1% measured between 1978 and 1984. Party identification upholds a linear relationship with age with an increase in party attachment observable as one moves through successive age cohorts (Campbell et al., 1964). A linear relationship also exists between the strength of party identification and the length of time a particular alignment has existed for. The intensity of this party identification has positive influences on turnout propensity. When party identification exists, the individual is likely to turn out to vote to express support for that particular party.

Sniderman et al. (1991) provided an alternative perspective on the issue of party identification. They suggest that there is a third category of citizens, a category comprising individuals who neither succumb to the bandwagon effect, nor boast any partisan alignment. This group of citizens uses a short-cut means of making complex decisions by using a likeability heuristic in comparing the respective candidates. Those most favourable are awarded short term support and the vote.

2.4.2.4.9 Political Socialisation

As mentioned previously, attachment to a party is a psychological orientation with roots in the individual's past. More specifically, party identification can often be attributed to the political socialisation process that the individual has been subjected to. Stacey (1978: 2) provides a definition of the socialisation process as being "the development process whereby each person acquires the

knowledge, skills, beliefs, values, attitudes and dispositions which enable him or her to function as a more or less effective though not inevitably compliant, member of society". Political socialisation therefore represents the intrinsic beliefs about voting and the democratic process implicit in the individual (Tam Cho, 1999). Political socialisation is the manner in which the individual develops an understanding of the political system via the influence of different socialising experiences through family, education and work among other things (Himmelweit et al., 1981). Tam Cho (1999) suggests that it is not the factors of education or age per se, that influence turnout propensity. Rather, it is the socialisation associated with education or age. Political socialisation begins early in life (Stacey, 1978; Hyman, 1959). In a study of partisanship in children, Stacey (1978) found that approximately two-thirds of British and American twelve year olds have developed political party preferences. Often they follow predictable patterns in accordance to parental values and religious orientation. Likewise, Hyman (1959) found that an affiliation towards a particular party typically develops well before the individual reaches voting age which strongly reflects the individual's social milieu and in particular, his/her family. The strong familial socialisation link is most prominent between the parent and the child. Miller et al. (1990) found that parental partisanship often passes on to children. Strong parental identification with a particular party often results in the child also identifying with and supporting that particular party. Connell (1972) found that there is a correlation not only between the party choices of parent and offspring, but among a range of other politically related topics also. He found a similarity of attitudes and views to exist between the parent and the child on a range of issues including foreign affairs, economics, civil rights, war, prejudice and

family roles. According to Connell (1972: 323), there is a high degree of “correspondence between the political beliefs of an “offspring” and a “parental” generation”. He refers to two different types of correspondence; pair correspondence and group correspondence. Pair correspondence refers to when there is a direct correspondence and correlation between one person (the parent) and another (the child), for example, when the most radical ideological father has the most radical ideological child. The other type of correspondence, group correspondence, refers to correlation of opinions between generations. It is the term used to describe a similar distribution of opinions, attitudes and views in each generation regardless of the occurrence of pair correspondence.

In his study of the extent to which each of these types of correspondence exists, Connell (1972) found that in general, there is low pair correspondence and high group correspondence with the distribution of attitudes and values in the older generation being reproduced in the younger generation. This is reinforced by Pattie and Johnston (2001) who suggest that the most important aspect of home-place socialisation is the memory of a “voting culture” within the household during childhood. This strengthens the argument put forward by Connell of high group correspondence.

Cross pressures such as differing parental voting choice or a parent voting differently to the social group norm, weakens the effect of familial socialisation. Other factors, such as educational background, social class grouping and so forth, may also affect socialisation. These are possible reasons for the existence of high group correspondence as opposed to pair correspondence.

According to Schlozman et al. (1999) much of adult socialisation takes place in the workplace. This results in a sex bias with domestic responsibilities likely to

keep women out of and to push men into the workforce. The workplace facilitates informal political discussions which helps to develop an interest in politics and mobilises the individual to vote. If males are more likely to be in the workforce than females, they have a participatory advantage as far as information acquisition is concerned. Schlozman et al. (1999: 39) comment on how "...women are less likely to be working, to be working full-time, and to be in jobs that demand education and training". The overall theme is male advantage as "men's and women's workplace experiences do matter for their participation" (Schlozman et al., 1999: 51) and hence, for their political socialisation.

2.4.2.5 Religion, Culture and Citizenship

2.4.2.5.1 Religion

In their study of turnout decline, Blais et al. (2004) found that religion is an important correlate of turnout propensity. Religion influences turnout in how it affects the socialisation process, as discussed in the previous section.

2.4.2.5.2 Culture

Blais et al. (2004) suggest that declining turnout levels are indicative of a larger cultural change. People's perceptions of the importance of voting are changing and the activity of voting is seen as less essential and efficacious as it once was. Warf (2004: 130) comments on Anthony Giddens' perspective of culture as defining "what is normal and what is not, what is important and what is not, what is acceptable and what is not, within each social context". He also notes how Giddens described culture as being acquired through a lifelong process of socialisation whereby individuals are socially produced from the cradle to the

grave. Himmelweit et al. (1981) refer to the “zeitgeist”, the changes that have occurred in the political, economic and cultural climate of a society, as being triggers for declining turnout levels.

2.4.2.5.3 Citizenship

In the Irish electoral system, citizenship status restricts the type of elections that can be participated in. Democratic theory suggests that participation is fundamental to citizenship and that in order for all citizens to be equally respected, all must be equally welcome to participate. However, apart from citizenship status, there are many other obstacles that may hinder the turnout prospects of resident non-nationals. Areas characterised by high in-migration of foreign immigrants tend to experience low turnout levels. It may be suggested that immigrant populations have not yet developed the habit of voting; however it is likely that there are other reasons which may result in low turnout.

The main obstacle facing immigrant populations is the language barrier. A lack of proficiency in English “increases the costs [of voting] by exaggerating the associated bureaucratic hurdles” (Tam Cho, 1999: 1144). Without fluency in the language, it may prove difficult to get onto the electoral register. There are other problems associated with language barriers also. In particular, language affects the type of political information obtained. If there is a discrepancy in the information obtained by the individual, the political socialisation process will be adversely affected resulting in alienation from politics and low turnout levels.

The actual process of casting a vote may also prove problematic to non-nationals owing to the fact that the Irish PR-STV electoral system is one of few PR-STV systems in operation worldwide.

2.4.3 Other Influences

2.4.3.1 Political Mobilisation

According to Pattie et al. (2003), there is no substitute for political mobilisation. Left to their own devices, it is unlikely that citizens will actively participate in politics and turn out to vote. However, if asked to participate, they are likely to do so. Pattie et al. (2003) speak of mobilisation as being a direct request to participate, and while this is sometimes the case, mobilisation also occurs as a result of more indirect factors.

Rallings and Thrasher (1990: 89) argue that higher turnout will be experienced in areas “where a contest is unusual or characterised by high partisan competition, or features intense competition by one or more parties”. As the outcome of an election becomes less certain, voter turnout tends to increase (Filer et al., 1993; Pattie and Johnston, 2001). In a study on marginality in Britain, Whitely et al. (2001a) found a well-established correlation to exist between electoral participation in Britain and the closeness of the competition. Pattie and Johnston (2001) apply a rational twist to the marginality-turnout relationship suggesting that voters are rational and turn out in large numbers only when an election is considered a close contest. Perceptions of marginality are quite significant with regards to mobilisation (Pattie and Johnston, 2004). How close the elector perceives the election outcome to be affects the decision to vote. If a close and contested outcome is perceived, it will have a mobilising effect on the elector as a greater value will be placed on his/her vote. A close contest also increases individual efficacy. Conversely, if the perceived marginality is low, and a given outcome seems certain, the elector is much more likely to deliberately abstain as the likelihood of his/her individual vote causing change is minute. Mitchell

(2003) refers to the 2002 Irish General election and to the de-mobilising effects of Fianna Fáil's power monopoly. Specifically, he attributes the low turnout levels experienced to low marginality and in particular, to the fact that the outcome of the election was assumed to be certain.

Party efforts at mobilisation generally focus around canvassing and campaigning⁶. Party canvassing is described by Huckfeldt and Sprague (1992: 72) as being "the most important form of encounter between parties and citizens". The effort party workers make to contact individual citizens can be very influential in not only mobilising the individual, but in swaying their actual vote preference in that party's direction. Party mobilisation depends upon a process of social diffusion whereby convincing one individual to vote in a particular direction has cascading effects (Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1992). If one individual, who has been persuaded to vote for a certain party or policy, convinces another to vote similarly, they in turn will convince another and so on. The political spectrum may also have a mobilising effect. According to Crepaz (1990), the wider the political spectrum, the greater the likelihood that each individuals' political orientation will be facilitated and provided for. A wider variety of possible choices therefore increases turnout propensity by providing the opportunity to express one's political views.

Much research on mobilisation tends to look at the impact of Get-Out-the-Vote (GOTV) mobilization drives, be they partisan or non-partisan operations. The West Haven experiment by Gerber and Green (2005) tested the effectiveness of GOTV phone calls in mobilising the electorate. The calls delivered were non-partisan in nature and varied slightly in wording to stress one of three variants – a

⁶ Campaigning is in large part a function of the media and so is dealt with in section 2.4.3.2 The Media

close election contest, voting as a civic duty, and neighbourhood solidarity. They also ended in one of two different ways. The first ending simply involved stating “we hope you’ll come out to vote”. The second ending involved attempting to establish a voting intention by asking if the person would be turning out to vote on election day. The results of the experiment pointed to the ineffectiveness of non-partisan phone-calls on mobilisation and voter turnout. Similar results were found by McNulty (2005) in a GOTV phone call drive in San Francisco. In this instance, calls were delivered by a commercial phone bank. The negative results in this case were attributed to variation in the receptiveness of people to unsolicited phone calls. Cardy (2005) undertook a partisan mobilisation experiment involving not only GOTV phone calls but GOTV mail as well. However, as with McNulty (2005) and Gerber and Green (2005), the findings illustrated the ineffectiveness of GOTV mobilisation drives at increasing turnout. Gerber and Green (2000a) found door-to-door canvassing to have the greatest mobilisation affect when compared with direct mail and phone calls. In particular, it is believed that the effectiveness of door-to-door canvassing is due to the “personal touch” factor associated with this type of canvassing. Gerber and Green (2005) suggest that those who are most susceptible to voter mobilisation efforts are those belonging to minority groups, the young, and those living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. However, the extent to which the effort is effective depends on whether or not voters have already been contacted by other canvassers. Un-receptiveness to door-to-door efforts usually results from prior saturation with personal contact.

2.4.3.2 The Media

It has been suggested by Street (2005) that politics is now constituted by the media. Politics is no longer carried out independently as an entity to be reported on by journalists. Rather, it is increasingly organised as a media phenomenon (Dahlgren, 2001). What is of utmost importance nowadays is the marketing of political parties, politicians and policy promises (Himmelweit et al., 1981). The susceptibility of the general public to the marketing process results in a very powerful media effect on mobilisation. According to Newton and Brynin (2001: 265), “mass media [has] the ability to influence not what people think but what they think about”. Often, the media succeeds in mobilising the electorate into unconventional methods of participation. Schumpeter (1976) speaks of how newspaper readers, television watchers and radio listeners are easy to work into a psychological frenzy, even if they are geographically separated.

The media is the predominant source of political information for the majority of people. The presentation and ranking of relevant issues by the media places an explicit value on those issues in the eyes of the elector (Dunleavy, 1990). Newton and Brynin (2001: 265) speak of how “the media can prime people to react in one way rather than another, or can present (frame) issues in a way that leads people to think about them in one way rather than another”. The Democracy Commission (2005) suggests that this may be problematic in that media coverage tends to focus on popular, trivial or controversial matters as opposed to the actual issues at stake in a given election. This can lead to problems when considering the numbers who rely heavily on the information provided by the media (Schudson, 1998). Dunleavy (1990) comments on how, from the mid-1960s onwards, television broadcasts were replacing newspapers as

the primary source of political information. Miller et al. (1990) reiterate this point in a study regarding sources of political information, finding that almost every subject studied received their political information from television news or personal conversation. Conversely, in their research on the national press and party voting in the UK, Newton and Brynin (2001: 280) found that after controlling for a variety of factors, there was a statistically significant relationship between newspaper reading and voting. They found the influence of newspapers to be greatest in close electoral contests when electors find it difficult to make choices. Specifically, they found that newspapers have influence to the extent that “they reinforce and reflect rather than mould or influence”. Street (2005) points to the need for all information received by the media to be regarded plainly as information, and not to be looked upon or assessed as being right or wrong, serious or trivial. To eliminate bias within the media, the Democracy Commission (2004) point to the necessity of diverse media ownership with policing and control of the media independent of the government and large multi-national corporations.

There are two arguments on the effectiveness of mass media. On the one hand, Norris (2000) praises the media as contributing positively to political knowledge. Speaking of the situation in Britain in the 1980s, Dunleavy (1990) comments on the powerful influence of mass media in affecting vote choice. On the other hand however, Street (2003: 23) sees the media as very problematic in that it results in a “dumbing down of political communication [with] the political world [being] re-constituted according to the conventions of the medium in which it comes to exist”. Putnam (2000) also views mass media as being problematic. He discusses a link between television viewing and civic disengagement suggesting that

television induces passivity by stealing time that might otherwise be available for participation in community life. The media has been accused of bearing some responsibility for low and declining turnout rates. The presentation of election polls showing the most likely winner and potential loser has much influence on the individual. Hart (1996) believes that “by making politics easy, television has made citizenship easy, and that is a dangerous thing...People drift lazily across the [televised] political landscape [and] pay less and less attention” (Miron, 1999: 331). The term “media malaise” has been used to describe the manner in which people have become disengaged due to their viewing, reading and listening habits that result from a general over-saturation with the media.

2.4.3.3 Voting as Habit

Voting is thought to be an activity sustained by habit. Voting in one election increases the likelihood of voting in the next election. Therefore, it has been argued that the emphasis should be on getting the individual out to vote in the first place (The Democracy Commission, 2004). According to Gerber et al. (2003), once the psychological impetus to vote has been established, it endures over time and voting becomes a habit.

Some people have psychological orientations more susceptible to habit-formation such as feelings of civic duty and genuine interest in political affairs. This, coupled with the fact that voting is thought to be a self-reinforcing activity, leads to the establishment of the habit of voting whereby those who vote come to think of themselves as voters. Research by Gerber et al. (2003) on voting as a habit forming act, found that voting in the 1998 US General election raised the probability of voting in the 1999 local elections indicating that the propensity to

vote changes once one votes in an election. In more colloquial terms, voting in an election has a knock-on effect. With respect to turnout propensity in subsequent elections, the persistence of the habit of voting is thought to be sustained by feelings of efficacy and importance that are experienced by the individual when he/she turns out to vote.

2.5 PLACE AS A CENTRAL THEME

With the advent of globalisation, the issue of “place” was catapulted onto the research agenda, and since then there has been much debate over the significance of place with respect to geographical research. It is argued that place upholds a contradictory relationship with globalisation. The homogenisation that goes hand-in-hand with globalisation is not projected onto place. Rather, places are increasingly being defined in terms of their unique attributes. However, the difficulty with defining place in this subjective manner is the individualistic tendencies that it provokes, resulting in place meaning different things to different people (Hubbard et al., 2004). In order to be able to define the concept of “place”, that which is outside that place requires definition also. According to Massey (1994), one cannot have a sense of place without there being an awareness of the processes that are occurring outside of that place. People become acutely aware of the differences that exist between their place and other places. According to Harvey (1996), this leads to a state of competition between places with the main motivation for the competition being mobile capital. This results in people attempting to differentiate between their place and other places. One means of accomplishing this is through the creation and preservation of a “sense of place”. This was addressed earlier in section 2.4.2.4.7 which dealt with

the notion of place identity. The complexity of the concept is based around the idea that one place cannot be effectively depicted by a single sense of place. Rather, the sense of place experienced by each person is different.

When places change, expand, rejuvenate or even depopulate, a sense of loss may be experienced. Creswell (2004) comments on research by May (1996) on the rejuvenation of Stoke Newington in Inner North London. This rejuvenation had been welcomed by some, but others who had been long term residents experienced a profound sense of loss. Creswell (2004) quotes May (1996: 201) on two such residents;

“Both Paul and Pat have seen the area where they grew up change beyond all recognition and such changes precipitate a very real sense of loss”

According to Sibley (1995), this “sense of loss” is directly related to exclusion and the resistance felt towards a different sort of person moving into a neighbourhood. Hague (2004), writing on the work of Benedict Anderson, suggests that the sense of community previously felt by Paul and Pat would not be real but imagined. He ascertains that places consist of imagined communities. His justification for such an assertion lies in the fact that even members of the smallest nation will never know the majority of the other members. They will never meet them or hear of them. Yet, in the minds of each of those members lives the image of their communion with others in that nation. Therefore, the sense of community felt is merely an imagined sense.

These deliberations with respect to place, sense of place, sense of loss and imagined communities demonstrate the complexity of the theoretical concept of place to geographical research. It is difficult to define the exact contribution of place to the discipline as there are many other dimensions constituting it. The

bare minimum was touched on here to provide an introduction of place as a central theme in this research. The remainder of this section deals primarily with place in political geography as directly relevant to this thesis.

2.5.1 Place in Political Geography

The divine importance of place in political geography, as envisioned by Agnew, is summarised by the following statement;

“ Place channels the flow of interests, influence and identity out of which political activities emanate ”

(Agnew, 1996a: 133)

Agnew has conducted much research into the relationship of the concept of place to political studies, basing his work upon the principle that “political behaviour is intrinsically geographical” (Agnew, 1987: 6). This concept is central to this research with the main concern being the effective accomplishment of a place-based study of the influences on voter turnout in Fingal.

A central notion, and one advanced by Agnew, is the manner in which place influences politics by way of differing local characteristics and phenomena which result in distinctive political identities and activities. Differences in the politics between places may be accounted for by an amalgamation of influential factors. Firstly, a spatial-economic influence affects local politics in terms of the spatial division of labour which may result in differing class and community affiliations. Access to communication technology can either limit or enhance social and political interaction while characteristics such as social class, ethnicity and gender differences feed different political ideologies. These characteristic differences vary from place to place and from location to location within a particular place (Agnew, 1996a). Polarisation may account for differing political

environments (Pattie and Johnston, 2003) while the effects of party manifestos and other rhetorical assertions differ according to place with political parties and the projects they represent being differentially embedded in places (Agnew, 1987 & 1997).

The role of 'place' is given a fundamental stance by Agnew in the geographical context of political studies. He maintains that in order to effectively study and understand political behaviour, a place-based perspective must be adopted. His own work on the development of a multi-dimensional view of place is in part an expansion of the work of Yi Fu Tuan (1974) in that Agnew combines the "sense of place" discussed by Tuan with the spatial referents of "location" and "locale" resulting in a three-fold dimension of place. "Locale" refers to "the structured 'microsociological' content of place, settings for everyday routine social interaction provided in a place" (Agnew, 1987: 5). David Sibley (1995) comments on the deliberations of Nicky Gregson with regards to locales. Gregson spoke of locales as ranging from a room in a residential house, to a street corner, to a shop floor, to towns and cities. "Location" is described as representing the "macro-order" in a place", referring to the location of a place in wider geographical space and the relationship between that place and other places (Agnew, 1987: 5). The final element, "sense of place" is the "subjective orientation...engendered by living in a place", explained by Tuan (1974: 235) as how "people demonstrate their sense of place when they apply their moral and aesthetic discernment to sites and locations". These three elements of place are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they are interrelated constituents which have become more flexible over time. Insofar as Agnew's definitions suggest, prior to the 19th century, locales were locations. It was only with advancements in

transportation and communications infrastructure that the three individual elements of place could be clearly identified. The inter-relationship between the three elements is illustrated in the following quote;

“Locale is the core geosociological element in place, but it is structured by the pressures of location and gives rise to its own sense of place”

(Agnew, 1987: 28)

Agnew privileges the “local” as the most effective scale at which to study political behaviour. Marsh (2002) also speaks of the importance of the ‘local’ in explaining individual electoral behaviour. National and global issues take on meaning only as they relate to the local. However, the “local” takes on meaning only in terms of a larger spatial context, i.e. the “national”. There is an interdependency between the local, the national and place. The medium through which this interdependency is played out is that of political parties. From a top-down perspective, political parties provide the state with “political legitimacy” (Agnew, 1987: 38). Looking at it from a bottom-up perspective, political parties articulate the demands of local populations to the higher national level authorities.

What relevance does all of this hold with respect to voter turnout in Fingal? The main contribution is that it provides a strong theoretical justification for this study. This thesis is concerned with conducting a largely place-based study of the influences on voter turnout in Fingal, and in particular with researching the influences on an electoral area (EA) by electoral area (EA) basis. The suggestion by Agnew that political behaviour is best studied at the level of the “local” has much bearing on this research with the main focus being the study of electoral behaviour at the local level in Fingal. The significance of place to this thesis is embedded in the concept of place identity. Place acts as a means of preserving

identity. With Fingal being a relatively new local authority area, the fundamental task has been the creation of an awareness in the people in Fingal of the area in which they now live, to instill in the people a sense of belonging to Fingal and to create an individual Fingallian identity or rather, an individual identity with roots in the county of Fingal.

2.6 RESEARCH THEMES AND HYPOTHESES

To recapitulate on the literature thus far, Socio-Economic theory, the theory of Psychological Resources and the theory of Social Connectedness as encapsulated by Perea's Individual Incentives Theory are the most effective explanatory theories of turnout behaviour. Specific elements of these theories have also been individually theorized to develop specific models of explanatory variables. In particular, the factor of party identification has been theorized by the Michigan model, rational voting and abstention by the Rational Voter Model, and socio-economics by the Civic-Voluntarism Model.

Due to the multiplicity of models and theories that have been proposed as explanations of voter turnout, the author has decided to formulate hypotheses based upon individual elements of these models as opposed to the formulation of hypotheses based solely on the existing documented models. By doing this, it will be possible to develop a place-specific theory with respect to those influences on turnout in Fingal county. It also reduces the limitations posed by studying turnout within the context and boundaries of existing theories.

An examination of the turnout literature points to the widespread influence of demographic variables on voter turnout. It has on occasion been found that there is an association between sex and turnout. Specifically, the literature suggests

that males are more likely to vote than females. In recent years however, it has been suggested that the influence of gender differences on turnout is waning. The relationship between age and turnout has been found to be curvilinear in nature, with turnout propensity increasing as one moves through successive age cohorts. Marital status has been suggested to influence turnout to the degree that those who are married are more likely to vote than those who are separated, divorced or who have never married. As this is the first study of its kind in Fingal, the exact nature of the relationship between these demographic factors and turnout is uncertain. Owing to this, the following non-directional hypothesis has been devised;

H₁: There is an association between demographic variables (i.e. sex, age and marital status) and turnout variation within the county of Fingal.

The level of socio-economic resources, that is, educational attainment, occupational status, social class grouping and housing tenure, has been found to have an influence on voter turnout propensity. Specifically, the relationship between social class and turnout is observable at the aggregate level while educational factors and turnout uphold an inverse relationship (in the Irish context). The socio-structural factor of residential stability as measured through length of residence, is also thought to influence turnout propensity. The extent to which these socio-structural influences exist at the individual level will be explored through the following hypothesis;

H₂: There is an association between socio-structural variables and voter turnout in Fingal, whereby residential stability and a high level of socio-economic resources is correlated with higher turnout levels.

There are a number of other factors which have been found to enjoy a relationship with voter turnout. However, as these factors are less straightforward than those already hypothesized, they cannot be grouped in the same manner in which the previous sets of factors have been. Each is easily manipulated into individual hypotheses. For efficiency purposes however they are hypothesized together below.

H₃: Turnout variation within Fingal can be explained by a combination of other factors. Specifically, there is an association between turnout and;

- habit*
- civic duty*
- attention to the media*

This thesis is implicitly concerned with the notion of identity. There are three components of identity in Fingal that this thesis addresses; namely, partisan identity, group identity and place identity. The main concern in relation to identity is that of the place identity component. The reason for this lies in the fact that Fingal is a relatively new county, having only been established on 1st January 1994. Given this, it is reasonable to suggest that the level of place identity in Fingal may be weak. Attachment to place and place identity are thought to positively influence turnout by motivating the elector to vote in the

name of an issue that is of concern to that particular area. The suggestion that identity is low in Fingal may therefore adversely contribute to turnout levels leading to the formulation of the following hypothesis;

H₄: Differing levels of place identity are associated with turnout variation in Fingal County.

This study is mainly concerned with the factors influencing turnout on an electoral area basis. It is presumed at the outset that the factors relevant to turnout in one electoral area may not necessarily be applicable in another electoral area. This leads to the formulation of the fifth and final hypothesis;

H₅: The factors influencing voter turnout vary from one electoral area to another.

Throughout the remainder of this thesis, the focus will be on proving the validity of each of these hypotheses with respect to Fingal.

CHAPTER 3

VOTER MOBILISATION

3.1 INITIATIVES TO PROMOTE VOTER PARTICIPATION

Voter turnout levels vary immensely from one country to the next irrespective of geographical location with the social characteristics of non-voters being quite similar in each country (Franklin, 1996). It has been widely recognised that low and declining turnouts are a consistent and perennial problem of democratic systems. This chapter will discuss some of the initiatives that have been implemented in Ireland and abroad in an attempt to address the issue of low and declining voter turnouts.

There are different approaches to creating and implementing voting initiatives. According to Ellis et al. (2006: 20);

“some approaches rely on formal lines of communication through traditional partners while others attempt to build social networks using non-traditional partners to promote their message of encouraging voters to turn out.”

Ellis et al. (2006) identified six different categories of mobilising activities; information campaigns, advertising campaigns, grass-roots movements, school/mock/parallel elections and educational programs, entertainment and inducements.

1. Information Campaigns

Information campaigns tend to deal with “how” to vote with the focus on the processes of registering and the “how, when and where” of voting. The mediums employed in such information campaigns range from mail-outs, leaflet drops and posters to advertising on the radio, television and print media along with the use

of New Information and Communications Technology (NICTs), such as the internet and email, to disseminate information. Workshops are also run to educate voters about the importance of participation and the voting process; both of which are addressed, for example, by the Active Citizenship Program run by the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice.

2. Advertising Campaigns

While information campaigns tend to address the “how to” of voting, advertising campaigns focus on the question of “why” one should turn out. Information campaigns build upon the moral requirement of voting and deliver messages such as “voting is your civic duty” and “your vote is your voice” through mediums such as television, radio, billboards, newspapers and the Internet.

3. Grass-Roots Movements

Grass-roots movements involve on-the-ground operations in which face-to-face and personal interaction motivates the elector to turn out to vote. Often grass-roots movements take the form of door-to-door canvassing, local events, and the setting up of tables and kiosks in public places. They usually tend to target a specific group, for example youth or minority groups, and often take the form of Get Out The Vote (GOTV) activities and registration drives.

4. School/Mock/Parallel Elections and Educational Programs

In some countries, the educational curriculum involves modules which address the issues of democracy and voting, for example the Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) module in Ireland. These educational programs attempt to

instil in the students a sense of civic duty which will result in active participation and voting in later life. In some countries, schools go one step further in providing education about voting and hold school/mock/parallel elections. An example of this is the “Student Vote” initiative in Canada which will be discussed later in the chapter.

5. Entertainment

Perhaps the most familiar initiative which falls under the heading of “entertainment” is that of “Rock the Vote”. Rock the Vote was established in the USA in 1990 “as a response to concerns that freedom of speech and artistic expression were under attack. Its highly visible approach to involve and empower young people by using popular culture trends to make political education and participation more appealing has been widely adopted by other groups throughout the world” (Ellis et al., 2006). Rock the Vote focuses on encouraging those in the 18-24 age group to turn out to vote. Some Rock the Vote initiatives will be discussed later in the chapter.

6. Inducements

In some electoral contests, incentives to vote are offered such as entry into a prize draw or entry into a lottery. These incentives are intended as a means of encouraging voters to the polls who in order to rationalise voting, need to see some sort of direct benefit from turning out. These are generally those voters who are not persuaded by arguments of civic duty and moral obligation and who also have no specific party alignments.

There are numerous international initiatives which have been proposed and implemented in an effort to increase turnout and to sustain high turnout levels. Some of these initiatives correspond with the six categories of mobilising activities identified by Ellis (2006) above. Five of these initiatives will be addressed in the following section.

3.2 INTERNATIONAL VOTING INITIATIVES

This section will discuss some international attempts at addressing the issue of active participation and voting. The first initiative discussed is that of compulsory voting in Australia. The remainder of the section will then discuss international initiatives which correspond with the Irish initiatives that will be addressed later in the chapter. In relation to the Irish initiative of electronic voting, the British local elections of 2002 will be discussed where the British Government pilot tested a range of alternative voting methods. With respect to the Irish CSPE educational program, Canada's Student Vote will be discussed. An account of Slovakia's Rock Volieb '98 will be given in comparison to the Irish Rock the Vote '07, and in relation to the proposed independent electoral commission in Ireland, the Elections New Zealand organisation will be described.

3.2.1 Australia, Compulsory Voting

Compulsory voting is when the right to vote is combined with the obligation to vote. It was introduced to many countries in the late 1800s and early 1900s as a means of increasing electoral turnout and maintaining a high level of voter participation. In terms of Western European countries, it was introduced in

Liechtenstein in 1862, in Belgium in 1893, in Luxembourg in 1919 and also features in the democratic systems of Cyprus, Greece and Switzerland (Gratschew, 2006). In the past, it also featured in Austria, Italy and the Netherlands. Outside of Western Europe, but still within the western world, it is a feature of Australian democracy.

Table 3.1 displays a sample of turnout rates from selected countries around the world. What is imminently evident is the much higher turnout rates in those countries which feature or once featured, compulsory voting. New Zealand is also high on the list although compulsory voting is not practised there but rather compulsory registration, which will be touched on later in the chapter.

TABLE 3.1: Average Voter Turnout Rates from Around the World (%)

Country	%	Country	%
Australia	94.5	Brazil	77.8
Belgium	92.5	Portugal	77
Austria	91.3	Slovenia	76.6
New Zealand	90.8	UK	75.2
Italy	89.8	Canada	73.9
Luxembourg	89.7	France	73.8
Netherlands	87.9	Ireland	73.3
Sweden	87.1	Japan	69.5
Denmark	85.9	USA	66.5
Germany	85.4	India	59.4
Slovakia	85.2	Switzerland	56.3
Norway	80.4	Poland	50.3

SOURCE: Adapted from Lopez Pintor, R. and Gratschew, M. (2002) (eds.) *Voter Turnout Since 1945: A Global Report*, Sweden, International IDEA

Australia features first in the table with an average voter turnout rate of 94.5%. This level of turnout is directly attributable to compulsory voting laws which are an established feature of Australian democracy.

Compulsory voting in Australia was advocated by a man named Alfred Deakin at the turn of the 20th century. It was first introduced in federal elections in 1911 and in 1915 it was used in the first state elections in Queensland. In 1924 it was

introduced countywide (Australian Electoral Commission, 2007). The motivation behind compulsory voting is to achieve 100% participation which would, in theory, create an assembly which wholly represents the sentiments of the electorate. However, it is argued by opponents of compulsory voting that in a free and democratic society, everyone has the right to vote and the right not to vote if they so choose. Gratschew (2004: 27) reiterates this point stating that “compulsory voting...is not consistent with the freedom associated with democracy”. She also states that “voting is not an intrinsic obligation and the enforcement of a [compulsory voting] law would be an infringement of the citizens’ freedom associated with democratic elections”.

The Australian Electoral Commission (2007) has outlined both the arguments in favour of, and the arguments against, compulsory voting on their website. They are as follows;

Arguments in Favour of Compulsory Voting;

- Voting is a civic duty comparable to other duties citizens perform, for example, taxation, compulsory education, and jury duty
- It teaches the benefits of political participation
- Parliament reflects more accurately the “will of the electorate”
- Candidates can concentrate their campaigning energies on issues rather than encouraging voters to attend the polls
- Governments must consider the total electorate in policy formation and management
- The voter isn’t actually compelled to vote for anyone because voting is by secret ballot

Arguments Against Compulsory Voting;

- It is undemocratic to force people to vote – an infringement of liberty
- The ill informed and those with little interest in politics are forced to the polls
- It may increase the number of “donkey votes” (i.e. ballots numbered 1,2,3 and so on from the top of the list down or 1,2,3, and so on from the bottom of the list up)
- It may increase the number of informal (spoilt) votes
- It increases the number of safe, single member electorates – political participation then concentrates on the more marginal electorate
- Resources must be allocated to determine whether those who failed to vote have “valid and sufficient” reasons

As voting is compulsory in Australia, the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) endeavour to make voting as facilitative as possible for the electorate. This involves allowing the voter to cast his/her ballot via a number of methods. As well as voting in the traditional polling station, postal voting, pre-poll voting and absent voting are permitted if the elector knows in advance that they will not be present on polling day. In addition, there is voting at Australian overseas missions along with voting at “mobile teams” (mobile polling stations) set up in hospitals and nursing homes and in remote locations. A report compiled by the International IDEA (2004) points to the need for penalties to exist where compulsory voting laws have not been complied with. They point to the need for sufficient penalties to reduce the occurrence of “scoff law” where non-voters go unpunished, underestimating the strength of the compulsory voting laws. “Scoff

law” also refers to the occurrence of donkey voting (previously mentioned) and the possibility of votes being registered for extremist parties, both of which are thought to be due to people being forced to the polls against their will.

In some countries, compulsory voting laws do not provide for non-voting penalties. In Australia however, there are set rules/guidelines in place detailing how to deal with non-voting offenders. Subsequent to the election taking place, a computerised list is produced detailing the names and addresses of all apparent non-voters. The District Returning Officer (DRO) writes to each of the “non-voters” asking for an explanation for abstention or a \$20 fine if no valid explanation can be given. The “non-voters” must then reply by a specified date in one of three manners. Firstly, if the apparent non-voter did in fact turn out to vote, he/she must advise the DRO as to the details of when and where the vote was cast. Secondly, the non-voter has the option of providing the DRO with a “valid and sufficient” reason for failing to turn out and thirdly, the non-voter can pay the \$20 fine for abstaining. If the reason provided by the non-voter is not accepted as being “valid and sufficient”, the DRO will write a second time informing the non-voter that if payment of a \$20 fine is not made by a specified date, he/she will be brought to court where a maximum fine of \$50 can be imposed. Ultimately, if a court ordered fine is not paid, the non-voter faces varying penalties from community service orders to goods seizures and jail sentences.

Some countries with compulsory voting laws impose harsher penalties than Australia. In Greece, for example, if a non-voters explanation for abstention is not accepted, they face a jail sentence of up to one month. In Belgium, if an acceptable reason cannot be provided, the non-voter faces a €5-€10 fine on the

first the incidence of non-voting. On the second offence, the non-voter must pay a fine of between €10 and €25 but if they fail to vote four or more times in fifteen years, they are excluded from the electoral register and disenfranchised for ten years. If this non-voter is a civil servant, they are also disqualified from promotion (Gratschew, 2004). In other countries, the complexity of compulsory voting laws and the resources required to enforce them often prevent offenders from being punished. Although the penalties for failing to vote in Australia appear to be particularly lenient, they do appear to be effective in maintaining a high level of voter turnout. Gratschew and Lopez Pintor (2002) found compulsory voting to increase turnout by about 10% to 15%. In Australia, since compulsory voting was introduced nationally in 1924, electoral turnout has never fallen below 90%.

3.2.2 Britain, 2002 Alternative Voting Methods Pilot Study

The 2002 local elections in the UK saw 30 local authorities partake in various pilot schemes to test alternative voting methods. The methods piloted were all postal voting, multi-channel voting and electronic voting, electronic counting, flexible polling stations and early voting and extended polling hours.

All postal voting involved the voter filling out their ballot form and posting it in a pre-paid envelope. Those residing in all postal pilot wards were informed that there would not be any polling stations set up or open on Election Day. Rather, they were informed that there would be a limited number of delivery points set up, mainly intended to assist those who were unsure as to how to vote. The UK Electoral Commission reported that all postal voting was quite successful in increasing voter turnout with turnout almost doubling in some areas.

Multi-channel and electronic voting employed the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in voting. The initiatives piloted involved remote electronic voting via a computer connected to the Internet, SMS text messaging, telephone voting, electronic voting in polling stations using touch screen kiosks and PCs and similar in public places using touch screen kiosks. Anecdotal evidence from Liverpool suggested that the range of ICT based voting methods piloted accessed all age groups with SMS text message voting being used most by those in the youngest age cohorts, internet voting being used most by middle-ages voters, and telephone voting being used most by those in the older age cohorts (The Electoral Commission, 2002). In each area where the ICT based initiatives were piloted, voters were also able to vote via the traditional means.

Electronic counting was piloted in fifteen authorities. ICT based votes were automatically counted when cast with traditional ballot papers being scanned by an electronic wand device.

Some local authority areas piloted early voting and extended hours voting. Early voting allowed voters to cast their votes the weekend prior to Election Day while some polling stations operated under extended polling hours awarding voters greater flexibility.

One local authority area permitted voters to cast their ballot at any polling station located within their particular ward.

The 2002 local elections in the UK demonstrate how it is possible for a large scale pilot scheme to be orchestrated involving many different methods of voting. This contrasts greatly with the Irish electronic voting scheme which will be discussed in section 3.3.2.

3.2.3 Canada, Student Vote

It is thought by many that voting is an activity sustained by habit (Gerber et al. 2003; The Democracy Commission, 2004). It appears that voting in one election increases the likelihood of voting in the next and, according to Gerber et al. (2003), once the psychological impetus to vote has been established, it endures over time and voting becomes habit. This is the premise upon which the Student Vote program in Canada is based.

Student Vote is a parallel election program that aims to provide students with the chance to participate in a non-partisan parallel election in order to promote active citizenship and participation while working with a range of establishments to engage young students and introduce them to civic and community life (Ellis et al., 2006).

Student Vote was founded in 2003 when it held the first parallel election with the 2003 Ontario Provincial Elections. At this time it was called Kids Vote Canada and involved 335,000 students from 825 schools representing every electoral district in the province (Student Vote, 2007). Since then it has held four other parallel elections in 2004, 2005 and 2006 and is currently preparing for the sixth parallel election to be held in October 2007 in conjunction with the 2007 Ontario Provincial Elections and Referendum. The program is open to all elementary, intermediate and secondary schools in Canada who can be registered to take part by the principal of the school or by any acting teacher.

The program is divided into two distinct parts aimed at allowing students to practice being active citizens. According to Student Vote (2007); "If we'd all like young Canadians to grow up into active citizens, then shouldn't we give them a way to practice first? That's what the Student Vote program is all about:

understanding the process, discovering issues and learning first hand how to vote and why it matters". The first component of the Student Vote program is education. Ellis et al. (2006) note that the Student Vote organizers do not provide teachers and students with specific campaign materials in order to re-enforce the relationship between informing oneself and being an active citizen. Rather, the students are taught about democracy and elections and follow the election campaign through the media. They complete assignments based around the televised "Leader's Debate" and take part in a local candidate's debate. Oftentimes the candidates visit the schools in their district that are taking part in the Student Vote program and canvass the students.

In the week prior to the official Election Day, the second part of the program takes place when students undertake the roles of Deputy Returning Officers and poll clerks and cast ballots on designated Student Vote days. Electoral Management Bodies provide the schools with official ballot papers, ballot boxes and voting screens. Real resources are used as it is thought that the handling of a real ballot paper is a strong learning experience for the student. The results for each school are sent to the Student Vote Returning Officer where they are tabulated according to electoral district and kept confidential until the election night when they are publicly announced and covered by the media. Interestingly, the Student Vote results tend to correlate strongly with the official election results.

Canada's Student Vote parallel election program shows how schools can be used to effectively educate children, i.e. tomorrow's voters, on not only the importance of voting, but also on how to actually cast a vote.

3.2.4 Slovakia, Rock Volieb

In the 1990s, the main government party in Slovakia was the dictatorial Merciar's Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZPs). Opposition parties lost out in the 1994 elections when turnout amongst 18-24 years olds was less than 20% (Stone, 2000). It was recognised that there was a need for a program or initiative to motivate young, first-time and undecided voters to turn out to vote in future elections. In 1998, in conjunction with the Civic Campaign '98 (a campaign concerned primarily with voter education), the International Republican Institute (IRI) hired a Slovak named Martin Kapusta to oversee the setting up of a Slovakian Rock-the-Vote, modelled on the American Rock-the-Vote initiative mirrored around the world (Stone, 2000). It was named "Rock Volieb" and ran concurrent to the 1998 Parliamentary Elections with a target population of first-time voters and young voters in the 18 to 24 age range.

Rock Volieb held 18 concerts with popular rock and pop bands and ran a voter awareness tour which visited 17 cities in Slovakia before the election (Stone, 2000). They distributed 20,000 motivational flyers, 70,000 how-to-vote flyers, 30,000 stickers and 15,000 pencils. In addition, they gave away t-shirts and hats with printed slogans such as "Volim, teda som" ("I Vote, Therefore I Am") and left 40,000 postcards in 200 pubs urging voters to go to the polls and vote. They created a web page and ran a television and radio advertising campaign which was shown on music television channel "MTV Europe" and before every screening of the cult film *The X-Files: The movie* (Ellis et al., 2006).

The copious resources utilised and distributed during the 1998 Rock Volieb resulted in an 84% turnout at the Parliamentary Elections held that year, an

increase from the 75.4% turnout recorded at the previous Parliamentary Elections in 1994, and saw the HZPs loose out to the “reformers” (Stone, 2000).

3.2.5 New Zealand, Elections New Zealand

In New Zealand, all electoral administration is conducted by an organisation called Elections New Zealand. Elections New Zealand is comprised of three different agencies; the Electoral Enrolment Centre (EEC), the Electoral Commission (EC) and the Chief Electoral Office (CEO) who each have different responsibilities in administering an election.

The Electoral Enrolment Centre (EEC) is of particular importance given that enrolling to vote in New Zealand is compulsory (note however that voting is not). Under the Electoral Act 1993, eligible electors who fail to enrol can be prosecuted (Elections New Zealand, 2005a). To date, nobody has been prosecuted and Elections New Zealand attributes this to the fact that the EEC prefers to encourage electors to enrol rather than wait for opportunities to penalise them. The responsibilities of each of the electoral agencies are clearly outlined on the Elections New Zealand website (Elections New Zealand, 2005b). The EEC is responsible for providing electors with information on enrolling and for the subsequent enrolment of voters. The EEC are also responsible for the production and maintenance of the electoral rolls, the conduct of the Maori Electoral Option every five years (which allows New Zealand Maori or descendents of New Zealand Maori to vote in a Maori electoral district), and the hosting of the Elections New Zealand website. The EEC facilitates the elector by allowing the individual to register via the normal methods (paper or online) once they turn 17. They are considered to be provisionally enrolled at this time and

their details are automatically transferred to the electoral roll when they turn 18. As a result of the efforts of the EEC, New Zealand has one of the highest voter registration rates in the world (Ellis et al., 2006).

The Electoral Commission (EC) is responsible for regulating political parties in terms of registering parties and their logos and supervising their electoral budgets. In addition, it is the responsibility of the EC to encourage and conduct public education on electoral matters along with ensuring electors understand the MMP electoral system.

The Chief Electoral Office (CEO) is responsible for the conduct of Parliamentary general elections, by-elections and referendums along with the running of an information campaign and the provision of “Easy Vote” packs. The “Easy Vote” pack is sent to every elector and is “a personalised voter information package outlining the elector’s registration details and containing an “Easy Vote” card (a one time use card that provides simple information to polling place staff regarding a voters placement on the electoral role which speeds up the process and allows voters more freedom as to their voting location), a list of nearby polling places, the names of the candidates, party lists, information on advance voting, contact details for the returning officer in the constituency, and a brochure on the MMP system and how voting works”, (Ellis et al., 2006: 30).

Elections New Zealand endeavours to make the electoral process as simple and transparent for electors as possible to encourage voter participation. In addition to the information readily available, information can be obtained from Elections New Zealand in sign language, audio, captions, Braille, and large print and is also available in fourteen different languages.

3.3 IRISH VOTING INITIATIVES

It is not unfair to suggest that Irish initiatives to promote and encourage voting lag far behind the initiatives attempted in some other countries. With the exception of the most recent elections held in 2004 and 2007, turnout has been following a downward trend. Given this, it would not be unreasonable to expect that some type of widespread initiative would have been implemented and its resultant effect monitored and assessed. However, this has yet to be done. In saying this, there have been attempts to address the issue of voting and turnout through a number of outlets, although the initiatives are usually either pilot schemes or localised initiatives within a certain community. Arguably the most effective Irish effort to promote voter turnout is that of the voter education programs run by the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice. To begin with, an account of these voter education programs will be presented which will be followed by a discussion of some other Irish mobilisation initiatives which correspond with the international initiatives previously discussed.

3.3.1 The Active Citizenship Program

The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice represents the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the Vincentian Congregation, the Daughters of Charity and the Sisters of Holy Faith. As a community oriented association, the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice are concerned with those who have experienced some sort of disadvantage either socially or economically and emphasise working inclusively with people rather than attaining change for them.

The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice work in conjunction with various community groups in economically disadvantaged areas, and it was through their

work with such community groups that they became aware of an excessive number of non-voters in these areas. In response to this, the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice set up a non-partisan voter education program entitled the “Active citizenship program” (Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice, 2007).

The Active Citizenship Program involves a series of workshop-type meetings. The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice provides trained facilitators and relevant materials to run the programme where groups of interested participants wish to partake in the programme. The main aim of the program is to create a belief in the individual of their power to influence and cause change while encouraging participation in local community life and in the electoral process. The workshops consist of three units that study reasons for turning out to vote, how to register to vote and the actual mechanics of casting a vote along with how to make informed decisions on who to vote for by effectively evaluating election manifestos. These units are delivered with the emphasis on general elections with additional units also available which focus on local elections and European elections.

The Active Citizenship program website states that the program involves 85% participation and 15% presentation, promoting active behaviour from the outset.

The programme has knock-on effects in those areas that it is run in that it is not only those who actually attend the workshops who benefit from the program. Rather, those who partake in the program often try to mobilise others in their area to turn out to vote. A group of women who partook in the Active Citizenship Program in the Corduff Community Centre, for example, subsequently created posters to distribute around the area. These posters stated amenities in nearby

housing estates and compared these to the facilities in their own housing estate. This highlighted the lack of facilities in their housing estate. The poster concluded with a statement of the most recent turnout figures for the two estates and a declaration of the difference between the two estates, that “they vote, we don’t”.

3.3.2 Electronic Voting

The Minister for the Environment in 2002, Mr. Noel Dempsey, implemented an electronic voting pilot scheme in three constituencies (Dublin North, Dublin West and Meath) in the 2002 General election with the aim of projecting a positive image of Ireland. However, this attempt to bring Irish elections into the technological era was met with widespread criticism. It is a debate which has not been isolated to Ireland but rather one which takes place all around the democratic world where electronic voting has started to materialise.

There are two types of electronic voting (e-voting); remote electronic voting and onsite electronic voting. Remote electronic voting involves the transmission of the ballot via various forms of new information and communications technologies (NICTs) at a location away from the polling station, for example via email, the Internet or SMS text messaging. The second type, onsite electronic voting, is the type of e-voting that was piloted in Ireland in 2002 (Norris, 2004). Bittiger (2004: 39) states that a common sentiment amongst experts is that the introduction of electronic voting “will greatly facilitate polling and that its adoption is a matter of course in the face of current technological developments and voter expectations”. Norris (2004) outlines the main advantages to an e-voting system as involving added convenience and efficiency, reduction in the

time and effort required to vote, increased speed in the tabulating of results and increased facilitation for those with limited mobility and little flexibility. However, Norris (2004: 43-44) also notes that such a system of voting would likely widen the “digital divide between the information “haves” and “have-nots” – between rich and poor, between graduates and those with minimal educational qualifications and between the younger and older generations”, and that it would probably “reinforce, or even widen, many of the familiar socio-economic disparities in electoral participation that already exist including those of social class, education, gender and income”. A well established assertion is the role that these socio-economic factors play in turnout behaviour. In particular, those belonging to the lower social classes and those with lesser educational qualifications are those who are prone to abstention as opposed to turnout. Similarly, these are also the people who are likely to be discriminated against in the technological sense. Lower income households are less likely to be as technologically-engaged as e-voting would require. Also, those with lesser educational qualifications are less likely to be equipped with the skills that would enable one to make effective use of any e-voting system. Therefore, the question must be asked of who exactly such e-voting technology would benefit, and if such technology would likely increase turnout or merely provide existing voters with alternative methods of casting a vote.

However, the effectiveness of e-voting in terms of turnout is not the main argument against the introduction the system in Ireland. Rather, the main argument is that of the security of such an e-voting system. The security of remote e-voting was heavily criticised in a joint report produced by the California Institute of Technology and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

in 2001. The Caltech-MIT report argued that voting via the Internet introduces serious security risks due to the potential for interference by computer hackers. According to Norris (2004: 43), in order for remote e-voting to be acceptably secure, there needs to be "...advances in biometric voice recognition, retina scanning and fingerprint recognition [and] widespread use of smart card as identifiers with a computer chip and unique digital certificate".

In relation to the security of on-site electronic voting, Quinn (2002a) refers to a passage written by Leo Kohn (1932) in relation to the 1922 Constitution in which it is stated that "a constitution [should be] based on a wide suffrage, PR and a rational distribution of constituencies, embodying an elaborate system of checks and balances designed to preclude the growth of autocratic tendencies in any of its organs...". Contrary to this statement, Quinn (2002a) argues that electronic voting is not endowed with the "elaborate system of checks and balances" spoken of. Quinn (2002b) also argues that electronic voting is undemocratic as the process of voting is taken out of the hands of the ordinary voter, and that it is technically unsafe.

Widespread opposition to electronic voting has adopted the "technically unsafe" argument. The machines purchased for use in Irish elections are considered to be technically unsafe as they do not produce a Voter Verifiable Audit Trail (VVAT). A VVAT is when a paper record of the vote recorded in the electronic voting machine is printed. The voter can then check this to ensure the machine recorded the correct vote and subsequently place the paper record into an ordinary ballot box. This would allow random manual checks to be carried out and would also allow marginal constituencies to be recounted. The audit trail and subsequent checks would also allow election authorities and returning officers to

ensure that the machines are registering votes correctly, an important issue in a complex electoral system such as PR-STV, along with reducing concerns about machine modules or diskettes going missing or being tampered with before counting. Most opponents of electronic voting would support the use of electronic voting technology if it produced a VVAT. Building on this, the free e-Democracy project published a statement on their website which they claim has been endorsed over 600 times. This statement is as follows;

“Computerised voting is inherently subject to programming error, human error, equipment malfunction and malicious tampering. Due to the opaque nature of the technology involved, which few understand, it is crucial that electronic voting systems provide a V-VAT. By this we mean a permanent record of each vote that can be checked for accuracy by the voter before the vote is submitted, and is difficult or impossible to alter after it has been checked. This must be achieved without compromising the secrecy and integrity of the ballot thus, to prevent vote selling or coercion, the vote records cannot be kept by the voter. It must be noted that such an audit trail is only useful if it is used regularly for records to verify the electronic result. Without a verifiable voting system, every election is open to allegations which will raise doubts over the results that administrators will be unable to disprove. However, an audit trail alone is not sufficient – all aspects of the voting process need to be made secure. Providing a voter-verifiable audit trail should be one of the essential requirements for any new voting system.”

(Free e-Democracy Project, 2003)

Successful electronic voting has been implemented in some countries, for example Brazil, and the UK Electoral Commission pilot tested a wide range of NICTs at the local elections on the 2nd of May 2002. However, the widespread uncertainty, distrust and criticism that the electronic voting initiative met in Ireland has meant that the e-voting machines purchased for the pilot in 2002 have remained in storage since.

3.3.3 Civic, Social and Political Education Program (CSPE)

An attempt to educate the pre-voting age population about the importance and mechanics of voting was made with the introduction of the CSPE module to schools in the late 1990s. The rationale behind the module was that social attitudes and awareness need time and practice to develop. The module covers civic, social and political education and was examined as a Junior Certificate subject for the first time in 2000. It covers topics such as citizenship, participation and the democratic system within which voting, elections and proportional representation is taught. However, according to Harris (2005: 178);

“its shortcomings in practice include lack of commitment by many schools, who treat it as the last subject to be allocated, so that it suffers from incursions on class time, the reallocation of trained and committed teachers, rapid turn over among teachers, and limited scope and variety in the projects submitted.”

The main limitation of the module is that it ends once students reach approximately fifteen years of age, which is agreed as the age at which the individual is likely to begin to develop a sense of political awareness. It is not a component of the Leaving Certificate syllabus. It has been suggested by Honohan (2004) that the module needs to be extended to include lessons on political literacy and skills which might be developed through various kinds of school or classroom council in order for it to be more effective as a political educational tool.

Some more effective school based initiatives have been implemented in other countries, such as the “Student Vote” initiative in Canada which will be discussed later in the chapter.

3.3.4 Rock the Vote '07

The US initiative of “Rock the Vote” has been adopted by many other countries since its establishment in 1990. Rock the Vote was established in Ireland in late November 2006. It was set up to encourage young people to register to vote and to turn out on polling day. The approach of the Irish Rock the Vote involved pursuing people face-to-face along with getting popular characters such as musicians and comedians to star personalities and sports stars to make turnout pledges through popular youth mediums, in particular via web videos on the Rock the Vote website. The website was established which allowed politicians to post “blogs” (short colloquial messages) regarding their manifestos and youth relevant policies. It also enabled those who accessed the website to respond to any of these blogs. The Irish Rock the Vote campaign culminated in a concert in St. Stephens Green in Dublin City Centre, marketed as “Rock the Green”. To date, the Irish Rock the Vote has been an election specific initiative. However, in comparison to other Rock the Vote initiatives, such as the Slovakian “Rock Volieb” in 1998, the Irish attempt appears somewhat limited. This contention will be addressed later in the chapter.

3.3.5 Proposed Independent Electoral Commission

Speaking of the Green Party and Fianna Fáil proposals following the General election in May 2007, Killian Doyle (2007) stated that “the Government would establish an independent Electoral Commission to take responsibility for electoral administration and compiling a new electoral register. This body would take over the functions of the Standards in Public Office Commission in relation to electoral expenditure”. It is proposed that an Independent Electoral

Commission be established by 2009 in time for the next European and local elections. This would undertake a number of functions including encouraging registration and voting, supporting voter education programs and providing research into political awareness and the level of political engagement. It would perhaps mirror, or be similar to Elections New Zealand in New Zealand, an initiative that will be discussed later in the chapter.

3.4 IRISH VERSUS INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES

To recapitulate on the chapter thus far, five international initiatives to increase participation and voter turnout levels were discussed. Specifically, an account of the alternative voting methods pilot scheme implemented in the UK in 2002 was given along with an account of Canada's Student Vote program in schools, Slovakia's Rock Volieb initiative in 1998 and the Elections New Zealand organisation in New Zealand. In addition, compulsory voting was discussed with a focus on Australia.

Subsequently, five Irish initiatives, corresponding to the international examples were addressed. These were the 2002 electronic voting pilot scheme, the introduction of the CSPE module in schools, Rock the Vote '07 and proposals for an Independent Electoral Commission. In addition, an account of the Active Citizenship Program run by the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice was given.

An evaluation of each Irish initiative discussed in comparison to its international equivalent reveals Irish voting initiatives to be somewhat lacking. Firstly, the electronic voting scheme piloted in three constituencies in Ireland in 2002 was widely criticised by many. Had it been part of a wider pilot study designed to

determine the effects of alternative voting methods on voter turnout, it may have been received less criticism. In the 2002 UK pilot studies, a range of alternative voting methods were tested across thirty local authority areas. In Ireland however, many of the electorate felt threatened by the electronic voting pilot. As this was only piloted in three constituencies, there was a considerable lack of understanding about the system countrywide. Also, in contrast to the UK pilot, in the constituencies where electronic voting was piloted, it was the only method of voting available to the electorate. If more information had been available to the public about the purpose of the study and what it hoped to achieve, along with allowing those who so wished to vote via the traditional paper ballot, the initiative may not have been the receiver of such condemnation.

In June 2000, CSPE was examined as a common level Junior Certificate subject for the first time having previously been introduced to schools as an additional non-examined module. The intention of the CSPE module was and is to educate school children of the importance of active citizenship and democracy along with promoting understanding of our PR-STV electoral system. However, as voting is thought to be a self-reinforcing activity, theory would suggest that the best manner of educating and encouraging people to vote would be through practising voting from early on. This is the stance taken by the Student Vote organisation in Canada which allows school aged children and teenagers to experience voting first hand by running parallel elections. This helps the young citizens to begin to develop the habit of voting before they come of voting age.

Rock the Vote '07 was the first Irish Rock the Vote initiative. It culminated in Rock the Green, a concert held in St. Stephen's Green in Dublin prior to the election and set up a website containing information on how to vote along with

information on candidates, a “blog” from politicians and candidates and webcasts from well known faces asking young voters to turn out to vote on Election Day. While Rock the Vote '07 cannot be widely criticised, it appears that there is much more that could have been done to entice voters to the polls when compared with Slovakia's Rock Volieb in 1998. Rock Volieb held 18 concerts in comparison to Rock the Vote's '07 one, and ran a voter awareness bus tour nationwide along with distributing copious vote promotion merchandise.

It is proposed that an Independent Electoral Commission be set up in time for the 2009 local and European elections. Such an organisation would likely benefit from copying the Elections New Zealand model. However, the proposed commission begs the question of why it is only now, in the 21st century, that such a proposal is being made when the trend of low and declining voter turnout has been obvious for decades.

With the exception of the most recent elections in 2004 and 2007, the voter turnout trend has been one of low and declining turnout levels. Given this, it is reassuring to note that there have been and are some initiatives in Ireland aimed at addressing the problem of low turnouts. However, when compared with similar international initiatives, it becomes evident that there is much more that could be being done to help increase voter turnout around the country and to try to maintain high turnout levels. While voter turnout at the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections and at the 2007 General election did not follow the trend of declining turnout levels, it should not be assumed that the perennial trend of declining turnout has been reversed. One should note Kavanagh (2004: 83) speaking of the slight increase in turnout at the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections;

“The extent to which these elections will prove to mark a historical signpost, pointing to intensified electoral competition and participation, remains to be seen...these developments may ultimately prove to be a temporary aberration, representing a brief reversal of a general trend of continued turnout decline.”

This should be kept in mind when dealing with the topic of voter turnout.

CHAPTER 4

STUDY AREA

As this research is implicitly place-based in nature, it was decided to present a background to the study area as a separate chapter. This short chapter discusses the background to the study area in terms of topography, constituency boundaries, population and political representation.

The Study area is the relatively new administrative area of Fingal. Fingal was established on the 1st of January 1994 following the Local Government Act of 1993 which split Dublin County Council into three new local authority areas; Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown, South Dublin and Fingal.

4.1 TOPOGRAPHY

Fingal is the largest of the new local authority areas occupying a total land area of 452.7km². It is drained by the Delvin River to the North of the county, by the Tolka and Santry Rivers to the South of the county and by the Broadmeadow and Ward Rivers in the centre. The county boasts an 88km long coastline extending from Balbriggan in the North to Sutton in the South.

4.2 CONSTITUENCY BOUNDARIES

With regards to constituency boundaries for General elections, Fingal encapsulates the whole of the Dublin West and Dublin North constituencies, parts of the Dublin North-East constituency and a very small part of the Dublin North-West constituency. The Dublin West constituency is situated to the west and south west of the county and contains all of the Blanchardstown electoral

divisions including those parts of the Blanchardstown-Abbotstown, Dubber and the Rye Ward electoral divisions which lie to the north of the Northern Cross Route (M50 motorway). The Dublin North constituency encompasses the northern and eastern parts of the county as far south as the Balgriffin and Portmarnock South electoral divisions, including those parts of the Airport and Turnapin electoral divisions situated north of the Northern Cross Route (M50 motorway). The Howth, Sutton and Baldoyle electoral divisions in the south east of the county comprise much of the Dublin North-East constituency while the Dublin North-West constituency encompasses those parts of the Airport, Blanchardstown-Abbotstown, Dubber, Rye Ward and Turnapin electoral divisions situated to the south of the Northern Cross Route (M50 motorway) (Constituency Commission, 2004).

For the purposes of local elections, Fingal is divided into six Local Electoral Areas (LEAs) (see Figure 4.1); Balbriggan to the north of the county, Swords in the centre of the county, Malahide to the east, Howth to the south east, Mulhuddart to the west and Castleknock to the south west. It is on these divisions that the bulk of this research will be based.

4.3 POPULATION

According to preliminary Census results released by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) in July 2006, Fingal experienced the greatest population growth levels of any county in the country between 2002 and 2006 with the county's population increasing by 22.1% to 239,813 people. The growth in population in Fingal in this period vastly exceeded the growth experienced in the other local authority areas in Dublin, with the population increasing by only 3.4% in South Dublin,

1.0% in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown and 2.0% in Dublin City. In real numbers, the population of Fingal increased by approximately 43,400 people which compares to an increase of 8,084 people in South Dublin, 1,896 people in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown and 9,950 people in Dublin City.

In terms of population change by general election constituency, the Dublin West constituency experienced the greatest percentage change at 26.8%. Following closely behind was the Dublin North constituency with a percentage change of 21.4%. These are two of the three highest percentage changes experienced in the country. The Dublin North-West constituency experienced a less significant change of 7.2% while the Dublin North-East constituency experienced a population decline of -4.4%, the highest percentage decrease in the country.

With regards to population by electoral division (ED), three of the five most highly populated EDs within Fingal (and indeed within the Irish state) in 2002 were located to the South-West of the county; Blanchardstown-Blakestown, Castleknock-Knockmaroon, and Blanchardstown-Coolmine, and these EDs remained in the top five in 2006. The Swords-Forest electoral division also featured in the top five most populated EDs in both 2002 and 2006. In relation to the lowest populated EDs, there is less uniformity in the pattern between 2002 and 2006 with the Lucan North and Airport electoral divisions (the two lowest populated EDs in 2002) being replaced by Ballyboghil and Hollywood in 2006. Some EDs more than doubled in population between 2002 and 2006 with the greatest percentage change occurring in the Dubber ED (347.1%) (Census 2006). In contrast to this, a number of EDs actually experienced population decline, the greatest of which occurred in the Blanchardstown-Roselawn ED where the population decreased by 10.4%. Also experiencing a greater than 5% drop in

population size were Portmarnock North (-9.5%), Baldoyle (-6.8), Howth (-5.9) and Holmpatrick (-5.2). The actual change in terms of numbers varied greatly from one ED to the next. The range was as vast as a 510 person decrease in Howth to a 7,884 person increase in Blanchardstown-Blakestown (Census 2006).

4.3.1 Components of Population Change

According to preliminary Census 2006 results released in July 2006, the average birth rate in Fingal per 1000 of the population is 19.3 which compares with an average of 15 per 1000 of the population for the state as a whole. This is the highest birth rate in the country.

The death rate in Fingal is 3.6 per 1000 of the population. This is one of the lowest death rates in the country and compares favourably to the state average of 7 per 1000 of the population.

Fingal boasts the highest birth rate and lowest death rate of all Dublin local authority areas.

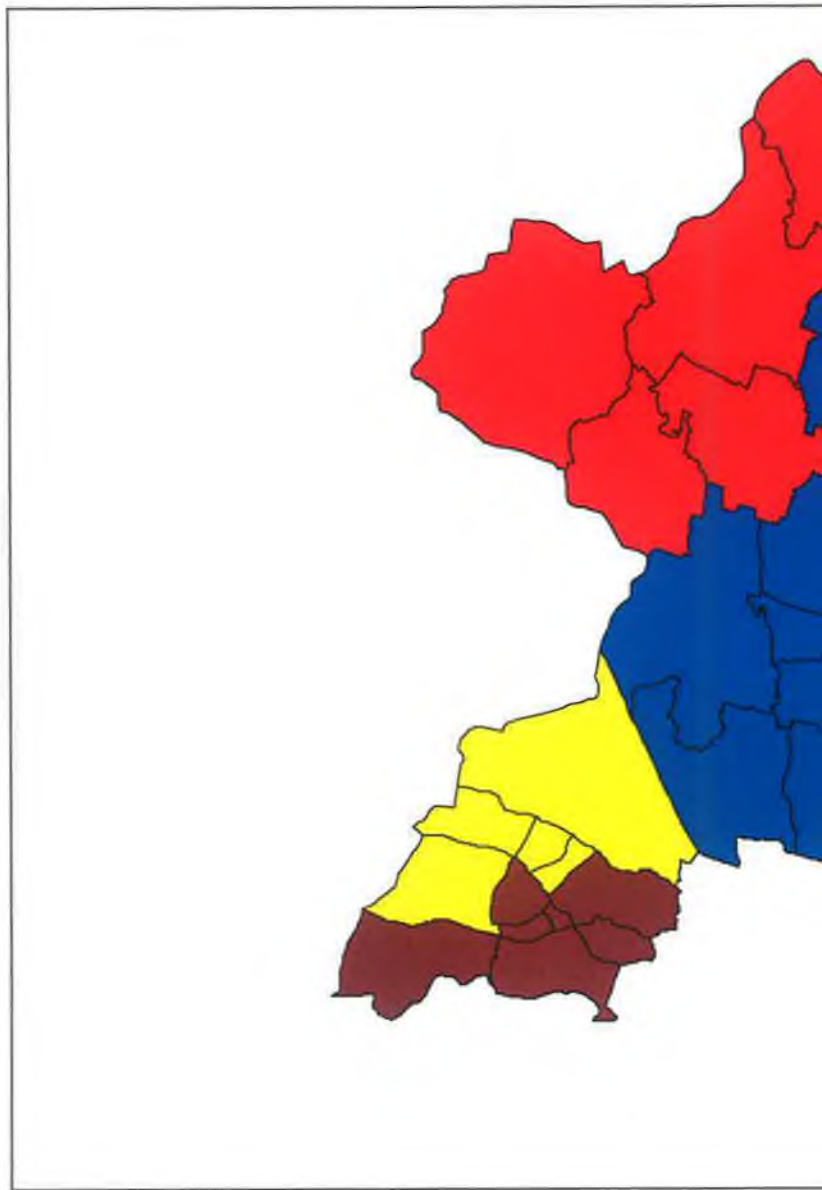
4.4 Political Representation

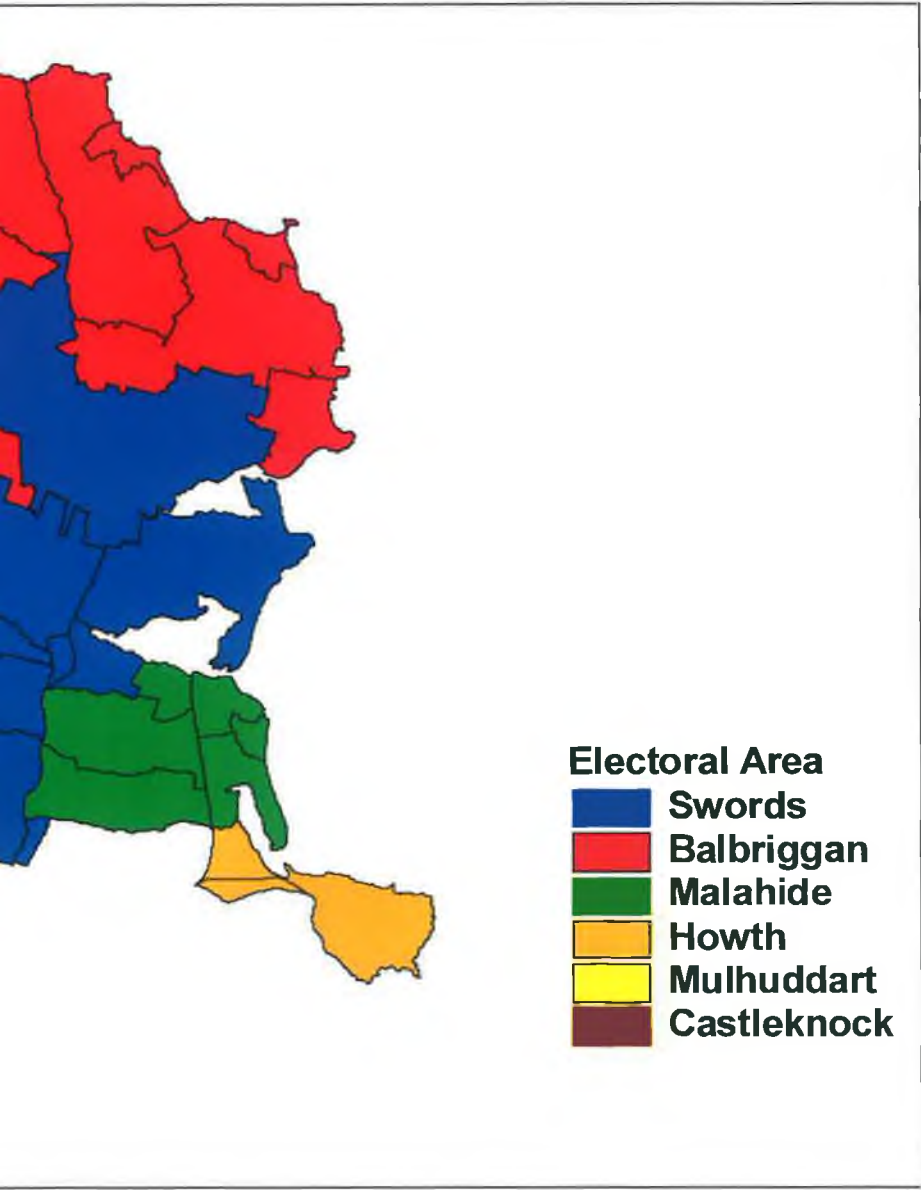
Based on Census 2006 figures, Fingal contains the two most disadvantaged constituencies with regards to Dáil Eireann representation. These are the Dublin West constituency with 30,966 people per Dáil Eireann representative, and the Dublin North constituency with 30,077 people per Dáil Representative. The other two general election constituencies in Fingal, Dublin North-East and Dublin North-West compare favourably with other constituencies in the country.

There is a vast difference between the local electoral areas in Fingal in terms of the population per local representative ratios. Based on Census 2006 population

figures, the Castleknock EA is the most disadvantaged in this regard with a population to local councilor ratio of 16,467:1, that is, one local councilor represents the interests of 16,467 people. However, it is worth noting that the Castleknock EA encapsulates much of the highly populated Blanchardstown area in Dublin 15 with the EDs of Blanchardstown-Abbottstown, Blanchardstown-Blakestown, Blanchardstown-Delwood and Blanchardstown-Roselawn all comprising part of the Castleknock local electoral area. The Swords and Balbriggan electoral areas also had high population to councilor ratios at 12,314:1 and 10,090:1 respectively. The well established Malahide and Howth electoral areas both have low population to local councilor ratios.

Figure 4.1: Local Electoral Areas in Fingal





CHAPTER 5

METHODOLOGY

This chapter will describe the different methodologies that were employed in this research in an attempt to meet the research aims and hypotheses as outlined in chapter two.

The chapter will focus on the different research methods utilized in the study and will provide a justification for the multi-method approach employed.

An account will be given of the various spatial units that are addressed throughout the thesis along with an account of the associated spatial data, followed by an explanation of the means by which this data will be analysed and the limitations of its use.

The main research method, the questionnaire survey, along with related aspects will then be discussed in detail with the chapter concluding following a discussion of the other research method used.

5.1 RESEARCH METHODS

It was decided to use a multi-method approach to explore the topic of interest, i.e. the factors influencing voting and non-voting in Fingal. This was decided on in order to gain an in-depth account of turnout choices across Fingal. Secondary data was used in developing the literature review in chapter 2. Books, newspaper articles and journal articles were read. These were sourced from newspaper clippings, internet sites and a variety of web-based journal databases, including JSTOR, the Arts and Humanities Citation Index, the Social Science Citation Index and Academic Search Premier.

Spatial data in the form of census data from the Central Statistics Office and turnout data from the marked registers for the 2002 General election and the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections was utilized to explore the relationship between certain variables during correlation and regression analyses.

Spatial questionnaire data was also used in the exploration of the hypotheses developed in chapter two. It was initially intended to begin with the questionnaire survey, which was to be carried out across the six local electoral areas in Fingal, and to follow this up by holding a series of focus group meetings to explore some of the survey findings in detail. In addition, it was intended to hold a series of interviews with local councillors, TDs and general election candidates to gain an “eye-witness” account or “professional” account of turnout in Fingal. However, as the project progressed, it became apparent that it would not be feasible to run the focus group meetings. The reasons for this will be discussed later in the chapter. Therefore, the research in this study is based upon questionnaire results and interview findings and not on focus groups research as was initially intended.

5.1.1 Why a Multi-Method Approach?

Due to the nature of the topic at hand, a multi-method approach was utilized in which quantitative and qualitative data were combined.

The topic of turnout and in particular, the factors that influence the turnout decision are ambiguous in every respect. As a result of this it was decided that a single method approach to researching the topic would not be suitable and would not achieve the best results. By using more than one method to conduct the

research, it was thought that greater clarity and insight into the topic could be gained. Hoggart et al. (2002: 67) suggest that;

“Research quality should be enhanced by multi-method investigations. Most evidently, the advantages of multi-method approaches are asserted on account of the capacity to undertake ‘triangulation’. What is meant by triangulation is the use of a series of complementary methods in order to gain deeper insight on a research problem”

This research undertakes a multi-method approach to explore the issue of turnout in Fingal from two perspectives – that of the elector, and that of the ‘professional’ in the political arena. Firstly, the voter’s perspective is captured via a questionnaire survey distributed across Fingal. The focus groups that were originally planned were intended to explore some of these survey findings in greater detail but due to uncontrollable circumstances, they had to be abandoned. Secondly, insight into the politician’s perspective or the “political professional’s” perspective is obtained through a series of interviews with sitting TDs, councilors and General Election 2007 candidates. By using this multi-method approach, it was possible to develop an in-depth picture of the factors affecting turnout propensity in Fingal.

5.2 SPATIAL DATA

Data is available at a number of varying spatial divisions, some of which are addressed in this research. This section will outline the various spatial subdivisions that will be referred to throughout the course of this work. It will then detail the types of spatial data utilized in this research with respect to the different subdivisions before addressing the different analytical techniques employed to investigate the spatial data. This section will conclude with a discussion of the imitations of using such area based data in turnout research.

5.2.1 Spatial Subdivisions

5.2.1.1 County Level Data

The largest spatial subdivision referred to in this research is that of the county. The county and county level data is referred to mainly in a comparative context during discussions of voter turnout levels. This data is primarily gleaned from other sources and often refers to the “county of Fingal”. While considered to be principally an administrative area rather than a county, council efforts in recent years have focused on the creation of a “County Fingal”. Data from the Central Statistics Office (CSO), marked register data and questionnaire data are all available at this county level and each are utilized in this research with respect to Fingal.

5.2.1.2 Dáil Constituency

Dáil constituencies, also referred to as general election constituencies, are the second largest of the spatial subdivisions referred to in this research. Dáil constituencies vary in population size and hence in the number of Dáil seats representing each constituency. Dáil constituencies will be referred to in only terms of general election turnout figures as this research does not involve constituency level statistical analyses. To recapitulate on the general election constituencies contained within Fingal, Fingal encapsulates the whole of the Dublin West and Dublin North constituencies, parts of the Dublin North-East constituency and a small part of the Dublin North-West constituency.

5.2.1.3 Local Electoral Area

Local election constituencies are termed local electoral areas (LEAs) and are one of the main spatial units utilized in this research. Local electoral areas are comprised of a number of electoral divisions (EDs) and it is possible to aggregate ED data to calculate local electoral area statistics for a range of relevant variables. As previously illustrated in Figure 4.1 in chapter four, Fingal is comprised of six local electoral areas; Balbriggan in the north of the county, Swords in the centre, Malahide and Howth in the east and south east and Castleknock and Mulhuddart in the south west. Marked register data, along with census data and questionnaire data, are used at the LEA level throughout this thesis.

5.2.1.4 Electoral Division

The smallest geographical unit at which a range of demographic and socio-economic census data is made available is that of the electoral division (ED). With respect to this research, the electoral division was an extremely useful spatial unit. It was possible to create ED level maps in the Geographical Information Systems program, ArcView 3.2 using marked register data. This ED level marked register data was also used in conjunction with census data at the ED level for the purposes of statistical analysis. Kavanagh (2002) has noted how many urban EDs tend to be homogenous in terms of socio-economic factors implying that the main socio-economic differences with respect to urban EDs exist between EDs and not within. This justifies the use of ED level data for comparative purposes in this research. That said, there are exceptions to this

when dealing with particularly large EDs, such as the Blanchardstown-Blakestown ED in the Castleknock electoral area.

5.2.1.5 Estate Level Data

A particularly acute spatial unit occasionally referred to in this research is that of the level of the housing estate. Data at the housing estate level is available owing to marked register turnout data and it is within this context that some individual housing estates are referred to. Housing estate data can be used to determine if similar areas in different places behave differently in terms of electoral turnout. With regards to this research, housing estate data is mainly used for comparison purposes in relation to voter turnout within some of the more densely populated electoral divisions located in the Castleknock and Mulhuddart local electoral areas.

5.2.2 Types of Spatial Data

Differing types of spatial data were utilized in the production of this research. As previously mentioned, the different types of spatial data are available at varying scales. Each of the types of spatial data used are described below with reference to the respective spatial scale.

5.2.2.1 Census Data

The Central Statistics Office (CSO) releases a comprehensive set of data at the spatially acute electoral division level. This involves an amalgamation of demographic and socio-economic variables, readily available for use on the CSO website. This data is available for every administrative county, town and

electoral division within Ireland. Much census data was utilized during the course of this research for the purposes of description, comparison and statistical analysis. In particular, it was possible to use this census data in conjunction with marked register data to carry out correlation and regression analyses using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) computer program. This allowed the author to determine what influence these factors might have on turnout propensity in Fingal.

Demographic and socio-economic data was drawn mainly from the 2002 Census for these purposes. However, where available, data from the 2006 Census was used. It was not possible to take demographic and socio-economic data entirely from the 2006 Census, as at the time of writing, only a limited amount of this data in the format of small area population statistics had been released for public use by the CSO. The demographic and socio-economic data from the 2002 Census is actually more relevant to this research than it might at first appear. The 2002 General election was held approximately one month after the 2002 Census was carried out. This implies that there is quite a degree of temporal harmony between the 2002 General election turnout data set and the 2002 Census data. The 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections were held midway between the census period. Therefore, a similar level of temporal mismatch can be expected between the use of 2002 Census data in conjunction with 2004 election data and the use of 2006 census data in conjunction with 2004 election data when conducting statistical analyses.

5.2.2.2 Election Data

Election data refers to constituency level turnout data that are available for all

types of elections. Throughout this thesis, turnout rates are often referred to at the constituency level. This data is widely available for use from various sources such as from election-based web sites on the internet or in published form. Parker (1984) stated that turnout data is not available for use for spatial units below the constituency level in Ireland. However, the 1997 Electoral Act provided for the release of marked registers for local, European and general elections making much smaller units of aggregation possible.

5.2.2.3 Marked Register Data

Throughout this research, marked register data for the 2002 General election and the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections was utilized. The marked register data for the 2002 General election in Fingal was obtained from Dr. Adrian Kavanagh (NUI Maynooth/ NIRSA) who conducted a joint nationwide study of turnout in the 2002 General election with the National Institute of Regional and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA) in conjunction with the Geary Institute, UCD (Kavanagh et al., 2004). The marked register data set for the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections resulted from an analysis of the copies of the marked register provided by the Fingal Development Board. Marked register data is particularly useful as it allows turnout to be calculated on a number of scales. ED level turnout data calculated from marked registers can be used in conjunction with census data in carrying out correlation and regression analyses. ED level marked register data can also be used in the GIS program, ArcView 3.2 to create ED level turnout maps depicting spatial variations in turnout levels.

5.2.2.4 Questionnaire Data

As this research is primarily concerned with conducting an individual level account of turnout propensity in Fingal, there was a need for questionnaire data to be collated and analysed. The questionnaires were distributed according to local electoral area and returned questionnaires were logged according to the Dáil constituency and the local electoral area from which the respondent originated. For an in-depth discussion of the means by which the questionnaire data was collated, see section 5.3.

5.2.3 Analysis of Spatial Data

A number of varying methods were utilized in the analysis of the spatial area-based data. Computer mapping was employed along with the use of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program to carry out correlation and regression analyses. SPSS was also used in the analysis of the questionnaire data along with other qualitative techniques which were used in the analysis of the interview data. Both of these will not be discussed in this section. Rather, they will be addressed in turn later in the chapter.

5.2.3.1 Computer Mapping

The Geographical Information Systems (GIS) program ArcView3.2 was used in the creation of computer maps. ArcView uses a digitized set of boundaries at ED level as a base layer in creating maps. It was decided to use choropleth maps, also known as graduated colour maps, with natural breaks to illustrate certain features of the research. ArcView allows marked register data to be imported from MS Excel which in turn allows turnout maps to be created.

5.2.3.2 Correlation and Regression Analysis

The SPSS program was used to conduct correlation and regression analyses. Marked register turnout data along with relevant census data were imported into the SPSS program where it became possible to conduct investigations into the nature of the relationship between possible causal variables and turnout, known as correlation analyses. This data was also used to determine the key influences on turnout and the extent to which certain factors influence turnout propensity, otherwise termed regression analysis.

Correlation analysis forms the bedrock of virtually all research concerned with investigating relationships. The correlation coefficient is a basic descriptive statistic which enables one to determine precisely how strong the relationship is between two variables (McGilloway, 2001). The stronger the relationship that exists, the lesser the points will depart from a straight line and the more confidently one can estimate one variable on the basis of the other.

Regression analysis allows explanatory models of specific behaviour to be developed. With respect to this research, it was thought that a number of independent variables might have an influence on turnout propensity. Therefore, a multiple stepwise regression analysis was undertaken. Multiple regression examines the relationship between a number of predictor (independent) variables and one possible response (dependent) variable (Clifford and Valentine, 2003).

When using statistical tests of this nature, it is essential to be aware of the assumptions that these particular tests are based on along with the limitations of such statistical procedures. These will be discussed in the following section.

5.2.3.3 Geographically Weighted Regression

It might be thought that a study of this sort would lend itself to a Geographically Weighted Regression (GWR) analysis, owing to the fact that GWR allows the researcher to model the manner in which the relationship between turnout and various causal factors varies over space. This would help in identifying the various causal factors that are significant on a local electoral area basis. However, the results of such an analysis in relation to Fingal would prove meaningless. In order for a GWR analysis to produce meaningful results, each regression needs to be based on a sufficient number of data points, typically upwards of 150 to 200 points. However, in the case of Fingal, the highest number of data points available is 42 (i.e. 42 electoral divisions). Therefore, although the programme would run, local parameter estimates would have huge standard errors resulting in meaningless results with each point being regressed against the exact same set of data points. Therefore, it was decided that a GWR analysis would not be suitable or appropriate for this research as it would merely replicate the findings of a conventional ordinary least squares regression analysis.

5.2.4 Limitations of Spatial Data

Although it is not the main research method utilized in this work, the fact that spatially organized data is utilized to some degree raises a number of methodological issues that must be accounted for.

5.2.4.1 Ecological Fallacy

Associations that are observed at the aggregate level cannot be assumed to apply at the individual level (Kitchin & Tate, 2000). While this is a problem that must

be addressed when dealing with spatial data, it is also the premise upon which much of this research is based. There is a need to follow-up on aggregate level studies of turnout, such as that conducted by Kavanagh (2006) with an individual level study (such as this) to determine whether those factors identified as influential at the aggregate level also apply at the individual level.

Ecological fallacy describes the situation when causal relationships at the individual level are inferred from aggregate analyses.

5.2.4.2 Modifiable Areal Unit Problem

The modifiable areal unit problem is a combination of two problems, namely the scale problem and the aggregate problem.

The basic premise behind the scale problem is that spatial correlations are scale dependent. They measure “the relationship between variables relative to the scale of the spatial units from which the observations are drawn” (Shaw and Wheeler, 1995; 161). When correlation coefficients are calculated on a small number of large areas, the resultant coefficient tends to be higher than when it is calculated on a large number of small areas (Rogerson, 2001). The scale problem can be addressed by testing for statistical significance via the students T-test as opposed to just calculating the correlation coefficient.

The aggregate problem was also termed the “zoning effect” by Fotheringham et al. (2000: 237). The way in which area boundaries have been defined also influences the correlation coefficient. The spatial correlations conducted in this research are based upon ED administrative areas. These areas are considered to be arbitrary in the sense that they do not reflect natural breaks in population

characteristics. Rather, their boundaries are modifiable and if they were changed, it is likely that a different correlation coefficient would result.

When dealing with correlation analyses, it must be kept in mind that the degree of association measured between two variables is subject to, and relative to, the particular set of areal units on which the correlation is based. Shaw and Wheeler (1995; 163) state that once the results are interpreted in this manner, “the scale problem can be accommodated in a positive fashion”.

5.2.4.3 Correlational Fallacy

It is important to remember that a correlation between two variables is merely indicative of an association and not of a causal relationship. If a correlation is found to exist between two variables, it can only be said that they variables are associated. It cannot be inferred that one variable is a result of the other. If causation has been inferred from a correlation, a correlational fallacy is said to have taken place (McGilloway, 2001).

5.2.4.4 Spurious Correlation

Spurious correlation results when the data being tested contains a few extreme values. These extreme values are also termed outliers and they unduly influence the correlation coefficient. If outliers exist, the correlation coefficient that results is either artificially high or low and is thought of as being a spurious correlation (McGilloway, 2001).

5.2.4.5 Temporal Mismatches

The main problem with using marked register data is that it is always prone to

some degree of error. As true population figures are only available on the day a census of the population is conducted, turnout figures are calculated as a percentage of the numbers on the electoral register. As compulsory registration is not in practice here, the electoral register does not contain accurate voting age population figures. However, to calculate valid adult population turnout based upon census data would be to introduce temporal mismatching. In order for temporal mismatching to be eliminated in turnout studies, turnout figures must be calculated as a percentage of those on the electoral register while keeping in mind that this will incur some degree of error. It is also important to keep temporal mismatching in mind when carrying out statistical analyses with two different data sets. In this research, correlation and regression analyses were conducted based on 2002 Census data as well as 2006 Census data in order to limit the degree of temporal mismatch incurred when dealing with elections from two different periods.

5.2.4.6 Linearity

One of the most fundamental assumptions of correlation and regression statistics is that the relationship between the two sets of data can be described by a straight line. It is possible to determine whether or not a linear relation exists between two variables by drawing scatterplots of the observations. If the data is not characterised by a linear relationship, the correlation and regression analyses will not provide an accurate portrayal of the relationship between the variables.

5.2.4.7 Multicollinearity

Multiple regression analyses are susceptible to multicollinearity.

Multicollinearity is the term used to describe the situation where there is a high correlation between the independent variables (Shaw and Wheeler, 1995). If two variables are highly intercorrelated, they may both be explaining the same amount of variation in the dependent variable. Shaw and Wheeler (1995; 236-237) state that the problem with multicollinearity is that “an increase in one independent variable is accompanied by changes in the others, and we cannot therefore regard them as being held constant”. In relation to turnout research, this manifests in that a significant relationship might be found between turnout and a predictor variable which is actually a function of a third hidden variable. Shaw and Wheeler (1995) suggest a means of overcoming this as using a stepwise regression method such as that used in this research.

5.2.4.8 Heteroscedasticity and Homoscedasticity

One of the assumptions of regression analysis is that the residual values will be normally distributed about the regression line. Heteroscedasticity is the term used to describe the situation where this is not the case and where there is variance in the distribution of the residuals about the regression line. The opposite condition of heteroscedasticity is termed homoscedasticity and in order for a regression model to be considered reliable, this homoscedasticity must be a feature of the data. Homoscedasticity can be identified by drawing a scatterplot of the data.

5.2.4.9 Spatial Autocorrelation

Correlation and regression analyses assume all values are independent of one another. If the value at any one point is dependent on the value at surrounding points, the resultant pattern is said to display a degree of spatial autocorrelation

(Frei, 2005). This infringes on the assumptions of independence on which correlation and regression analyses are based. As Kavanagh (2002) notes, this can lead to questions regarding the robustness of the regression model.

5.3 QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY⁷

It was decided to conduct a questionnaire survey to gain insight into the reasons for voting and abstention amongst Fingal's electorate. As this target population was scattered across a wide area, a questionnaire survey was thought of as being the best manner with which to ensure a wide geographical coverage. It was also considered to be a good means of yielding much data relatively quickly (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2006). It was decided to make the survey a self-completion questionnaire. This was deemed necessary due to the nature of the research topic and the issue of confidentiality. Specifically, any other completion method would have introduced a high degree of bias in relation to response error, as discussed below. Therefore, a self-completion questionnaire was seen as the most unobtrusive method of collecting personal and confidential data. It was also seen as advantageous in that it would eliminate the risk of interviewer bias which was seen as integral due to some of the questions that were asked. In face-to-face, telephone or on-the-spot questionnaire surveys, respondents might have felt compelled to answer in a specific manner which would have had the effect of adversely skewing the results. It was understood that a disadvantage to using such a method was the fact that the researcher would not be in a position to check the understanding of respondents to the questions asked (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2006). This problem was addressed and attempts were made to limit it in

⁷ For a copy of the Questionnaire used in this research, please see Appendix 1

the pretests and the pilot study that were conducted prior to administering the questionnaire. The self-administered questionnaire was administered via a paper survey as opposed to a web-based or email survey. Research by Frazee et al. (2003) on the effects of delivery mode upon survey response rates determined that traditional paper surveys yielded higher response rates than web-based or email surveys. The particular figures for their research showed a 60% response rate for paper surveys, a 43% response rate for web-based surveys and a 27% response rate for email surveys.

5.3.1 Errors in Questionnaires

Questionnaire surveys, and in particular self-completion questionnaires are prone to errors known as response error and non-response error.

5.3.1.1 Response Error

Response error is a potential error that can be introduced to a piece of research via the researcher or the respondent (Flowerdew and Martin, 2005). In self-administered survey research, response error refers to errors introduced by the respondent. Marquis et. al (1981: 339) define an individual response error as being “when an answer to a survey question isn’t the same as the true value of the characteristic being measured”. The sources of response error vary and can originate in the respondent not understanding what is being asked, not knowing how to answer a particular question or not answering a question truthfully. Respondents may attribute themselves with greater assets, such as higher educational qualifications than are true or a higher income than is actually earned in an attempt to impress the researcher. Likewise, they might try to impress the

researcher by providing them with the answer they believe the researcher wants to hear, or the “correct” answer (Joppe, 2007).

Marquis et. al (1981) identified two types of response error in surveys – systematic response error and random response error. Systematic response error is a response that is repeatedly made, e.g. always reporting being 5 years younger or reporting smoking 10 cigarettes per day less than the actual number. Random response error on the other hand, refers to the seemingly random inconsistent mistakes made when answering survey questions. Marquis et. al (1981) determine that every survey answer contains three elements, the true value, systematic response error and random response error. To reduce the likelihood of response error due to faulty design, misinterpretation of survey questions or untruthful reporting, the questionnaire was pre-tested and piloted.

5.3.1.2 Non-Response Error

Flowerdew and Martin (2005) refer to non-response errors as “those associated with refusals or non-contacts”. In the case of self-administered questionnaires, non-response errors are associated with non-respondents and the possibility that those who respond to a survey differ from those who do not. If the subject of the survey is deemed uninteresting by respondents, and the questions asked are considered intrusive, possible respondents may refuse to complete the questionnaire. The pitfalls here lie in the fact that those who consider a particular subject unimportant or uninteresting are likely to be similar characteristically. Likewise, those who do respond to a survey and who consider a subject interesting or important are also likely to be similar in terms of characteristics.

To try to reduce the non-response error associated with non-respondents, response rates were reviewed after completion of the random postal survey and attempts were made to contact possible non-respondents. This will be addressed later in the chapter.

5.3.2 Survey Distribution

Following a consideration of the strengths and weaknesses of such a method, it was decided that the best method of distributing the questionnaire survey was via mail. The main strength of this method is that it eliminated the possibility of interviewer bias (Flowerdew and Martin, 2005). This was vital due the nature of the survey topic and the fact that it concerned a relatively sensitive subject with confidential questions, for example, “Did you vote in the 2002 General Election?”. Tull and Hawkins (1996) evaluated the use of mail/postal surveys using seven different headings; flexibility, quantity of data that can be collected, control of interviewer effects, control of sample, speed of data collection, response rate, and cost. They determined that mail questionnaires have the potential to generate large amounts of information at a low cost. They also suggested that respondents were more likely to give honest answers to personal questions due to the lack of interviewer bias. The disadvantages of the postal method of distribution were the time that mail surveys take to complete and the fact that mail questionnaires tend to feature low response rates. Also, the researcher has no control over who actually completes the questionnaire. Nonetheless, it was decided that a mail questionnaire was the best method of distributing the survey. This decision was supported by DeLeeuw (1992) who suggested that mail surveys are more reliable than telephone or face-to-face

surveys. It was decided that the main disadvantage presented in the literature, i.e. time, was a limited issue outweighed by the fact that mail questionnaires are less intrusive than other types of survey distribution methods.

Heberlein and Baumgartner (1978) used a meta-analysis technique to test the influence or predictability of seventy-one characters on survey response rates. They found seven of these to positively influence response rates and three to negatively influence response rates. Of these ten characteristics, two are relevant to this research, one positive and one negative. The positive influence was that of the salience of the topic. At the time the questionnaire survey was distributed, a general election was pending making the issue of voter turnout topical and relevant, positively influencing the response rate. According to Heberlein and Baumgartner (1978), the fact that the sample is drawn from the general population negatively influences response rate. They found that samples drawn from the general population tended to have lower response rates. Fox et. al (1988) suggest six means of increasing response rate. The most achievable of these was that of the inclusion of a stamped return envelope with which to reply. This was also suggested as a good method of increasing response rates in postal surveys by Armstrong and Luske (1987). Considering this evidence, it was decided to include a return addressed envelope with the questionnaire surveys.

5.3.3 Survey Sample

According to Blaxter et al. (2006), the type of sampling employed depends upon the resources one has at one's disposal. The sampling resource available in this research was that of the 2004 marked electoral register for Fingal. The register contained 144,522 names with a further 2,040 names on the supplement to the

register totaling 146,562 names (Kavanagh, 2006). It was decided that systematic sampling would be best suited given the resource at hand. Flowerdew and Martin (2005: 96-97) describe how to take a systematic sample;

“A sampling interval is calculated by dividing the total number of items on the list by the sample size required. The start point should be randomly selected by numbering the beginning section of the list and selecting a number using the random number generator on a calculator. The sampling interval is then added to the number of the randomly selected member to identify sample number two. The process is repeated until the required sample has been drawn”

With 2500 questionnaires printed, the required sample size was 2500 leading to a sampling interval of 59. The sample was drawn and the questionnaire surveys were administered via post (as previously discussed). When response rates were examined with respect to local electoral area, a higher than anticipated refusal rate was identified in two of the six local electoral areas, Balbriggan and Mulhuddart. Flowerdew and Martin (2005) suggest that one means of overcoming this problem is to draw further names from the sampling frame. However, when this was considered in conjunction with the topic of the questionnaire surveys, it was thought that the same problem would be likely to arise again. Therefore, it was decided to distribute some surveys to local community groups in these local electoral areas. This had repercussions on the data analysis as will be seen in later chapters. Specifically, where deviant trends were noted in the two local electoral areas which contained a community group sample, separate figures were studied for the community group sample in order to determine whether or not the contrasting figures were a function of the community group sample. The overall questionnaire survey response rate was 27.4%. While quite low, this was as expected due to two factors. Firstly, the fact that the main distribution method was via post lends itself to lower response

rates. Mail surveys tend to yield lower response rates than other methods of distribution (Flowerdew and Martin, 2005; Blaxter et al., 2006). Secondly, the nature of the topic at hand also warrants lower response rates. Voter turnout and the respective reasons for turnout or abstention is considered to be a sensitive topic with the literature suggesting that sensitive topics often result in lower response rates. Therefore, the response rate obtained was as expected for such a survey.

In terms of actual numbers, 684 surveys were returned including 74 from community groups. Table 5.1 displays the breakdown in terms of electoral area.

Table 5.1: Actual Number of Surveys Returned by Electoral Area

	POSTAL	COMM. GRP	TOTAL
SWORDS	87	-	87
MALAHIDE	171	-	171
BALBRIGGAN	41	17	58
HOWTH	97	-	97
MULHUDDART	102	57	159
CASTLEKNOCK	112	-	112
TOTAL	610	74	684

5.3.4 Problem of Turnout Surveys

An inherent problem of surveys of this nature studying turnout rates is that they often yield higher turnout figures than officially stated. Some respondents claim to have turned out to vote when they actually have not, presumably out of embarrassment or a reluctance to admit the truth.

Neimi and Weisberg (1993) offer some insight into this over reporting of turnout;

“Silver, Anderson and Abramson (1986) have analysed the patterns of vote over-reporting, finding that misreporting turnout is related to demographics, with more highly educated people most likely to claim they voted when they did not. These problems notwithstanding, many of the individual correlates of voting have been found so often with so many different types of surveys that the results are generally viewed as accurate”

5.3.5 Rationale of Questions Asked

The following is an account of the rationale for each of the questions asked in the survey and an account of the type of information each question yielded.

Questions one to eight were concerned with the demographic and socio-economic attributes of survey respondents. Question one was included for a dual purpose. Firstly it was essential in ensuring homogeneity between respondent and electoral area (identified as a code printed in the top left/right hand corner of each questionnaire). It was intended to act as a control for later questions in the survey which were electoral area specific. The second purpose of question one was prospective in nature. On designing the questionnaire, it was decided that a question such as this would be required to keep open the possibility of geo-coding the responses. In order to ensure that geo-coding remained an option until the end of the study, a question concerning the geographical address of each survey was needed. Retrospectively, geo-coding was not carried out as it was seen to contribute little to the study.

Questions two to four were concerned with certain demographic characteristics of the respondent. The first hypothesis, (H_1) states that “there is an association between demographic variables, i.e. sex, age and marital status, and voter turnout”. H_1 is testable owing to questions two to four which allow crosstabulations to be conducted between the various demographic variables and turnout. Determining the demographic characteristics of respondents is integral in a study such as this. Questions two to four also allowed the characteristics of the sample to be compared with the characteristics of the general population resulting in greater certainty of representation.

On reviewing the literature, a recurring point is the association between length of residence and voter turnout. A common finding is that the longer one is resident in a particular place, the more likely it is that he/she will turn out to vote. The rationale behind this has to do with developing a stake in the community which causes the resident to become concerned about issues affecting their locale. It is thought that this might be an influential factor on turnout in Fingal owing to the fact that many areas have experienced an explosion in residential development over the past few years. These areas contrast heavily with other areas in Fingal that are well established. Question five deals with length of residence and is hypothesized in H_3 which suggests that turnout can be explained by a combination of factors, one of which is length of residence.

Question six probes for details of a socio-economic nature asking respondents to state their current occupation. This is an important detail in not only building up a picture of the characteristics of respondents but in allowing H_2 to be tested. H_2 states that “there is an association between socio-economic variables and voter turnout at the in Fingal whereby a high level of socio-economic resources is correlated with higher turnout levels”. By crosstabulating the responses to this question with turnout, it becomes possible to determine whether there is a statistically significant relationship between occupation and turnout.

Question seven was included as a control question. There were, in total, four different types of elections detailed in the questionnaire. These were a general election, a European election, a local election and two referendum elections. As there are restrictions on who can vote in each election, the question regarding

nationality acts as a control. Only Irish and British nationals are permitted to vote in general elections. Irish, British, and EU nationals are permitted to vote in European elections while these groups as well as non-EU nationals can vote in local elections. Only Irish nationals can vote in presidential and referenda elections. By looking at the response to question seven in conjunction with the questions regarding turnout, it becomes possible to determine whether or not the turnout statement is valid. Please note, it does not make it possible to determine if the response is true, just whether or not the response is valid.

Similar to question six, question eight not only allows a picture of the characteristics of respondents to be built up but allows for the testing of H₂, the second hypothesis. Question eight asks respondents to write in the age at which they completed full-time education. Educational attainment has been found to have an influence on turnout propensity and so by asking respondents to state the age at which they completed their education and looking at this in conjunction with turnout, it becomes possible to determine whether or not a relationship exists between turnout and educational attainment in Fingal.

Questions nine to fourteen are concerned with voter turnout and with self reported reasons for turning out to vote and for abstaining.

Question nine addresses turnout levels. It asks respondents to state whether or not they turned out at each of the last three elections held. Please note, as the turnout levels stated in these questions are self-reported turnout levels, they may be higher than actual turnout levels. This is addressed in section 3.2.2.5.

Following on from question nine, this question asks respondents to state their reasons for having voted in any of the three elections mentioned in question nine.

A list of possible choices was given along with a space for stating any other reasons. This question not only allows the reasons for turnout to be determined but also allows the types of voters in Fingal to be deduced.

Question eleven refers solely to the elections held in 2004. In this question, the respondent is asked to rank the three elections in order of importance and to provide a reason for ranking the most important election as so. The data yielded from this question is useful for comparative purposes. The literature suggests that turnout in the 2004 elections was positively influenced by the holding of the Citizenship Referendum which was an extremely contentious issue at the time. It also suggests that turnout could have been boosted due to various issues that were on the local agenda at the time, the most topical of which was the introduction of the Environmental Levy on refuse collection, i.e. the bin tagging system. By studying responses from this question, it becomes possible to determine which election was deemed as the most important election to electors.

Questions twelve, thirteen and fourteen deal with the reasons for abstention in each of the elections introduced in question nine. These questions are asked not only to determine the reasons for failing to turn out to vote at each of these elections, but also to see if the reasons for abstention differ depending on the type of election. It also allows a picture of the types of non-voters in each of the electoral areas to be built up.

Question fifteen deals with the electoral register and in particular, if the respondent is aware of whether or not their name is on the electoral register. Question fifteen was included to determine the proportion of respondents who are knowingly registered to vote.

Question sixteen was included on the questionnaire to determine whether or not the electorate makes use of their local TDs and councilors, and whether or not, having received help from a TD or likewise has a positive influence on turnout propensity.

According to the literature, group membership instills a sense of community spirit which makes the member more likely to turn out to vote. By examining the responses to question seventeen with respect to turnout, it becomes possible to ascertain whether this is also the case in Fingal.

At the time the survey was distributed, the most recent general election, held on May 24th 2007 was pending. According to the media around September 2006, the focus of the 2007 General election was expected to be on issues relating to the health system. Question eighteen was included to ascertain whether the Fingal electorate agreed with this contention, and also to determine what other issues are important to those residing in Fingal.

Question nineteen asks respondents which groups they think are most likely to address their area's needs. Respondents were presented with a list and asked to rank the options given. This question allows the author to determine what bodies or organisations the survey respondents feel are most helpful and will help in the development of recommendations. It also allows the author to ascertain whether or not respondents feel that Fingal County Council could be doing more to address their needs.

Place identity is an important theme in this research what with Fingal being a relatively new administrative area. It is also the founding element of the theoretical framework of the research. This question asked respondents to rank the list of areas given in terms of which they identify most with. This allowed the author to build up a picture of where in Fingal features strong place identity. Place identity is also important in terms of turnout as it has been suggested that those with strong place identity have a greater propensity to turn out to vote.

It is thought that attention to the media through newspaper readership and watching or listening to the news on the television or radio increases individual turnout propensity. Keeping engaged with public affairs in this manner builds up social capital which along with civic duty, are heightened through engagement with the public sphere. Questions twenty-one and twenty-two ask the respondent to state details of their newspaper readership and news watching habits in an attempt to measure political engagement. An examination of these responses with respect to turnout will make it possible to determine whether or not attention to the media is related to voter turnout. It will also make it possible to examine whether there is a relationship between political engagement and interest in politics. The data yielded from these questions will help in the testing of H₃ which states that “turnout can be explained by a combination of other factors”, one of which is attention to the media.

Question twenty-three asks respondents to state what areas in Fingal they are familiar with. This ties into the place identity theme in that familiarity with Fingal is a measure of how likely it is that a strong place identity will exist.

Questions twenty-four and twenty-five are concerned with barriers to voting. In particular, question twenty-four asks respondents to state any difficulties they have with regards to the voting process. It gives a series of options from filling in the actual ballot paper to knowing who the candidates running for election are. It also allows respondents to state that they have no difficulties with the voting process along with providing an “other” option where respondents are at liberty to write any difficulties not listed or to expand on those listed.

Question twenty-five asks for respondents input in relation to enticing non-voters to turn out to vote. It provides respondents with a list of possible options along with provision for any “other” ideas to be included in the “other” option. These responses will help in developing recommendations later in the research.

Question twenty-six asks respondents to state their level of interest in national and local politics according to a predetermined scale. This helps in validating the literature which suggests that having an interest in politics increases turnout propensity, and also allows the author to explore whether or not a relationship exists between interest in politics and political engagement.

Question twenty-seven addresses the level of understanding that respondents have of the issues that are relevant to, and at stake in, general, local and referendum elections. This allows the author to determine whether or not being interested in politics affects turnout propensity at related elections.

Questions twenty-eight and twenty-nine are concerned with candidate recognition in the local electoral areas and in the general election constituencies

in Fingal. Question twenty-eight asks respondents to state whether they are familiar with any of the candidates who stood for election at the last local elections in their specific local electoral area while question twenty-nine determines which general election candidates, who stood for election in 2002 are familiar to candidates in their respective general election constituencies. These questions were included to ascertain whether respondents have knowledge of the candidates who stood for election in their respective local electoral areas and general election constituencies and were intended as a measure of how effective campaign strategies are/were in creating long-lasting impressions.

Question thirty-one asks the respondent if having more information about voting and the electoral process would increase their likelihood to vote. Subsequently, the respondent is asked to state who they think should provide such information. These questions were intended to determine whether, from the electorate's perspective, enough information is available about voting and how to vote along with who the electorate believes could be doing more to inform them.

Question thirty-two concludes the questionnaire with an open-ended question. It asks respondents what would make them want to vote. For some respondents, reasons or incentives to vote may have been addressed earlier in the questionnaire survey. For those who haven't addressed such issues, question thirty-two provides an opportunity for them to state what would motivate them to vote. It also allows any motivations or reasons missed in the survey to be documented and provides an outlet for respondents to state any miscellaneous comments.

5.3.6 Pre-test and Pilot Study

According to Moore (2006), pre-testing is an integral element in conducting survey research. Pre-testing is when the questionnaire survey is examined by one or two experts prior to being piloted. Moore (2006: 127) suggests that these people “should include the client for the work and one or two other researchers who might be able to spot potential problems”. This questionnaire was originally adapted from a questionnaire used in doctoral research by Dr. Adrian Kavanagh. Subsequently, a draft of the questionnaire survey used in this research was examined by Ms. Hilary Kendlin of the Fingal Development Board and by Dr. Adrian Kavanagh, the research supervisor for this work. Following the pre-test some amendments were made, namely the inclusion of;

- Question twenty regarding place identity
- Question twenty-three regarding geographic areas in Fingal
- Questions thirty and thirty-one regarding information about voting and the providers of such information

Following these amendments, a pilot study was carried out. Flowerdew and Martin (2005) suggest that a pilot sample should include at least twenty respondents whose responses should be used to evaluate and test the questionnaire in relation to five design aspects;

1. Question Design and Format
2. Questionnaire Length
3. Questionnaire Output
4. Classification Questions
5. Serialisation and Other Information.

A pilot study was conducted in the Feltrim area of the Swords electoral area on the 8th, 9th and 15th of October 2005. Twenty-four questionnaires were completed. In accordance with Flowerdew and Martin's (2005) five design aspects, the following revisions were made;

1. Question Design and Format

The questions were understood by respondents and few problems were noted with regards to the instructions for answering questions. Question seven regarding nationality was revised to read "What is your nationality?" with a space provided for the answer as opposed to the previous exclusive question of "Are you Irish?". The space provided for answering question thirty-two was increased to give those respondents who wanted to expand on their answers room to do so.

2. Questionnaire Length

The questionnaires took approximately five minutes to complete. Therefore it was decided that no revision of the questionnaire length was needed.

3. Questionnaire Output

A codebook was developed and the data generated from the pilot study was input to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences program (SPSS). It was decided that the data yielded enough information for the research to be conducted. The only changes made to the codebook were those relating to the questions that were changed and the response options that were amended.

4. Classification Questions

The response options for questions three and four were revised following the pilot study. Initially question three was only interested in whether respondents were married or not. This was revised to include the five marital status categories of single, married, separated, divorced and widowed. Question four relates to the age of the respondents. Prior to the pilot being conducted, each cohort included ten age years including the youngest cohort which was presented as 15-24 years. However, as one is not franchised until the age of 18 years, this was revised to read 18-24 years. In addition, some typing errors were noted and consequently corrected.

5. Serialisation and Other Information

During the pilot study, questions were asked regarding the confidentiality of the questionnaire responses. Following this, it was decided to give the questionnaire surveys an identification number on return and not before distribution. Also, it was decided to stress the confidentiality aspect of the questionnaire data. This was achieved by underlining and “bold” printing “Confidentiality is assured” on page one of the questionnaire, by asking respondents not to include their house number in question one, and by repeating the confidentiality statement at the end of the questionnaire.

5.3.7 Questionnaire Analysis

The data yielded from the questionnaire survey was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) computer program. This enabled the author to crosstabulate the data and to run statistical tests to test the hypotheses

developed in chapter two. Tables were created in Microsoft Word and graphs were created by inputting relevant questionnaire data into Microsoft Excel and using the “Chart Wizard” option.

5.4 FOCUS GROUPS

At the outset, it was intended to run a series of focus group meetings to further validate and explore some of the survey findings. It was intended to hold two focus group meetings in the Mulhuddart electoral area in the Huntstown Community Centre, and two in the Malahide electoral area in the Grand Hotel. A recruitment plan was developed and a question guide drawn up based on the guiding principles by Kreuger (1998) and Morgan (1998a, 1998b).

Nevertheless, when it came to recruiting the participants as outlined in the recruitment plan, it became apparent that there was little public interest in participating. The recruitment plan involved contacting gatekeepers as suggested by various researchers. However, the contacted gatekeepers reported no interest from their respective groups. In the Mulhuddart electoral area, following the lack of progress through the gatekeepers, it was attempted to find participants through a process of self-selection by displaying posters on notice boards in the Huntstown Community Centre. However, as was the case with the gatekeepers, this generated no interest and the focus groups had to be abandoned.

Reflecting on this experience, the lack of interest in taking part in the focus groups may stem from a general sense of apathy amongst the electorate. Whether or not true apathy actually exists has been debated in recent years. Curtis Gans, director of the Commission for the Study of the American Electorate, defines apathy as meaning “no interest, no emotion, no feelings [and] no voice” on the

issues that are relevant in a given election. He discounts the occurrence of apathy suggesting instead that what is mistaken for apathy is actually disgust, discouragement and frustration. This may go some way to explaining the lack of interest in participating in the focus groups insofar as the recognition of discouragement. However, it is suspected that the disgust and frustration spoken of, if present, may have acted as motivating factors as opposed to demobilising factors in focus group recruitment. So was apathy to blame for the lack of interest in participating in the focus groups?

Vilhauer (2007) correlates laziness with apathy when comparing turnout at the French presidential election in April 2007 with the last US presidential election in 2004. He compares a turnout figure of 84.6% in the case of the 2007 French presidential election with a turnout of just 60.7% in the last US presidential election when accusing American voters of being lazy, apathetic and unpatriotic. In the Irish context, a recent article in The Carlow Nationalist acknowledges the existence of voter apathy. Weldon (2007) speaks of a debate at Carlow IT involving the five Carlow candidates who stood for election at the 2007 General election in May when he states the following;

“If the attendance at the debate is any indication of the level of interest in Carlow for the [General] election then voter apathy may be the biggest talking point”

An article on young voter apathy in the US likens voter apathy to a disease, while Gould (2001) suggests that it is not voter apathy that exists but rather voter fatigue. Gould (2001) tells of how the UK government are trying new initiatives to make it easier for the electorate to partake in the democratic process. He speaks of the increase in public cynicism brought about by a sense of disillusionment that taints political life.

Suggesting that the lack of interest in partaking in the focus group meetings is due to apathy raises the question of why, if people are so apathetic, was there a response to the questionnaire survey? If one reflects on these two methods however, the answer may become clear. It is likely that the ease of taking part in the questionnaire survey outweighed the effects of apathy. However, the time and effort that would be required to partake in the focus group meetings would necessitate a rather strong interest in the topic at hand. In a general sense, it is a strong interest that appears to be missing amongst the Fingal electorate making them susceptible to apathetic influences.

5.5 INTERVIEWS

The questionnaire survey captured the public's perspective on turnout propensity and related issues. In order to obtain a more holistic view of the factors affecting turnout in Fingal, it was decided to conduct a number of interviews with some of those directly involved in politics in Fingal. A total of seventeen interviews were conducted which involved local councillors, candidates standing for election in May 2007, sitting TDs (elected in 2002) and other party members. The names of those who were interviewed are not included here as a number of interviewees requested that their names not be given. It was decided not to provide a list of the other interviewees' names so as not to place more emphasis or significance on their respective responses as the responses of all interviewees were considered important in the creation of this research. It was thought that the interviewees would be able to provide an alternative perspective on turnout in their respective constituencies and local electoral areas involving an "insiders" view originating from first hand contact with the electorate.

To classify the interviews conducted as part of this research in terms of the structured/semi-structured/unstructured classifications often spoken of, they would be neither structured nor semi-structured but somewhere in between. As the interviews were not held for exploratory purposes (as is the case when they are conducted at the beginning of a research project) but rather intended as a supplementary method (to gain an additional perspective on the factors affecting voter turnout as determined by the questionnaire surveys), set questions were devised which all interviewees were asked to respond to. However, the structure was not rigid in that questions were asked in whatever order was most natural at the time. Also, provision was made for satellite questions to be asked if arising themes or issues prompted further questioning. This style of interviewing allowed the rigid formality of a structured interview to be upheld while also allowing some degree of flexibility and responsiveness (Moore, 2006). The following is a list of questions that were asked, in no particular order, of all interviewees;

1. In your encounters with the electorate, you have probably built up a good idea of the reasons why people fail to vote. What are some of those reasons?
2. What factors, if any, do you think will encourage people to vote at the next General election in May?
3. What factors, if any, do you think will discourage people from voting at the next General election in May?
4. Do you think the election campaign plays an important role in influencing people to vote, or just who they vote for?

5. What feedback have you gotten from your constituents as to the issues that are important to them at the next General election in May?
6. Are the people in your electoral area more concerned about issues that affect them personally or about issues that affect the whole community?
7. Suppose you were trying to convince a non-voter to vote, what would you say?

According to Blaxter et al. (2006), interviews may take place face-to-face, over the telephone or by email. The majority of the interviews conducted as part of this research took the form of telephone interviews and email interviews. This was unavoidable due to the circumstances prevailing at the time. The interviews were held during March, April and May 2007 when a General election was pending and subsequently called and held. Therefore, due to time commitments and time constraints of interviewees, many requested that the interviews be held over the telephone or by email. The interviews lasted between 20 and 30 minutes.

In the case of the telephone and face-to-face interviews, the interviews were recorded on a digital voice recorder and subsequently transcribed for analysis. Blaxter et al. (2006) promote the recording of interviews stating that it allows the interviewer to concentrate on the process of the interview and focus attention on the interviewee. In the case of the email interviews, when further questioning was required the interviewees were contacted with more questions.

The interviews were analysed qualitatively by studying the transcripts, coding any recurring themes and taking note of deviant themes.

5.6 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter outlined the main research methods that were employed in the production of this research along with the justification for using such methods.

As this research was primarily concerned with an individual level analysis of the factors influencing turnout propensity, the main research method employed was that of a questionnaire survey conducted at the local electoral area level.

However, this research was also concerned with providing a holistic depiction of turnout behaviour in Fingal. Hence, the questionnaire survey was complimented by other research methods also. Namely, an aggregate level correlation and regression analysis was conducted between turnout and various census variables to compliment the individual level analysis, and a series of interviews were conducted to explore the “political professional’s” perspectives on the factors that influence turnout propensity in Fingal County.

This chapter detailed the means by which each of these analyses were carried out along with the rationale for using such methods and the limitations of using each of the methods employed.

CHAPTER 6

VOTER TURNOUT

While the main concern of this research is that of an individual level analysis of the factors influencing turnout propensity in Fingal, the first step in ensuring this is done in a holistic fashion is to look at the geography of turnout in the county. The first half of this chapter therefore, will present a brief synopsis of voter turnout trends in Ireland and in Fingal in order to create a context in which the factors influencing turnout propensity may be studied.

The second step in ensuring an adequate study of individual turnout propensity is carried out is to look at aggregate level influences on turnout in Fingal. Hence, the second half of this chapter will be concerned with conducting brief aggregate level correlation and regression analyses involving possible influential factors on turnout gleaned from census data.

Prior to this however, an account of the Irish electoral system is given which acts as an introduction to the study of voting behaviour and turnout propensity.

6.1 THE IRISH ELECTORAL SYSTEM

The Irish electoral system stems from proportional representation (PR). The Accurate Democracy website states that the principle of proportional representation is “majority rule, with representation for the electoral minority in proportion to the way people vote. That is, 60% of the vote gets you 60% of the seats, not all of the [while] 20% of the vote gets you 20% of the seats, not none of them” (Accurate Democracy, 2007. Twenty-one Western European countries use a proportional representation system of voting including Ireland, Austria,

Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland and Spain. The advantages of such a system include greater accuracy, fairness and legitimacy in comparison to other voting systems along with lesser regionalism in terms of party support and better facilitation in terms of women. An often stated disadvantage to proportional representation is that it tends to give no one party a majority rule which can result in weak and indecisive government. There are two types of proportional representation voting systems; list systems and single transferable voting. A short note on each of these is given below;

1. List – There are two types of PR electoral systems which involve list systems; the Party List system and Mixed Member Proportional Voting.

Party List; Two subtypes of the party list system exist, open list and closed list. Both types involve lists of parties or lists of candidates presented by party whereby the voter awards their vote to either one party (closed list) or their preferred candidate within one party (open list).

Mixed Member Proportional Voting – this is also known as the additional member system, compensatory PR, the two rate system or the German system. The MMP system elects some representatives relevant to geographical constituency as in single member plurality voting. The other representatives are elected by a party list vote. The rationale behind the MMP system is to try to maintain proportional representation.

2. Single Transferable Voting (STV) – The type of PR used in Ireland and discussed in section 6.1.1.

6.1.1 Single Transferable Voting

The notion of a single transferable vote was first proposed by Thomas Wright Hill in 1821. It remained unused however until 1855 when Carl Andrae proposed a system of single transferable voting for use in Denmark. In the UK, Thomas Hare is credited with developing the STV voting system. In Australia, it is referred to as the Hare-Clarke system of voting after Thomas Hare in the UK and a man named Andrew Clarke, who in 1896 persuaded the Tasmanian House of Assembly elections to enlist the STV system.

In Ireland, the STV system of voting is provided for in article 16.2.5 of Bunreacht na hÉireann which states that “the members [of Dáil Eireann] shall be elected on the system of proportional representation by means of the single transferable vote”.

In contrast to other proportional representation systems, voters indicate a preference for individual candidates on a preferential ballot paper. This choice is not restricted by party lists, as is the case in other PR systems, and voters may indicate a preference for a multitude of candidates across political party lines. Candidates are subsequently elected from multi-member districts in proportion to the electoral support for the candidates as expressed in the voter’s preferences. Sinnott (1995: 14) refers to the PR-STV system as “allow[ing] for the expression of a complete range of voter preferences”. As a result of this it is regarded as a very facilitative voting system which upholds the minority voter’s right to representation.

Chubb (1982: 144) provides a comprehensive account of the PR-STV system of voting;

“Under the single transferable vote system, the elector has the opportunity to indicate a range of preferences by placing numbers opposite candidates’ names on the ballot paper. If the voter so indicates, a vote can be transferred from one candidate to another if it is not required by the prior choice to make up that candidate’s quota...or if, owing to the poor support given to the prior choice, that candidate is eliminated from the contest. Voters need not vote for all the candidates, but those who do vote for more than one, must number their preferences continually – 1,2,3 and so on”

In the PR-STV system, a threshold is imposed based on the number of valid votes cast and the number of seats in a constituency. This threshold is termed a quota and must be achieved in order to win a seat. The formula for calculating this quota is;

$$\text{Quota} = \frac{\text{Total number of valid votes cast}}{\text{Number of seats} + 1} + 1$$

The transfer of votes that makes the PR-STV system unique comes into play when a candidate either reaches the quota of votes required to be elected, or is eliminated from the contest due to a lack of votes. The vote transfers come from the elected candidate’s vote surplus and from the eliminated candidate’s ballots. The second preferences are counted unless that candidate has already been elected or eliminated, in which case the third preference vote is counted, and so on.

PR-STV is not a widely used system of voting. Apart from Ireland, the only other country to use it extensively is Malta. It is used on a lesser scale in Australia and some other countries.

6.1.2 PR-STV versus Plurality Voting

A major concern with the PR-STV system is its relative complexity when compared with other voting systems, especially in comparison to plurality voting systems, also referred to as “first-past-the-post”. The plurality system, used in the UK, is considered more accessible than PR-STV due to its simplistic nature. However, the “winner-takes-all” character of the system is heavily criticised by Sinnott (2005) and Woolf (2005). The plurality system is thought of as being a system which deprives voters of having a meaningful say in the electing government. Johnston and Pattie (2006) speak of the problems induced by such a system in the 2005 UK General election which he describes as being characterised by high levels of disproportionality. Plurality voting systems also tend to be characterised by much rational abstention (Downs, 1957), stemming from the fact that the outcome in some constituencies is considered a foregone conclusion which effectively demobilises voters who believe that turning out to vote would be a waste of their time. However, one advantage of plurality voting systems that PR-STV does not boast is the tendency of such systems to produce stable single-member governments. PR-STV, on the other hand, tend to produce unstable coalitions rather than one-party governments which some have suggested, risks political stagnation.

The unique advantage of the PR-STV system is that it reduces wastage of votes by transferring unused votes. This results in a more accurate reflection of the votes cast. In this manner, PR-STV ensures much greater representation than plurality voting.

STV also helps to minimise the number of unrepresented voters by ensuring proportionality. In contrast to other PR systems, where voters make their choice

in accordance to political party, STV allows voters to choose candidates which influences proportionality by the conscious selection of criteria such as age, gender and ethnicity.

This candidate-centric or person-centred approach to Irish politics has implications on the number of candidates a party decides to run in a given constituency and for the related campaign planning and management. Typically, political parties in Ireland stand more candidates for election than the number of seats they believe they will win in an effort to boost the party vote on polling day. The rationale behind this is to try to make certain that the vote transfers from the weaker eliminated party candidate will go to the stronger party candidate to help achieve their quota. As mentioned previously, careful consideration needs to be given to the number of candidates a party runs in a given constituency as too few or too many candidates may allow other parties to win seats. This does not pose a problem when voters vote along party lines, as in Malta, where voters stick tightly to party preferences. However in Ireland this is not the case. Election posters in Ireland encourage voters to give their favourite candidate their number one vote while giving other candidates from the same party their second and third preference votes. There is a significant emphasis in PR-STV systems to be ranked first to ensure that one does not get eliminated on the first round due to having too few first preferences. Vote management strategies spatially divide constituencies amongst party candidates to ensure an even spread of the vote while focusing on a core group of known supporters before canvassing secondary supporters.

The stress on candidates in the Irish PR-STV system to gain first preference votes results in localistic politics whereby candidates focus on local issues and

local concerns to try to attract votes. This focus on local issues is an attempt to draw the interest of electors from a candidate's own bailiwick or locality which may result in an increased personal vote. As a result of this localism, Sinnott (1995) likens Irish General elections to forty-two separate elections with marginality featuring strongly resulting in close, competitive elections in all constituencies.

The Irish PR-STV system is considered to be somewhat of a facilitative electoral system in comparison to other electoral systems in use around the world. In elections held under PR-STV systems, every constituency is considered marginal. In plurality voting systems however, there will always be a number of "safe" seats. This may have the effect of demobilising voters and lowering turnout levels where electors see no point in turning out to vote as the outcome of the election in their particular constituency is deemed obvious.

In contrast, PR-STV systems should result in high turnouts due to the unrestricted choice that these systems allow voters to make. Due to the proportional nature of PR-STV systems, there is a greater likelihood of one's vote counting, which should, in theory, mobilise voters to the polls. However, an examination of turnout rates over the past 25 years proves this not to be the case, suggesting that a facilitative electoral system is less of a positive influence on turnout than first suspected, and suggesting that there are other influential factors on voter turnout. The following section details recent turnout rates nationally and in Fingal within this context.

6.2 NATIONAL TURNOUT

During the 26 year period between 1981 and 2007, 9 general elections were held along with 5 European elections, 4 local elections, 15 referendum elections and 2 presidential elections (Took and Donnelly, 2007).

TABLE 6.1: Turnout in Ireland 1981 – 2007 (%)

YEAR	GENERAL	EURO.	LOCAL	REF.	PRES.
1981	76.2				
1982.1	73.8				
1982.2	72.9				
1983				53.7	
1984		47.6		47.5	
1985			63.0		
1986				60.8	
1987	73.3			44.1	
1989	68.5	68.3			
1990					64.0
1991			58.0		
1992.1				57.3	
1992.2	68.5			68.2	
1994		44.0			
1995				62.1	
1996				29.2	
1997	65.9			47.1	46.8
1998				56.2	
1999		50.2	50.2	51.1	
2001				34.8	
2002	62.8			(1)42.8 (2)49.4	
2004		58.8	59.9	59.9	
2007	67.61				

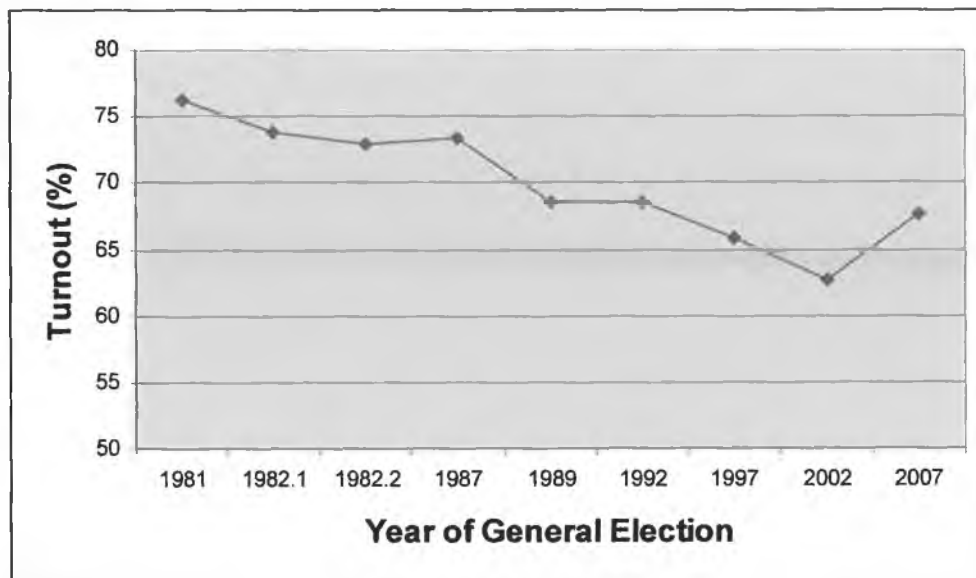
An examination of the turnout figures for each of these elections conveys a consistent trend of declining turnout levels. According to Lyons and Sinnott (2002: 144), low and declining turnout levels pose a problem to the democratic ideal. They suggest that “differential abstention, that is higher or lower levels of abstention amongst voters with different backgrounds or interests, may affect the outcomes of elections, with cumulative effects on public policy [with] the final

result of an election [being] determined not only by how electors voted, but also by which electors voted”.

Table 6.1 displays turnout rates for each of the elections held between 1981 and 2007. It is interesting to note that turnout variations between general and local elections in Ireland tend to be less marked than in some other countries. This has been attributed to the high levels of party competitiveness in Ireland (Sinnott, 1995).

Excluding the 2007 General election and with the exception of the slight increase in turnout experienced at the 1987 General election, turnout in general elections has been consistently falling, as illustrated in Figure 6.1.

FIGURE 6.1: National Turnout at General Elections



Turnout at European elections has tended to fluctuate during this 26 year period, often pertaining to what other type of election was held in conjunction with each respective European election, while local election turnout was falling until 2004 when a sharp increase in turnout was recorded. Possible reasons for this will be addressed later in the chapter.

There were just two contested presidential elections in this period, one in 1990 which saw a turnout of 64% and one in 1997 where turnout fell to 46.5%. The reason for such a drop in turnout between these presidential may be related to the electorate's perceptions of the marginality of the two contests. In particular, the 1990 presidential election was considered to be a closer contest than that of the 1997 presidential election. Voter fatigue may have also played a role in the low turnout recorded at the 1997 presidential election owing to the fact that elections had been held in the two years prior to 1997 with three elections being held in 1997 itself.

As can be seen from Table 6.1, turnout at referendum elections was quite volatile in the twenty-six year period presented with sharp rises and dramatic falls from one referendum election to the next.

The elections that this thesis is concerned with are the elections held in 2002 and 2004 which included a general election (2002), a local and European election (2004) and two referendum elections (2002 and 2004). The author is concerned with providing an account of turnout at the different types of elections that were held. However, as two referendum elections were held in this period, it has been decided to focus on turnout in just one of these, that of the Citizenship Referendum election held in 2004. Therefore, the remainder of this chapter will be concerned with presenting an account of turnout nationally and in Fingal at the 2002 General election and an account of turnout at the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections.

6.2.1 Turnout at the 2002 General Election

The 2002 General election was held on Friday 17th May 2002 and witnessed a turnout rate of 62.8%, the lowest turnout rate in a general election since the foundation of the state. In a joint project on turnout in Ireland, the Geary Institute in UCD and the National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA) in NUI Maynooth undertook a marked register analysis of turnout levels and subsequently created an Electoral Division (ED) level turnout map for the country (Kavanagh et al., 2004). The most noticeable geographical trend that this produced was that of a distinct urban-rural contrast visible not only between the Dublin region and the surrounding rural areas but between other urban centres and their hinterlands also. Kavanagh et al. (2004: 179) identified the main low turnout areas in the country as follows;

“An area of low turnout stretches from Dundalk in the north-east, southwards through Louth and all but the very north-western parts of Meath, incorporating most of Dublin, Kildare and east Wicklow and extending as far south as Carlow on the inland side. This pattern corresponds with the locations of the main urban centres along the east coast and their extending commuter belts. The map also shows a clustering of low turnout electoral divisions in and around the other main urban centres. This is most noticeable in Cork city and its surrounding areas, with low turnout also extending well beyond the immediate environs of the city into the eastern parts of county Cork. Pronounced low turnout is also found in and around Galway City, with concentrations of low turnout areas to the north and south of Galway Bay. Similar patterns of low turnout are evident in and around Waterford and Limerick cities.”

Lyons and Sinnott (2002) also note these urban-rural differences in turnout at the 2002 General election and note how the Dublin region and the urbanised constituencies adjacent to Dublin along with Cork City and constituencies with large urban centres such as Limerick East and Galway West are marked by low

turnout levels. They also note low turnout in the Donegal South-West constituency and in rural constituencies in the south east of the country.

Kavanagh et al. (2004: 180) also distinguish three high turnout areas. They label the first of these “the north-west excluding Donegal”, the second as “the south-midlands” and the third as “the south-west”. Kavanagh et al. (2004) also note that the urban-rural contrast in turnout levels transcends main cities and their hinterlands and is applicable also to most provincial towns which are seen as urbanised centres within a rural setting.

With respect to Dublin itself, Kavanagh (2004: 5) speaks of there being “a very pronounced and rather consistent pattern to the spatial variations in turnout”. The middle class and residentially stable parts of the county tend to be marked by higher turnout levels than areas with high population mobility or social deprivation. In particular, high turnout tends to be associated with Malahide, Sutton, Castleknock, Stillorgan, Dundrum and Foxrock among others. Conversely, low turnouts tend to be associated with Mulhuddart, Tyrrelstown, Ballymun and Darndale among others. In relation to Fingal, the county boundaries encapsulate a range of high and low turnout EDs from Malahide and Sutton to Mulhuddart and Tyrrelstown, as will be discussed later in the chapter.

6.2.2 Turnout at the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum Elections

On the 11th June 2004, three elections were held; local elections, elections to the European parliament and a referendum election on citizenship. In accordance with the first order/ second order election model, each of these elections are classed as second order elections. In keeping with the model, this results in the

expectation of lower turnouts for these elections than for first order elections (for example, general elections). The previous local elections that were held were those of the 1999 local elections in which turnout was just 50.3%, the lowest turnout in local elections since the foundation of the state. As Kavanagh (2004: 64) notes, the 2004 elections were “expected to mark yet another stage in the trend of continuing turnout decline that has marked Irish elections over the past 25 years, with the national turnout expected to be lower than the 1999 level...”. As it transpired however, national turnout actually rose in these elections to 58.8%.

A number of reasons have been suggested for the increase in turnout. Firstly, the holding of the citizenship referendum on the same day has been named as a possible contributing factor to the turnout increase (Kavanagh, 2004). This referendum election was of particular interest to the general public and proved to be a contentious issue in the media. It is suggested that this may have mobilised voters to the polls who ordinarily would not have turned out to vote. A second reason suggested by both Harris (2004) and Kavanagh (2004) which might explain the unanticipated increase in turnout is that of the “Sinn Fein Factor”. It is thought that Sinn Fein, along with the Socialist Party played a large mobilising role, particularly in working class areas. Kavanagh (2004) speaks of this effect on the Clondalkin constituency in which left-wing parties gained an extra 22.3% of the vote. In contrast to the local elections held in 1999, the 2004 elections were high profile elections in terms of media coverage, resulting in an unusually well informed electorate. According to Kavanagh (2004: 69), “it could also be argued that conflicts over the bin charges also had the effect of politicising a

previously disinterested section of the electorate in working class areas in Fingal and Dublin City, such as Finglas and Mulhuddart...”.

6.3 TURNOUT IN FINGAL

Voter turnout in Fingal follows the same pattern as the rest of the Dublin region in that turnout in general and local elections tends to be lower than the national average. Similar to other urban areas, turnout in referendum elections in Fingal also tends to be higher than the national average. Within the Dublin region itself, Fingal tends to boast higher turnout levels than the other local authority areas in both general and local elections.

6.3.1 Turnout in Fingal at the 2002 General Election

Average turnout in Fingal in the 2002 General election was 59%, which was higher than the average turnout recorded for the entire Dublin region (57.4%) but somewhat lower than the 65.2% turnout recorded for the Rest of Ireland.

Although the average turnout in Fingal for this election was 59%, there were considerable variations in turnout levels across the county, as illustrated by Figure 6.2. This electoral division map of turnout in Fingal clearly displays the turnout variations that can and do exist within one relatively small geographical area, i.e. Fingal. The urban-rural contrast spoken of previously appears to also apply in this “micro-level” context in that northern parts of the county, i.e. the more rural parts of the county experienced higher turnout rates than some of the more densely populated urban areas such as those places located to the west of the county. Specifically, high turnouts were found in the rural northern parts of the county with greater than 60% turnout recorded in Skerries, Holmpatrick,

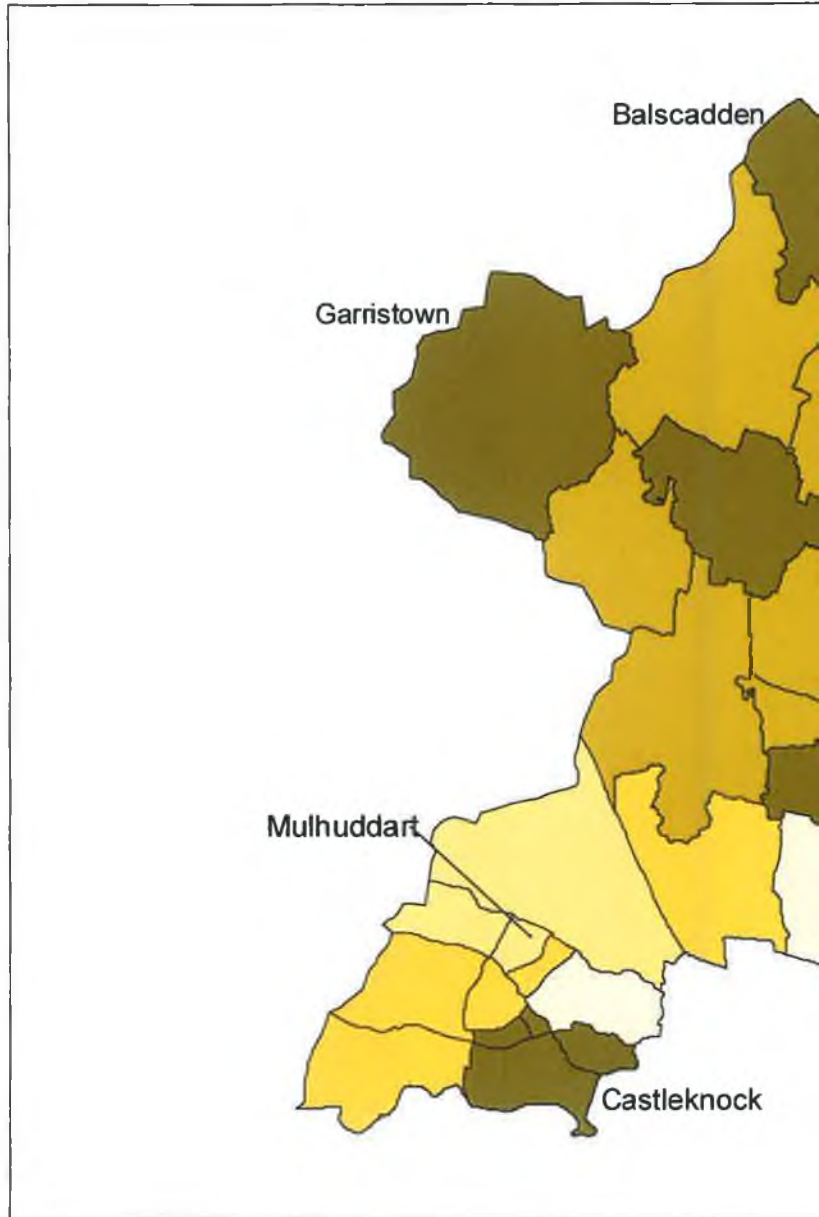
Garristown and Balcadden. The Malahide, Portmarnock, Howth and Sutton electoral divisions to the south-east of the county also experienced high turnout at this election along with Castleknock in the south west. Those electoral divisions which experienced turnout rates higher than 60% were Castleknock-Park (68.9%), Portmarnock North (65.3%), Sutton (64.6%), Blanchardstown-Roselawn (64.4%), Balcadden (63.7%), Blanchardstown-Delwood (63.3%), Malahide East (62.9%), Skerries (62.8%), Castleknock-Knockmaroon (62.6%), Malahide West (62.4%), Garristown (62.2%) and Howth (62%). In contrast, many electoral divisions recorded turnout rates well below the county average. These were mainly isolated to the south west of the county and included Blanchardstown-Abbotstown (32.7%), Blanchardstown-Tyrrelstown (42.9%), Blanchardstown-Mulhuddart (46.5%), Blanchardstown-Coolmine (50.2%), The Ward (50.2%), Blanchardstown-Corduff (50.8%) and Blanchardstown-Blakestown (53.9%) as well as the Airport ED at 28.6%.

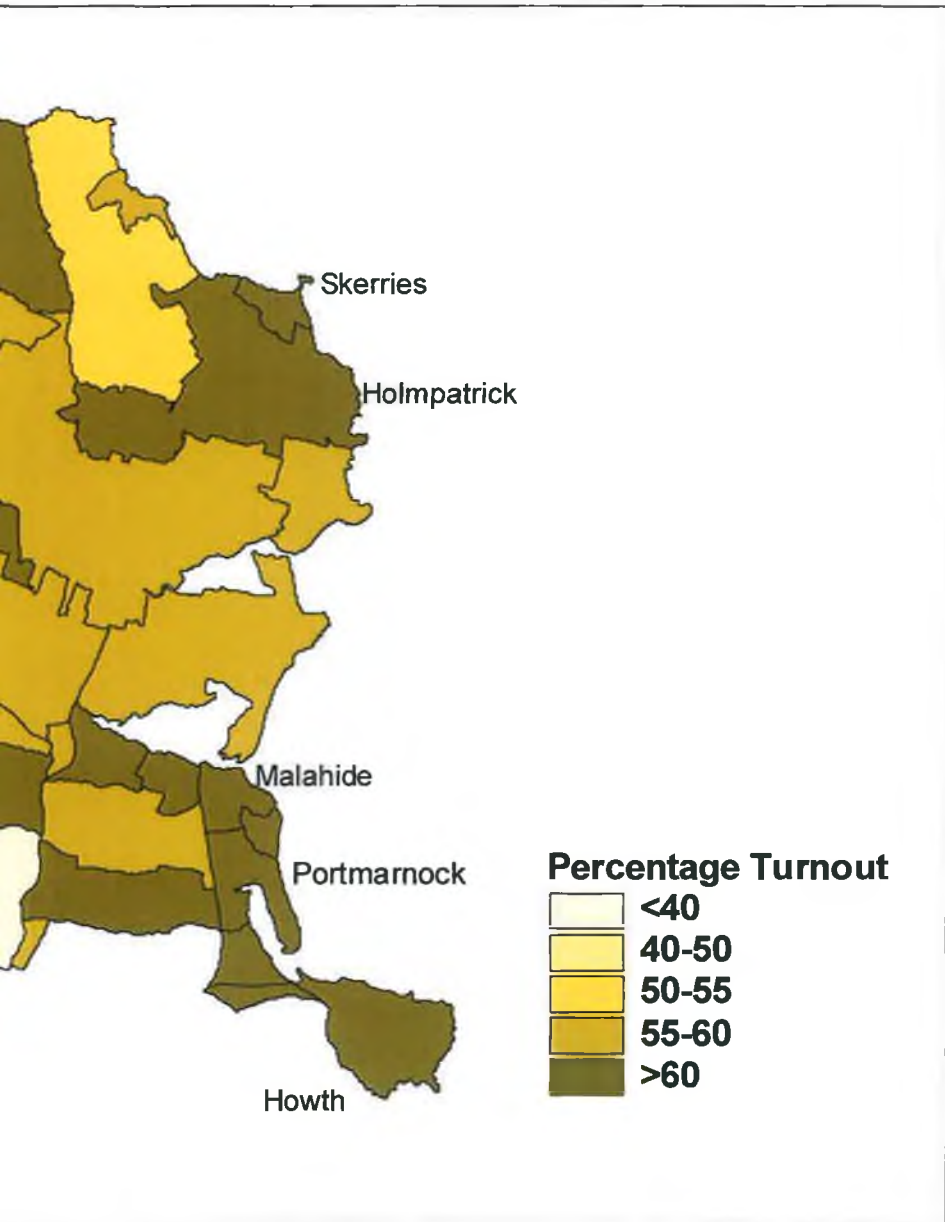
If one disaggregates these ED level turnout rates, and examines turnout levels within individual electoral divisions, it becomes apparent that considerable turnout differences also exist within some electoral divisions. This is a predictable finding given the densely populated nature of some of these EDs and the respective size of the electorate contained within.

It is possible to calculate turnout rates for individual streets, roads and estates by using marked register data available for use following the 1997 Electoral Act as discussed in chapter four.

With the focus on the lower turnout EDs to the south-west of the county, there were particularly large turnout differences between some areas and estates in the Coolmine, Mulhuddart and Blanchardstown areas.

Figure 6.2: Turnout in Fingal at the 2022 General Election





Those estates which experienced the lowest turnouts were Elmwood (40.2%), Sheepmoor (40.3%), Whitestown (40.9%), Willow Wood (44.9%) and Fortlawn (45.9%). In comparison, some neighbouring estates recorded much higher turnouts with Hazelwood recording turnout of (59%) along with higher turnouts in the Oakview (58.6%), Huntstown (54.6%) and Beechwood (52.5%) estates along with higher turnout in the Meadow area (53.4%).

One should always approach working with voter turnout data with some degree of scepticism given the recent and ongoing debate in the media regarding the accuracy of the electoral register. Unless the valid adult population, i.e. the number of people aged 18 and over, in a given area is exact to the numbers on the electoral register, turnout figures will always contain some degree of error. The 2002 General elections offers a good platform from which to study register accuracy due to the holding of a Census just weeks before polling day. According to the 2002 Census, the valid adult population in Fingal was 142,054 as of April 2002. At the time of the 2002 General election, the electoral register contained 138,074 names, hence being underestimated by 3.8%. If turnout levels were calculated as a percentage of the valid adult population as opposed to being based upon the numbers on the electoral register, it would have the effect of lowering the average turnout in Fingal at this election by 1.5% from the 59% quoted previously to 57.5%. By studying choropleth maps of the valid adult population according to Census 2002 in conjunction with the numbers on the electoral register, it becomes apparent that for many EDs in Fingal, the electoral register is either over-estimated or under-estimated. The electoral register being underestimated in a particular ED has the effect of creating higher turnout rates than are real with overestimation of the register resulting in lower turnout rates

than are true. At the time of the 2002 General election, it was estimated that many of the rural EDs in the north of the county were overestimated along with Lucan North and Castleknock-Park in the south west and the Howth, Sutton, Portmarnock and Malahide areas. Those EDs that appeared to be greatly underestimated were the Airport ED and Blanchardstown-Abbotstown with many of the EDs in the south west of the county registering some degree of underestimation. This means that the turnout differences previously mentioned are actually much more pronounced than is thought.

6.3.2 Turnout in Fingal at the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum Election

Voter turnout in Fingal for the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections averaged 55.2%. As was the case with turnouts in the 2002 General election, this was lower than the national turnout rate of 59.9% but higher than turnouts recorded in the other local authority areas in Dublin. In relation to the six local electoral areas in Fingal, turnout increased in every electoral area since the previous local elections held in 1999 (see Table 6.2).

TABLE 6.2: Voter Turnout in Fingal at the 1999 and 2004 local Elections (%)

	Turnout 1999	Turnout 2004	Change in Voters
99-04			
Balbriggan	44.9	56.4	4,901 (+50.2%)
Malahide	40.1	57.3	3,995 (+49.3%)
Howth	39.2	58.4	3,306 (+47.0%)
Swords	35.4	55.5	7,866 (+84.7%)
Castleknock	42.9	55.2	4,365 (+50.2%)
Mulhuddart	29.7	50.0	7,499(+138.2%)
Fingal Average	38.4	55.2	31,932 (+66.2%)

The most striking increase was observed in the Mulhuddart electoral area which experienced a 138.2% increase in the actual number of voters between the 1999

local elections and the 2004 elections. The figures in Table 5.2 may be explained with reference to social class. Specifically, the electoral areas with larger populations in social classes 1 and 2, which encapsulates the electoral areas of Malahide and Howth, tend to experience turnout levels higher than the county average. In contrast, the Mulhuddart electoral area, which has a higher than average percentage of its population in social classes 5 and 6, is marked by the lowest turnout levels in the county.

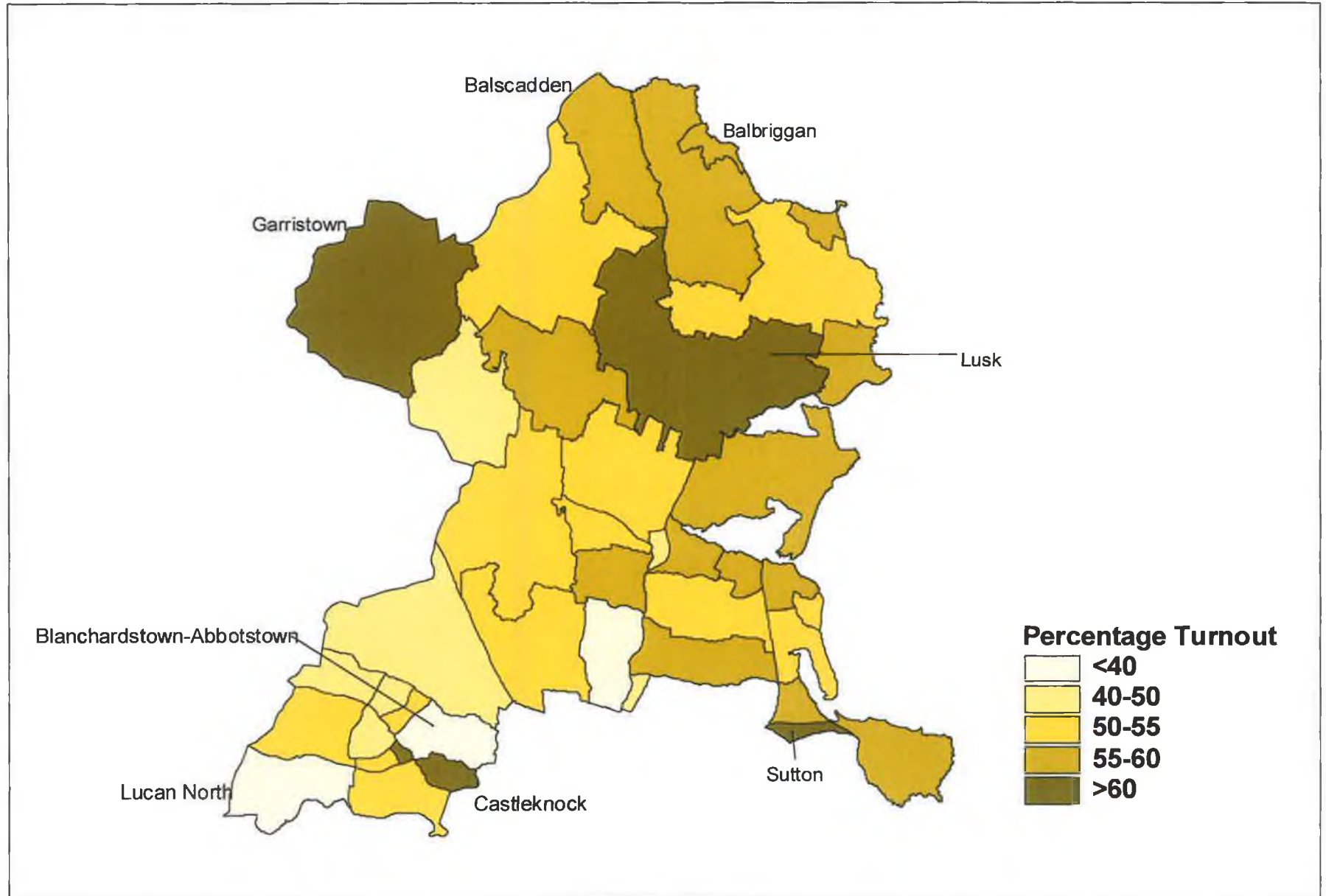
In terms of the geography of voter turnout in Fingal, the pattern of turnout in the 2004 elections closely resembled the geography of turnout in the 2002 General election as illustrated by Figure 6.3.

As was the case with turnout in the 2002 General election, the areas of Fingal which experienced the highest turnout levels in 2004 were the more rural EDs to the north of the county, in particular Garristown and Lusk, along with the Howth, Sutton, Portmarnock and Malahide EDs in the east, and the Castleknock-Park and Blanchardstown-Roselawn EDs in the south-west. The EDs which experienced the highest turnout in the 2004 elections were Garristown (62.7%), Castleknock-Park (62.4%), Sutton (61.9%), Lusk (61.1%), Blanchardstown-Roselawn (60.1%), Malahide West (59.5%), Balbriggan Urban (57.9%), Swords-Forrest ED (57.8%), Ballyboghil (57.8%) and Rush (57.7%). The lowest turnout areas were mainly clustered to the south-west of the county encapsulating the EDs of Blanchardstown-Abbotstown (37.1%), Lucan North (38.6%), Blanchardstown-Tyrrelstown (42.9%), Blanchardstown-Mulhuddart (47.1%), Blanchardstown-Coolmine (47.5%) and the Rye Ward (49.5%) with Clonmethan, Swords Village and the Airport ED also experiencing low turnout rates (48.7%, 47% and 34% respectively).

Similar to the 2002 General election, there were also large turnout variations within individual electoral divisions. In the Blanchardstown/Mulhuddart area for example, Warrenstown, Saddlers estate and Mulhuddart Wood recorded turnout rates of just 31.8%, 32% and 37.6% respectively. In contrast, Castlecurragh, Huntstown Lawn and Oakview recorded turnouts of 63.9%, 66.7% and 58.9% respectively.

In relation to the difference in turnout rates between 2002 and 2004, it appears that on average, the average turnout rate in Fingal fell by 5.42% between the 2002 General election and the 2004 local elections. Turnouts were higher in some EDs in 2004 in comparison to 2002. These were mainly the working class areas in the south-west of the county, for example the Ward, Blanchardstown-Mulhuddart, Blanchardstown-Abbottstown, Blanchardstown-Tyrrelstown, which might be explained with reference to the "Sinn Fein Factor" previously mentioned. The Airport ED also experienced a rise in voter turnout at the 2004 elections along with a limited number of EDs in the rural north of the county, namely Garristown, Balbriggan Urban and Balbriggan Rural and Lusk. In contrast, the majority of EDs in Fingal saw a drop in turnout levels between 2002 and 2004 with the highest drop experienced in the Castleknock Electoral Area along with Howth, Portmarnock and Malahide in the south east, Kilsallaghan and parts of Swords in the centre and Clonmethan, Skerries, Rush and Balscadden located in the north of the county.

Figure 6.3: Turnout in Fingal at the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum Elections



6.4 CORRELATION ANALYSIS

Marked register data for Fingal for the 2002 General election and the 2004 local elections was correlated with census data from the 2002 census of population and relevant data from the 2006 census where available. The results of the correlation analyses are presented in Table 6.3. A positive correlation coefficient is indicative of a positive correlation with turnout in the stated election whereby it is inferred that an increase in that particular variable in an area would result in an increase in turnout. Conversely, a negative correlation coefficient is indicative of a negative correlation with turnout and an increase in that particular variable in an area would adversely affect turnout levels.

The first thing to note from the correlation analysis is the strong and significant correlation between turnouts at both elections. This indicates that high turnout areas in general elections also tend to be high turnout areas in local elections and low turnout areas in one election correspond to low turnout areas in the other election. This validates the geography of turnout presented in Figures 5.2 and 5.3 which illustrate similar patterns to turnout in Fingal in both elections.

In terms of nationality, it appears that the percentage of those of Irish nationality is positively and significantly correlated with voter turnout at both the 2002 General election and the 2004 local elections. This contrasts to the other nationalities included in the analysis where the respective correlation coefficients indicate a significant negative correlation with voter turnout. This may be related to the tendency for there to be high concentrations of non-nationals in residentially mobile areas, with residential mobility also proving to adversely influence turnout propensity, as will be discussed later.

Table 6.3: Bivariate Correlations between Turnout in Fingal and Census Variables

	2002 GE	2004 LE
<u>Turnout</u>		
Turnout at the 2002 General election	-	.79**
Turnout at the 2004 local election	.79**	-
<u>Cultural Characteristics</u>		
Irish born as % of population	.67**	.54**
% Polish and Lithuanian***	-.64**	-.45**
Other EU nationality, %***	-.56**	-.37**
Rest of World, %***	-.64**	-.43**
Traveler	-.76**	-.56**
Catholic	.42**	.43**
Other religion	-.45**	-.51**
<u>Demographic Characteristics</u>		
Males as % of population	-.14	-.03
Single***	-.67**	-.40**
Married***	.71**	.45**
Separated***	-.52**	-.33*
Divorced***	-.14	-.10
Widowed***	.24	.03
18-44, as % of the electorate***	-.61**	-.37*
45+, as % of the electorate***	.61**	.37*
<u>Educational Level</u>		
Non formal primary, lower secondary	-.40**	-.24
Upper secondary level	.68**	.60**
Third level	.17	.03
<u>Social Class</u>		
Social Class 1 & 2	.67**	.46**
Social Class 5 & 6	-.29	-.12
Unemployed, 2002	-.49**	-.33*
<u>Length of Residence</u>		
House built after 1996	-.41**	-.13
House built after 2001***	-.60**	-.42**
Living at a different address in 2001***	-.55**	-.36**
<u>Housing Tenure</u>		
Owner Occupied housing***	.53**	.43**
Rented housing***	-.56**	-.43**
Rented from Local Authority***	-.39*	-.26
Flat/Apartment accommodation***	-.24	-.26
<u>Family Cycle</u>		
Pre family (childless couple)***	-.49**	-.20
Pre-school age children***	-.53**	-.31*
Early school age children***	-.50**	-.24
Adult children***	.47**	.21
Empty nest***	.55**	.30
Retired***	.35*	.17

Table 6.3 Continued

	2002 GE	2004 LE
Household		
One person household***	-.41**	-.24
Lone parent, young children***	-.63**	-.41
1 child***	-.47**	-.21
2 children***	.41**	.21
3 children***	.57**	.33*
4 children***	.37*	.21
Transport & Commuting		
No car household	-.65**	-.53**
Leave home to commute to work before 7:30am	-.52**	-.30

* Statistically significant at the 5% level

** Statistically significant at the 1% level

*** Based on 2006 Census data

The correlation analysis between marital status and turnout confirms the findings of the literature to a great extent. Specifically, there is a strong, positive, significant association between turnout and the percentage of married people in an area. Conversely, there are negative associations between turnout and the percentages of single, separated and divorced people.

Age appears to be clearly correlated with turnout to the effect that there is a positive association between turnout and the percentage of those aged 45 and over on the electoral register and a negative association between turnout and the percentage of those aged 18-44 on the electoral register. Both associations are evident for turnout at the 2002 General election (significant at the 1% level) and the 2004 local elections (significant at the 5% level). This is in keeping with the contentions of the literature which states that those in the youngest age cohorts are more likely to abstain from voting than to turn out when compared with those in older age cohorts.

Contrary to what might be expected, the relationship between third level education and turnout is decidedly weak and is not statistically significant. It is possible that the weakness of this relationship is a function of the age factor

previously mentioned in that the majority of those educated to third level will have done so since university fees were abolished in the 1990s. Therefore, many of those educated to third level belong to the youngest age cohorts, the cohorts negatively associated with turnout. It appears that the strongest relationship between turnout and level of education applies to upper secondary level education whereby a relatively strong, statistically significant correlation exists for both elections. Also, there is a significant negative association between turnout at the 2002 General election and education to primary or lower secondary level. This suggests that lower levels of educational attainment in a given area do affect turnout levels in that area. Those educated to primary or lower secondary level left full time education prior to sitting any significant examinations. It appears that a high percentage of these people in an area in Fingal adversely influence voter turnout levels in that area.

The association between turnout and social class is as detailed in the literature with positive correlation coefficients between turnout and the percentage of people in social classes one and two and negative correlation coefficients between turnout and the percentage of people in social classes five and six.

The correlation analysis indicates that housing tenure is strongly related to turnout variations at both elections. Specifically, there is a positive correlation between owner occupied housing and turnout and negative correlations between turnout and rented housing, flat/bedsit accommodation and local authority/ Fingal County Council rented housing. This reaffirms the relationship between turnout and social class previously mentioned in that housing tenure and social class are implicitly linked. The negative relationship between turnout and the percentage of people in social classes five and six is mirrored in the relationship

between turnout and rented accommodation. Specifically, those in rented accommodation and in particular, in local authority rented accommodation tend to belong to the lower social classes, hence explaining the negative association between turnout and both of these interrelated variables.

While on the topic of housing, length of residence and residential mobility are significantly correlated with turnout. There is a negative association between turnout and a short length of residence, that is, those who are residing in a new housing estate built since 2001. Likewise, there is a negative association between turnout and residential mobility which was computed owing to the percentage of people who had been living at a different address some time during the 12 months prior to the census being held.

There is a significant association between the percentage of households with no car and turnout at both the 2002 General election and the 2004 local elections whereby having no car is negatively associated with turnout levels. The basis behind this is likely to lie in that mobility is limited for those households without the use of a vehicle making attending the polling station a costly activity in terms of travel time. The lack of a vehicle is also a crude wealth indicator in that those households without the use of a car are likely to be lower income households which the literature suggests are prone to voter abstention.

There are significant family cycle associations with turnout in Fingal. There are negative correlation coefficients between turnout and the percentage of pre-family couples (i.e. childless couples), the percentage of families with pre-school age children and the percentage of families with children of early school age. These coefficients become positive for families with adolescent children, families with adult children and families with children who no longer reside in

the family home. There are two possible means of explaining this pattern. Firstly, the time constraints of caring for young children might occupy time that might otherwise be available to partake in the electoral process. Secondly, the pattern might be explained with reference to developing a stake in the community. Socialisation begins for children when they come of school going age. Parents and caregivers are drawn into this socialization process and through interactions with other adults in the community, they begin to become involved in the community and develop a stake in the community. This may also be linked with age in that as one moves through successive age cohorts, one becomes more likely to turn out to vote which corresponds with the ageing of children in the family cycle.

It is interesting to note the association between religion and turnout. There is a positive correlation between the percentage of Catholic people in an area and turnout at both elections. This is significant at the 1% level. Conversely, there is a negative relationship between the percentage of people in other religions and turnout at both elections. This is also significant at the 1% level. Although waning in recent years, religion for long has been a central aspect of community life in Ireland. With Catholicism being the most prominent religion in Ireland, it is possible that those activities which are part of Catholic life, for example, attending mass, help the person to develop a stake in the community. The socialization process associated with being a member of the Catholic religion results in the person acquiring beliefs, skills, values and attitudes conducive to electoral turnout with Buckley (2000) finding a strong link between mass attendance and voter turnout across all age categories. It is likely that the percentage of people in other religions is quite small which may partially explain

the negative correlation with turnout. With a smaller percentage of people, there is less opportunity to partake in the activities which create the attitudes, beliefs and values conducive to voter turnout. Also, it is likely that there are greater percentages of non-nationals than Irish nationals in the other religions, non-nationals who are characterised by negative correlation coefficients with voter turnout.

When conducting spatial analyses, it is important to be aware of the presence of outliers and the resultant effects of such outliers on the data analysis. In relation to Fingal, the small number of cases (i.e. forty-two electoral divisions) increases the possibility of outliers skewing the coefficient values. This necessitated the plotting of various variables on scatterplot diagrams in SPSS in order to identify the existence of outliers in the data. From this it was determined that two electoral divisions were consistent outliers. These were the Airport ED and the Blanchardstown-Abbottstown ED, the two consistently low turnout EDs in Fingal. Due to the nature of the Airport ED, and the fact that it encapsulates Dublin airport which has no fixed population, this electoral division has always been associated with extreme variances in different variables from one census year to the next. The Blanchardstown-Abbottstown electoral division is located on the fringe of the built up Blanchardstown area and is also often associated with deviant trends in comparison to the rest of the county. An example of the contrasting nature of the Blanchardstown-Abbottstown electoral division can be found in a report by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (2006). This report, entitled "Report of the High Level Group on Traveller Issues", states that the Blanchardstown-Abbottstown electoral division contains the second

highest concentration of Travellers in the country with 19.8% of the Traveller population reportedly residing in this electoral division.

Due to the fact that both of these EDs were identified as outliers, it was thought that the inclusion of these in the correlation analysis might have affected the coefficients presented in Table 6.3. Therefore, a number of coefficients were computed again to determine what effect these outliers had on the reported values. The results of this are presented in Table 6.4.

Table 6.4 Bivariate Correlations excluding Outlying Electoral Divisions

	2002GE	2004 LE
Demographic & Cultural Characteristics		
Irish born as % of population	.33*	.28
Traveler	-.49**	-.21**
Catholic	.09	.20
Other religion	-.20	-.36*
Males as % of population	.21	.28
Educational Level		
Non formal primary, lower secondary	-.69**	-.36*
Upper secondary level	.55**	.44**
Third level	.61**	.27
Social Class		
Social Class 1 & 2	.77**	.41**
Social Class 5 & 6	-.64**	-.29
Unemployed, 2002	-.68**	-.39*
Length of Residence		
House built after 1996	-.46**	-.04
Housing Tenure		
Owner Occupied housing	.75**	.52**
Rented housing	-.72**	-.46**
Rented from Local Authority	-.71**	-.40**
Flat/Apartment accommodation	.06	-.08
Transport & Commuting		
No car household	-.62**	-.43**
Leave home to commute to work before 7:30am	-.27	-.01

* Statistically significant at the 5% level

** Statistically significant at the 1% level

The resultant effect of removing the outliers was not particularly striking or noteworthy.

In relation to demographic and cultural characteristics, removing the outliers appeared to reduce the correlation coefficients between turnout and the relevant

variables. This is particularly true in the case of the “Catholic” variable, whereby the correlation coefficients were greatly reduced and the association proved insignificant. The exception to this is the “percentage of males” variable with which turnout appeared to be more correlated. However, this was still an insignificant association.

Once the outliers were removed, there appeared to be an association between turnout and the percentage of those educated to third level in an area. Previously, this association was marked by a low insignificant correlation coefficient. Subsequent to the removal of the outliers however, this association became significant and positive. The previous weak association between turnout and education to third level was suggested to be a function of age, whereby many of those educated to third level belong to the youngest, low turnout, age cohorts. The coefficient for third level education and turnout in Table 6.4 suggests, therefore, that this scenario is more applicable to the two outlying EDs and that in general, a high percentage of people being educated to third level in an area positively influences turnout propensity in that area.

In relation to social class, removing the outliers appears to increase the effects of social class on turnout propensity in a given area in Fingal. This is especially true in the case of social classes five and six.

6.5 REGRESSION ANALYSIS

A regression analysis was conducted between turnout at the 2002 General election and the 2004 local elections and relevant census variables detailing various demographic, socio-economic and socio-structural factors. Regression

analysis attempts to explain turnout variance by developing models based upon a range of predictor variables. In the case of Fingal, there are some limitations in the application of regression analyses in that there are a smaller number of cases than generally recommended. Specifically, there are forty-two cases in Fingal corresponding to the forty-two electoral divisions. The consequence of this is the possibility of unusual cases, otherwise termed outliers, skewing the model. This is addressed later in the section.

The type of regression used was that of a stepwise regression analysis in which the variables to be tested were entered in a stepwise manner and removed if proven to be insignificant. The variables entered into the model are the same variables that were used in the correlation analysis presented in Table 6.3.

Table 6.5 displays the regression model that best fits both the 2002 General election and the 2004 local elections.

Table 6.5: Multiple Stepwise Regression of Turnout for the 2002 General Election and 2004 local Elections

	2002 General Election		2004 local Elections	
	B	T-value	B	T-value
<i>Constant</i>	<i>31.49</i>	<i>9.01</i>	<i>37.65</i>	<i>8.94</i>
Owner Occupied	0.344	8.079	0.213	4.210
Population Change, '02-'06	-0.036	-4.391	-0.026	-2.612
Adjusted R Squared	0.702		0.395	

Two factors relating to housing tenure and population mobility are detailed in the model. The adjusted R squared values illustrate the extent to which these factors account for turnout variance with the largest R squared value corresponding to the 2002 General election. This demonstrates that this regression model accounts for more of the variance in turnout at the 2002 General election than at the 2004 local elections.

In both elections, high percentages of owner occupiers had a positive influence on turnout variation with population change having a negative influence.

As previously discussed during the literature review and addressed during the correlation analysis, owner occupancy is implicitly linked to social class. Owner occupants tend to belong to one of the higher social classes deriving from higher income earnings and the increased ability to purchase a house. Those areas which contain higher percentages of the population in social classes one and two tend to be marked by higher owner occupancy rates and higher turnout levels. Perhaps the reason why social class did not emerge as a predictor variable in this model has to do with the significant effect of social class already being accounted for in the owner occupancy variable.

The negative influence of population change on turnout as suggested by the model in Table 6.5 is associated with residential stability. Areas marked by high rates of residential stability tend to be characterised by stable populations who boast long lengths of residence. Those areas experiencing positive population change are marked by high numbers moving to the area. In keeping with the literature, these new residents have little incentive to vote as they are yet to develop a stake in the community. Conversely, those areas experiencing negative population change are characterised by population mobility, which, according to the literature, negatively influences turnout propensity. Therefore, population change, be it positive or negative, has a negative influence on turnout variance.

Analysed autonomously, it becomes apparent that the regression analysis presented in Table 6.5 does not best explain turnout variance in the respective elections. Rather, individual regression analyses can account for more of the

variance in turnout at each of the elections than the model presented in Table 6.5 can account for.

With respect to the 2002 General election, the regression model presented in Table 6.6 was developed which better explains turnout variance at the 2002 General election;

Table 6.6: Multiple Stepwise Regression of Turnout in the 2002 General Election

	2002 General Election	
	B	T-value
<i>Constant</i>	92.507	4.392
Owner Occupied	0.363	8.483
% of houses built after 2001	-0.131	-4.956
Male	-1.220	-2.725
Adjusted R Squared	0.765	

The adjusted R squared value confirms that the model presented in Table 6.6 is a better explanation of turnout variance in the 2002 General election than that presented in Table 6.5. This model accounts for 76.5% of the variance in turnout as opposed to the 70.2% accounted for by the previous model.

A high percentage of owner occupiers positively influences turnout and the associated T-value indicates that this is the most significant factor in the model. This model also incorporates a demographic variable, that of the percentage of males, and a variable relating to length of residence. The length of residence variable relates to population mobility and the percentage of houses built after 2001. It can be seen from Table 6.6 that this had a negative influence on turnout in the 2002 General election. In keeping with the literature, the short length of residence associated with those whose houses were built after 2001 (i.e. less than 12 months resident), has a negative influence on turnout propensity (Gimpel, 1999; Leighley and Vedlita, 1999). This has to do with developing a stake in the community and becoming concerned about issues affecting the community. It is

likely that a short length of residence does not accommodate the development of such concerns. Also apparent from the regression model presented in Table 6.6 is the negative influence that a high percentage of males in a given area had on turnout in the 2002 General election. In urban areas, it is often found that there is a negative association between males and turnout owing to the tendency for there to be a higher percentage of males in urban working class areas. It is possible that the negative association found in the regression model is rooted in social class. It is possible that the owner occupier males already accounted for in the stepwise regression model belong to the higher social classes and are those who are likely voters. It is probable therefore, that once these owner occupier males are controlled for, the remainder of the males belong to the lower social classes and are the likely non-voters, which accounts for the negative influence that males appeared to have on general election turnout in 2002.

In relation to the 2004 local elections, a better explanatory model of turnout variance than that in Table 6.5 is presented in Table 6.7.

Table 6.7: Multiple Stepwise Regression of Turnout in the 2004 local Elections

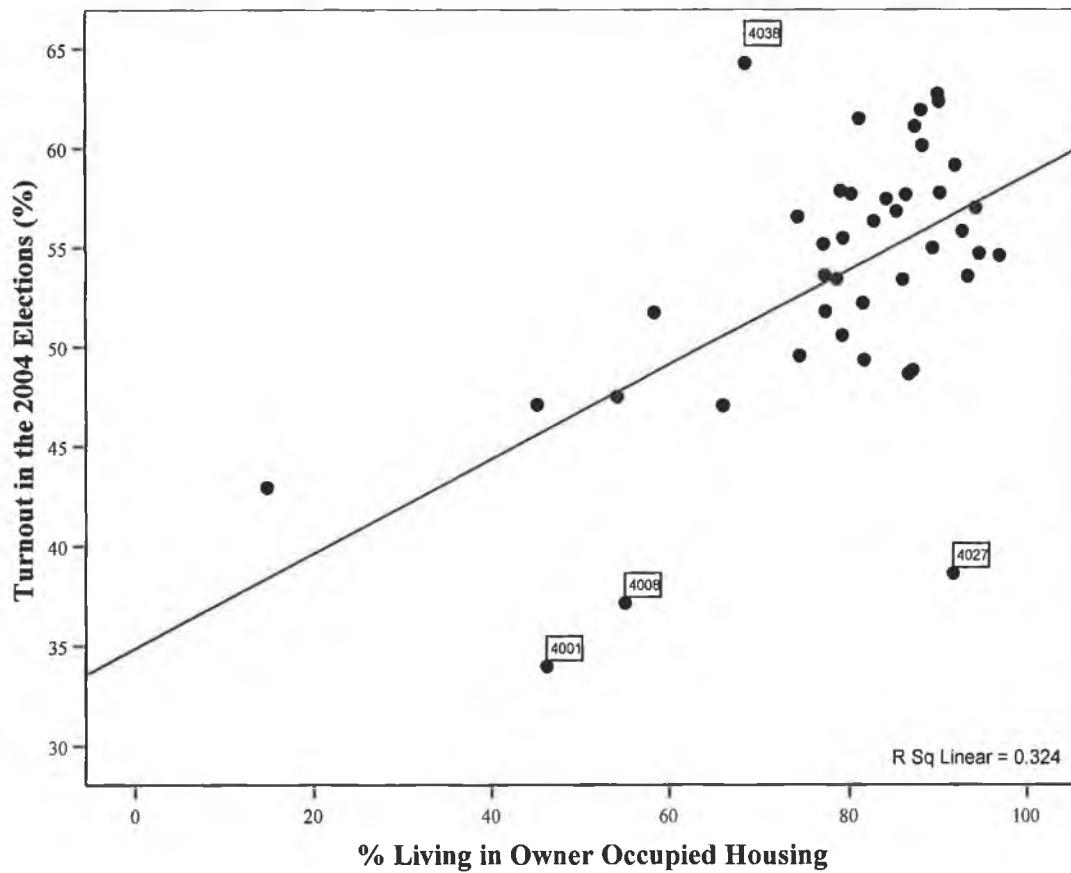
	2004 local Elections	
	B	T-value
<i>Constant</i>	46.349	8.759
Owner Occupied	0.423	4.381
Population Change, '02-'06	-0.042	-3.697
Married	-0.646	-2.476
Adjusted R Squared	0.466	

Table 6.7 illustrates the three variables that best explains turnout variation in the 2004 local elections based on stepwise regression. It appears that a high percentage of owner occupiers positively influences voter turnout. The other two variables in this model relate to demographics and population mobility. There is a negative influence on turnout in relation to population change variable.

However, it also appears that a high percentage of married people in a given area negatively influences turnout. This is not in keeping with the literature although there are two possible reasons behind this. Firstly, the regression analysis is an aggregate study of turnout and perhaps, unlike individual level investigations which tend to determine the state of being married as being a positive influence on turnout propensity (Crewe, Fox and Alt, 1992), the relationship does not exist at the aggregate level. However, this would not explain the positive correlation between the percentage of married people in an area and turnout presented in Table 6.5. The reason is therefore likely to lie in that once the married variable is introduced to the model, married owner occupiers are already being controlled for. This probably accounts for much of the positive association between turnout and the married population with a large portion of married people being owner occupiers. Once these are controlled for, it is possible that the residual married population is not typical of married people encapsulating married apartment dwellers, renters or recent movers, hence resulting in a negative influence of a high percentage of married people on turnout.

Although the regression model presented in Table 6.7 explains more of the turnout variance than the model in Table 6.5, the adjusted R-Square value is still quite low at 0.466. It was thought that the low adjusted R-Squared value might have been due to outlying electoral divisions which were skewing the model and causing the low value. It was decided to produce a scatterplot between the owner occupied variable and turnout at the 2002 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections to determine whether this was the case. The resultant scatterplot is presented in Figure 6.4 below.

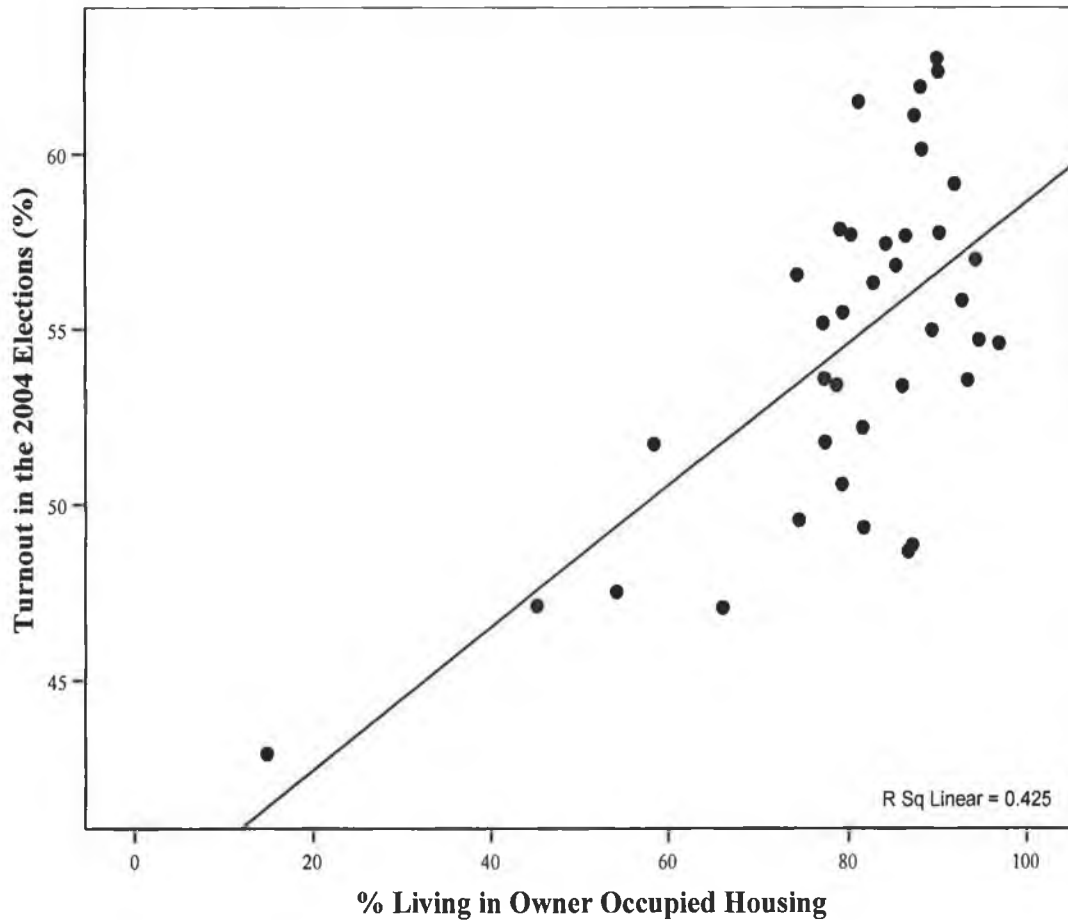
Figure 6.4: Owner Occupancy and Voter Turnout



As can be seen from Figure 6.4, four outliers were identified in the data. These are labeled by their ED numbers and include the Airport ED (4001), Blanchardstown-Abbottstown (4008), Lucan North (4027) and Swords-Lissenhall (4038). These EDs were deleted from the data and another scatterplot was drawn excluding the outliers. This scatterplot is presented in Figure 6.3.

As can be seen by Figure 6.5, the R-Squared value increased once the outliers were excluded from the analysis. Therefore, it was decided to conduct another regression analysis excluding the outlying EDs.

Figure 6.5: Owner Occupancy and Voter Turnout excluding Outliers



It was thought that this would increase the adjusted R-Square value of the model in Table 6.7. However, when the regression analysis was complete, it became apparent that this was not the case with the new R-Squared value being just .41. It was determined therefore, that the regression model presented in Table 6.7 best explains turnout variance at the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections.

6.6 CONCLUSION

As previously noted, it is important to study turnout and the factors which influence turnout propensity holistically. This chapter was the first step in this process with voter turnout being studied in two fashions. Firstly, an account of

voter turnout levels in Ireland and in Fingal was given which was followed by an aggregate level analysis of the factors which appear to influence turnout propensity in Fingal.

It was determined that there is a reoccurring spatial pattern to turnout in Fingal with the geographical pattern of turnout at the 2002 General election and the 2004 local elections very much resembling one another.

This was reiterated by the aggregate level analysis which involved correlation and regression analyses based on marked register data and relevant census variables. These analyses attempted to identify those factors which influence turnout propensity at the aggregate level. From the correlation analysis it was determined that nationality, marital status, age, education and a range of other socio-structural factors are positively correlated with turnout at the aggregate level. Much of the findings of the correlation analysis reiterated findings from previous research, as was detailed during the discussion of the correlation coefficients. A separate correlation analysis was conducted excluding two EDs (the Airport ED and Blanchardstown-Abbottstown) which were proved to be outliers when some of the variables were plotted on scatterplot diagrams. This had the effect of reducing many of the correlation coefficients. There were some exceptions to this however. Specifically, the effect of third level education on turnout propensity proved to be significant once the outliers were removed. Also, there appeared to be an increased influence of social class on turnout propensity, particularly in relation to social classes five and six, while the coefficient relating to the percentage of males in an area increased but was still insignificant.

The regression analysis attempted to provide models of explanatory factors which account for turnout variance at the 2002 General election and at the 2004

local elections. In relation to the 2002 General election, it was found that three variables best explain turnout variance. These variables were owner occupied housing tenure, the percentage of houses built after 2001 and the percentage of males in an area. The owner occupied variable had a positive influence on turnout variance while the other two variables adversely influenced turnout variation. In relation to the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections, the owner occupied variable also proved to be a positive influence on turnout propensity in the related regression model. The other two variables in this case were those of population change and the percentage of married people in an area. Both of these variables were deemed to have a negative influence on turnout variation at this election.

The chapter has provided a context from which to approach the study of individual level turnout propensity. Now that voter turnout levels and the factors influencing aggregate voter turnout propensity have been identified and addressed, the focus of the thesis will turn to those factors which affect turnout propensity at the individual level, initially concentrating on the factors hypothesized in chapter two.

CHAPTER 7

INFLUENCES ON TURNOUT IN FINGAL

This chapter will discuss some of the findings of the questionnaire survey in relation to the different influences that appear to exist on turnout in Fingal. It will begin by profiling the survey respondents in terms of sex, age, marital status, occupation, the age at which full time education ceased and residential stability. It will then continue to test whether individual level demographic and socio-economic influences along with some other influences impact on turnout in Fingal, as hypothesised by H₁, H₂ and H₃ in Chapter 2. The figures presented in this chapter are based upon a total of 684 completed surveys.

7.1 PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Table 7.1 displays the percentages of respondents in each of the sex, age and marital status categories and breaks these figures down in terms of electoral area. The final column in the table represents figures for the county as a whole taken from Census 2006 figures released by the Central Statistics Office (CSO).

Table 7.1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents by Electoral Area

	TOTAL	SW	MAL	BAL	HOW	MUL	CAS	CSO
<u>SEX</u>								
Male	45.0	41.4	47.4	35.8	55.7	37.7	50.0	49.7
Female	55.0	58.6	52.6	64.2	44.3	62.3	50.0	50.3
<u>AGE</u>								
18-24	5.6	4.6*	0.6*	20.8	3.1*	7.5	6.3*	11.0
25-34	15.3	17.2	9.9	18.9	5.2	28.3	10.7	22.0
35-44	26.9	39.1	34.5	18.9	12.4	24.5	25.0	15.7
45-54	21.3	20.7	16.4	20.8	18.6	23.9	28.6	11.4
55-64	17.5	11.5	22.2	11.3	27.8	11.3	17.9	8.0
65+	13.4	6.9	16.4	9.4	33.0	4.4	11.6	6.0
<u>MARITAL STATUS</u>								
Single	20.4	22.1	11.1	26.4	16.5	31.0	18.8	56.6
Married	66.4	61.6	76.6	58.5	69.1	55.7	70.5	37.0

* These categories contain small numbers; SW-3, MAL-1, HOW-3, CAS-7

As can be seen from Table 7.1, the sample consisted of more females than males with 55% of completed surveys coming from female respondents. On an electoral area basis, the percentage of males was greater than the percentage of females only in the Howth electoral area. There appears to be less of a difference in the percentages of male and female respondents in the electoral areas with a greater proportion of the population in social classes one and two than in the other electoral areas. In converse, the Balbriggan and Mulhuddart electoral areas, the two electoral areas with a greater proportion of the population in social classes five and six, are characterised by a much greater discrepancy between the percentages of female to male respondents with a ratio of approximately 2:1. The reason for this may stem from the survey distribution method and the fact that some surveys in these two electoral areas were distributed via local community groups. Specifically, 22.6% of the Balbriggan sample is comprised of community group respondents with 35.8% of the Mulhuddart sample being community group respondents. The characteristics of the community group sample as distinct from the postal sample are displayed in Table 7.2 below.

In total, 74 surveys were completed by community group respondents which accounted for 10.8% of the total number of surveys returned (684). As can be seen from Table 7.2, the community group sample is comprised of a much higher proportion of females to males. The reason for this may be that community groups tend to be dominated by female participation. The higher percentages of females to males in the Balbriggan and Mulhuddart electoral areas therefore, may in part be accounted for by the sex breakdown of respondents from the community group sample.

Table 7.2: Characteristics of the Community Group and Postal Sample

	COMM. GRP	POSTAL
SEX		
Male	27.3	48.1
Female	72.7	51.9
AGE		
18-24	11.1	4.7
25-34	28.3	13.1
35-44	24.2	27.2
45-54	21.2	21.4
55-64	14.1	18.1
65+	1.0	15.5
MARITAL STATUS		
Single	30.3	18.6
Married	46.5	69.5

The age breakdown of the sample differs from that of the county as a whole, as represented by the figures in the CSO column in Table 7.1. It appears that the sample is comprised of an older population than the county as a whole, with a greater proportion of respondents falling into the older age cohorts than is true for the county. The topic of the questionnaire survey lends itself to this age distribution with the general argument being that those in younger cohorts are more prone to apathy than those in older cohorts (Weldon, 2007; Buckley, 2000). As suggested by the literature, the lower percentages in the younger cohorts may be attributed to a general lack of interest in voting affairs amongst this age group, hence making them less likely to partake in a study such as this and skewing the age distribution towards older cohorts. Those in the youngest cohorts are also more mobile than older cohorts and hence, less easy to contact.

It also appears that the more established an electoral area is considered to be, the smaller the percentages of respondents are in the youngest age cohorts. For instance, only 8.3% of Howth respondents and 10.5% of Malahide respondents are aged less than 34 years. By contrast, 35.8% of Mulhuddart respondents and 39.7% of Balbriggan respondents are aged less than 34 years. This age

breakdown is not a function of the community group sample. When the figures for just the postal sample were studied, it became apparent that that postal respondents from Mulhuddart and Balbriggan are also likely to belong to the younger cohorts with 29.4% aged under 35 years in Mulhuddart and 36.6% aged under 35 years in Balbriggan.

The age breakdown of respondents has repercussions in the marital status categories. As can be seen in Table 7.1, there are much higher percentages of respondents of “single” status in the Mulhuddart and Balbriggan electoral areas in comparison to the other electoral areas. Specifically, 31% of respondents from the Mulhuddart electoral area and 26.4% of respondents from the Balbriggan electoral area stated their marital status as “single”.

The trends identified in the age and marital status of respondents from the different electoral areas might be explained by reference to the fact that three of the local electoral areas in Fingal are fast-growing areas. As a result, these electoral areas (Balbriggan, Mulhuddart and Swords) are likely to encapsulate higher numbers of single people and people in younger age cohorts, as appears to be the case with the survey sample.

Table 7.3 displays the age at which full time education ceased for all respondents and classifies this by electoral area also.

Table 7.3: Age at which Full Time Education Ceased by Electoral Area

	TOTAL	SW	MAL	BAL	HOW	MUL	CAS
<15	11.6	7.2	7.1	16.3	12.4	23.1	3.7
16-20	52.9	71.1	56.2	49.0	45.4	46.9	50.0
21-25	30.3	18.1	30.8	30.6	36.1	24.5	41.7
26+	5.3	3.6	6.0	4.0	6.1	5.4	4.6

As would be expected, the majority of respondents completed their full time education between the ages of 16 and 20 years. This suggests that the majority of

respondents have been educated to Leaving Certificate level what with the average age for sitting the Leaving Certificate exams lying between 17 and 19 years.

A high percentage of respondents did not complete full time education until their early twenties with 30.3% stating that they did not cease full time education until between the ages of 21 and 25 years. This suggests that quite a number of respondents have higher education qualifications or that they have partaken in adult education courses, as further underpinned by statistics for the 26+ grouping.

In contrast, over 11% of respondents left full time education at age 15 or under suggesting that these people left school either just after sitting the Junior/Inter Certificate examinations or sometime before. This may be a trend isolated to those in the older age cohorts, when it was more common to leave school at an early age than nowadays. However, this trend may also be indicative of the contrasting nature of Fingal itself in terms of social background.

Based on the socio-economic backgrounds of the electoral areas as detailed in chapter four, one would expect a higher percentage of early school leavers to be concentrated in the Mulhuddart and Balbriggan electoral areas, and this is indeed the case. 23.1% of respondents from the Mulhuddart electoral area left full time education at or before the age of fifteen years. In the Balbriggan electoral area, this figure stands at 16.3%. However, this is not the only explanation for the higher percentages in this category in these electoral areas. As opposed to the other characteristics of the sample examined, this is one trend that appears to be influenced by the community group sample. There are much higher percentages of respondents from the community group sample who reported that they left

school before fifteen years of age when compared with the postal samples from these two electoral areas. Specifically, 60% of the community group sample from the Balbriggan EA and 46% of the community group sample from the Mulhuddart EA reported that they left school before fifteen years of age. This compares with just 5% and 11.3% of the postal samples from these respective electoral areas. Quite a high percentage of respondents from the Howth electoral area (12.4%) also left school at or before 15 years of age. However as previously mentioned, if this is thought of in terms of the age breakdown of respondents from the Howth electoral area, it is probable that this high percentage of early school leavers applies to those in the older age cohorts when it was common to leave full time education at an early age.

Quite high percentages of respondents from all electoral areas did not complete full time education until between the ages of 16 to 20 years, suggesting that the majority of respondents have completed Leaving Certificate examinations along with some higher education qualifications.

There was much variation in the stated occupations of survey respondents. Quite a high percentage of respondents stated being either “retired” or “stay-at-home parents/spouses”. This may be attributed to the nature of the research in that those who are retired or stay-at home parents/spouses would naturally have more “leisure” time available in which to complete the postal questionnaire. The geographical distribution of those undertaking clerical/administrative work, of those in supervisory, managerial and consultancy positions, of those in the medical profession, of those in public sector employment, of those in education, of those in the finance sector and of those who are full time students was more or less uniform across the six electoral areas. Some other listed occupations

included childcare, retail/sales, tradesmen, catering, engineering, IT, airport workers and self-employed workers. There were also a number of respondents who stated their occupation as “unemployed”. There were lesser percentages of respondents who listed their occupation as being in construction, tourism, transport, literature (as both writers and other literature related businesses), as working in a library and as working as part of the Community Employment (CE) Scheme. What is conclusive from this analysis is that survey respondents come from an amalgamation of occupational backgrounds from low income occupations to high income professions.

The most common occupation of respondents from the Swords electoral area was that of clerical/administrative work with 18.4% of respondents stating this as their occupation. The second most commonly stated occupation was that of public sector employee. This was unsurprising given that County Hall, Fingal County Council’s headquarters are located in Swords village and so the propensity of employment in this public sector establishment is quite high for those living in the surrounding areas that comprise the Swords electoral area. There were also quite a high percentage of respondents in managerial/consultancy posts at 9.2%. Another 9.2% of respondents stated their occupation as stay-at-home parents/spouses.

The most commonly stated occupation of those in the Malahide electoral area was that of “retired” with 19.6% of respondents falling into this category. From this it can be inferred that the area is well established in nature with the high percentage of retired respondents very much in keeping with the age breakdown displayed in Table 6.1. The second most commonly stated occupation was that of stay-at-home parent/spouse at 18.4% which suggests that there may be a strong

community base to the Malahide electoral area with this group being likely to engage in community affairs. Following this, 13.5% of respondents stated their occupation as being managerial/consultancy in nature and this is indicative of the fact that the Malahide electoral is considered to be of a higher socio-economic standing than some of the other electoral areas that comprise Fingal.

13.5% of respondents from the Balbriggan electoral area stated their occupation as “student”. This also reflects the age breakdown presented in Table 7.1. This was followed by equal percentages (11.5%) of retirees, stay-at-home parents/housewives and those working in the field of education. Just under 10% of respondents stated their occupation as being clerical/administrative in nature.

Similar to the Malahide electoral area, 35.4% of respondents from the Howth electoral area stated their occupation as “retired” with 14.6% stating their occupation as stay-at-home parent/spouse and 10.4% upholding managerial/consultancy posts in the workplace. The next two most commonly stated occupations were those of “finance” and “public sector employee”. The frequency of these occupational categories among respondents from the Howth electoral area, reinforce the assertion that the Howth electoral area is very much an upper social class area.

In the Mulhuddart electoral area, 15.4% of respondents stated their occupation as being clerical/administrative in nature. The second most stated occupation amongst respondents from this electoral area was that of stay-at-home parent/spouse with 14.1% stating this as their occupation. 9.4% of respondents stated their occupation as “student” with 4.7% of respondents being unemployed and 2.7% retired. An occupational breakdown to this effect is what would be expected from an area such as the Mulhuddart electoral area.

17.9% of respondents from the Castleknock electoral area stated their occupation as “retired” with 16% being stay-at-home parents/spouses. 9.4% work in the medical profession with the same percentage upholding managerial/consultancy roles in the workplace. 7.5% stated that they were public sector employees with 6.6% engaging in clerical/administrative work. The occupational frequencies above corroborate the fact that the Castleknock electoral area is considered to be an area of a high socio-economic standing and are of the same degree as the occupational groups in the Malahide and Howth electoral areas.

Table 7.4 displays data relating to residential stability, collated from the number of years that respondents have been living at their present addresses.

Table 7.4: Number of Years at Present Address by Electoral Area

	TOTAL	SW	MAL	BAL	HOW	MUL	CAS
<5 YEARS	24.2	35.6	24.7	28.8	11.3	29.3	16.5
6-10 YEARS	14.6	14.9	17.1	23.1	8.20	13.4	13.6
11-20 YEARS	27.1	21.8	28.8	15.4	27.8	28.6	31.0
20+ YEARS	34.1	27.5	29.4	32.7	52.6	28.6	39.0

Of those surveyed, 24.2% had been living at their present address for five years or less. This is indicative of the expansion of the county in recent years which has seen much residential development, particularly in northern and western parts of the county. In contrast, 34.1% of respondents had been living at their present address for more than twenty years which is suggestive of the well established nature of some parts of the county.

The figures in Table 7.4 indicate the variability of residential stability across the county. It appears that there are considerably fewer respondents in the Howth and Castleknock electoral areas that have been living at their present addresses for less than five years in comparison to the other electoral areas. Conversely, the

percentage of respondents in these two electoral areas that have been resident at their present address for more than twenty years is greater than that in other electoral areas. This suggests that the Howth and Castleknock electoral areas are marked by high residential stability and is in keeping with the contention that these are well established areas.

The Mulhuddart, Swords and Balbriggan electoral areas are characterised by a considerable degree of residential mobility as indicated by the high percentage of respondents in these areas who have been living at their present addresses for less than five years. The Swords and Mulhuddart electoral areas also appear to be the least residentially stable of the six local electoral areas in Fingal, as indicated by the lower percentages of respondents resident for more than twenty years.

7.2 EXPLORING THE HYPOTHESES

7.2.1 Demographic Factors

The demographic factors of sex, age and marital status were hypothesized in H_1 as being associated with turnout variation in Fingal. To recapitulate on this hypothesis, H_1 stated the following;

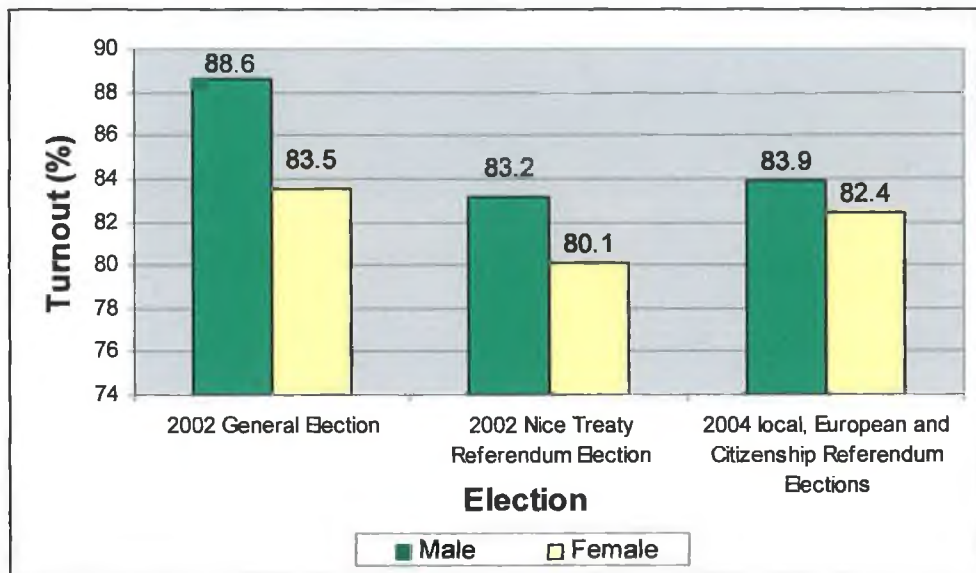
H_1 : There is an association between demographic variables (i.e. sex, age and marital status) and turnout variation within the county of Fingal.

Each of these factors will be explored in turn in the following sections.

7.2.1.1 Sex

Figure 7.1 displays self-reported turnout levels classified by sex for the 2002 General election, the 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum election and the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections.

Figure 7.1 Self-Reported Turnout Classified by Sex



As can be seen, a higher percentage of males to females reported turning out to vote in each of the three elections. While this is a constant finding across the three elections, when it is examined with respect to electoral area, there appears to be a contrast in the turnout rates of males and females. This is displayed by Table 7.5.

The most obvious feature illustrated by Table 7.5 is the lower turnout rates for both sexes in the Mulhuddart and Balbriggan electoral areas in comparison to the other four electoral areas. At closer examination, it appears that there are turnout differences between the sexes in both of these electoral areas also.

Table 7.5: Male and Female Turnouts by Electoral Area

	SW	MAL	BAL	HOW	MUL	CAS
MALE TURNOUT						
2002 GENERAL ELECTION	91.7	93.7	73.1	93.3	71.9	94.4
2002 NICE TREATY REF.	83.3	81.0	68.4	96.2	71.9	90.7
2004 LOCAL, EURO. & CITIZEN REF.	88.9	83.5	68.4	94.3	70.2	90.7
FEMALE TURNOUT						
2002 GENERAL ELECTION	85.7	85.4	80.6	85.7	76.5	90.7
2002 NICE TREATY REF.	72.1	82.6	70.0	88.1	74.7	90.7
2004 LOCAL, EURO & CITIZEN REF.	81.6	84.7	76.7	90.5	73.9	90.7

Specifically, in each of the three elections studied, higher percentages of females to males turned out to vote. In contrast, higher percentages of males to females turned out to vote in the Swords and Howth electoral areas in all three elections. The smallest discrepancy between male and female turnout rates can be found in the Castleknock electoral area where the same percentage of males and females turned out to vote in two of the three featured elections. Self-reported turnout rates for both sexes in this electoral area were over 90%.

The trend in the turnout rates of males and females in the Balbriggan and Mulhuddart electoral areas mentioned above might be partly attributable to the fact that some of the completed surveys from these electoral areas came from community groups. Table 7.6 displays turnout rates according to sex for respondents from the community group sample.

This table illustrates that self-reported turnout rates for both sexes in the community group sample were quite low for each of the elections.

Table 7.6: Male and Female Turnouts in the Community Group Sample

	TURNOUT
MALE TURNOUT	
2002 GENERAL ELECTION	70.6
2002 NICE TREATY REF.	52.9
2004 LOCAL, EURO. & CITIZEN REF.	58.8
FEMALE TURNOUT	
2002 GENERAL ELECTION	72.0
2002 NICE TREATY REF.	70.2
2004 LOCAL, EURO & CITIZEN REF.	61.9

In all three cases, turnout levels were higher for females than for males. However, turnouts amongst the community group sample are similar to the turnout rates in the Balbriggan and Mulhuddart electoral areas presented in Table 7.5. When the figures for the postal sample were compared with the community group sample in both of these electoral areas, it was found that turnouts were slightly higher amongst the postal respondents. However, with the exception of female turnout rates in the Balbriggan electoral area, the turnout rates were similar to those listed in Table 7.5. This suggests that with the exception noted above, the community group surveys do not significantly skew the male and female turnout rates in these electoral areas.

Although there are identifiable trends in the relationship between sex and turnout, the association between the two variables is not statistically significant with the difference in the percentages of males and females who turned out to vote varying little within electoral areas themselves.

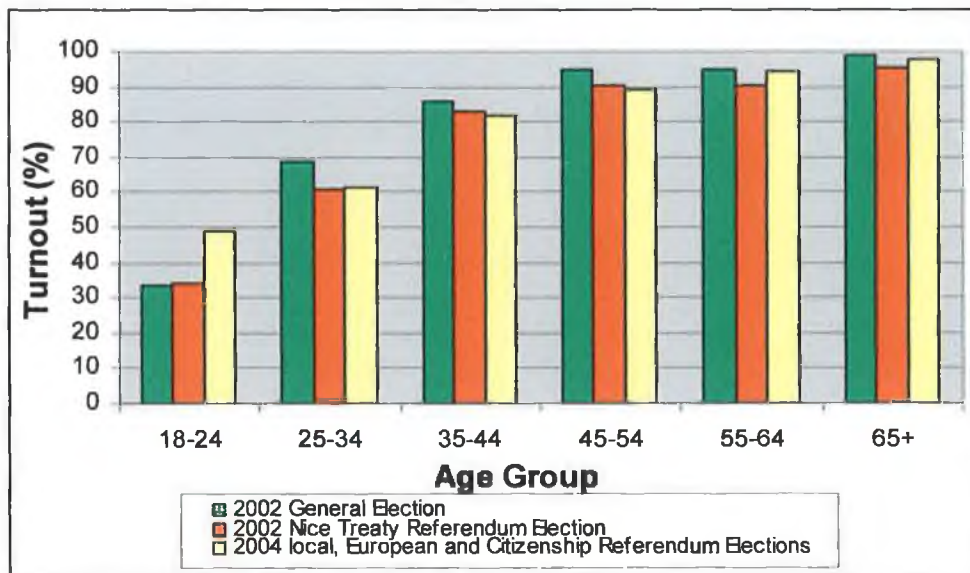
7.2.1.2 Age

As illustrated by Figure 7.2, voter turnout is lowest in the youngest age cohort (18-24 years) and increases steadily through successive age groups. This is a constant finding across the three elections.

Just 33.3% of respondents aged between 18 and 24 years old turned out to vote at the 2002 General election. A similarly low figure turned out to vote at the 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum election (34.3%) while 48.6% of 18-24 year olds reported turning out to vote at the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections. Turnout in the 25-34 years age group is in the 60 to 70

percentile range for each of the three elections. In every other age cohort, self-reported turnout is upwards of 80% for each election. This trend is in keeping with the literature which suggests the likelihood of turnout propensity increasing as one moves through successive age cohorts.

Figure 7.2: Turnout Classified by Age Group



It is interesting to note that for every age group apart from the 18-24 year old grouping, turnout was highest in the 2002 General election which is in keeping with the first order – second order election model. However, with respect to the 18-24 year old cohort, turnout was lowest at the 2002 General election and highest at the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections. As discussed in chapter four, there were a number of extenuating factors surrounding the 2004 elections which might explain this occurrence. Firstly, the local elections were very much dominated by the controversial environmental levy which was introduced in the year prior to the local elections taking place. This may have had the effect of mobilising the younger members of the electorate who are often thought to be radical in disposition and influenced by such protest behaviour. The second mobilising factor which might explain the

higher voter turnout rate amongst 18-24 years olds in the 2004 elections is that of the Citizenship Referendum itself. The referendum was considered to be highly contentious in nature and hence received much media attention which might have had the effect of mobilising the otherwise disinterested young electorate. Another possible explanatory factor which might account for the higher turnout amongst this age group in the 2004 elections is that many of those in the younger part of the 18-24 age group would not have been old enough to vote in the earlier elections held in 2002. These people would however, have been of voting age in 2004 boosting turnout amongst this age group in the 2004 elections and lowering turnout rates in the two elections held in 2002.

Table 7.7 displays turnout rates for each age group in each of the three elections according to electoral area.

Table 7.7: Voter Turnout by Age Group in each Electoral Area

	SW	MAL	BAL	HOW	MUL	CAS
18-24						
2002 GENERAL ELECTION	75.0	0*	10.0	50.0*	30.8	50.0
2002 NICE TREATY REF.	75.0	100*	10.0	0*	38.5	33.3
2004 LOCAL, EURO. & CITIZEN REF.	75.0	100*	30.0	100*	38.5	66.7
25-34						
2002 GENERAL ELECTION	71.6	64.7	90.0	80.0	60.5	81.8
2002 NICE TREATY REF.	50.0	41.2	70.0	80.0	61.9	81.8
2004 LOCAL, EURO. & CITIZEN REF.	57.1	58.8	80.0	60.0	53.8	81.8
35-44						
2002 GENERAL ELECTION	88.2	86.0	88.9	81.9	81.6	88.5
2002 NICE TREATY REF.	82.4	78.9	100	90.9	78.4	88.5
2004 LOCAL, EURO. & CITIZEN REF.	88.2	76.8	87.5	87.8	80.0	85.2
45-54						
2002 GENERAL ELECTION	94.1	96.4	100	94.4	89.5	100
2002 NICE TREATY REF.	76.5	92.6	100	94.4	89.5	100
2004 LOCAL, EURO. & CITIZEN REF.	88.2	92.6	90.0	88.9	81.6	96.9
55-64						
2002 GENERAL ELECTION	100	94.7	100	92.9	88.2	100
2002 NICE TREATY REF.	88.9	92.1	50.0	92.9	93.8	95.0
2004 LOCAL, EURO. & CITIZEN REF.	100	94.7	66.7	96.4	94.1	95.0
65+						
2002 GENERAL ELECTION	100	100	100	96.9	100	100
2002 NICE TREATY REF.	100	88.0	100	96.9	100	100
2004 LOCAL, EURO. & CITIZEN REF.	100	92.0	100	100	100	100

* These categories contain small numbers

In keeping with the county trend, the 18-24 age group display consistently lower turnouts than the other age cohorts. This is true for most of the electoral areas. The turnout figures for this age group in the Malahide and to a lesser extent, in the Howth electoral areas deviate from this trend, although this may be attributable to the small numbers that comprise the 18-24 age group in these electoral areas.

The general trend identified in the county, that of a positive relationship between turnout and age whereby turnout increases with increasing age, applies to some extent in all of the electoral areas. It is especially valid in the case of the Mulhuddart electoral area where turnout increases noticeably as one moves through successive age cohorts.

The 18-24 age cohort in the Mulhuddart electoral area is marked by much lower turnout rates than in other electoral areas. The same age cohort in the Castleknock electoral area displays much lower turnout rates than each of the other age cohorts with turnout in the following age cohort (25-34 years) being in the eighty percentile range. The 25-34 age group is also marked by quite high turnout rates in the case of the Howth electoral area.

The largest discrepancy between the age cohorts occurs in the Balbriggan electoral area where turnouts for the youngest age grouping are considerably lower than for the other age cohorts. This is in keeping with the contentions of the literature in relation to age and turnout as previously noted.

Also in keeping with the trend identified for the county, turnout in the 18-24 age cohort was highest in the case of the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections across every electoral area. In almost every other instance,

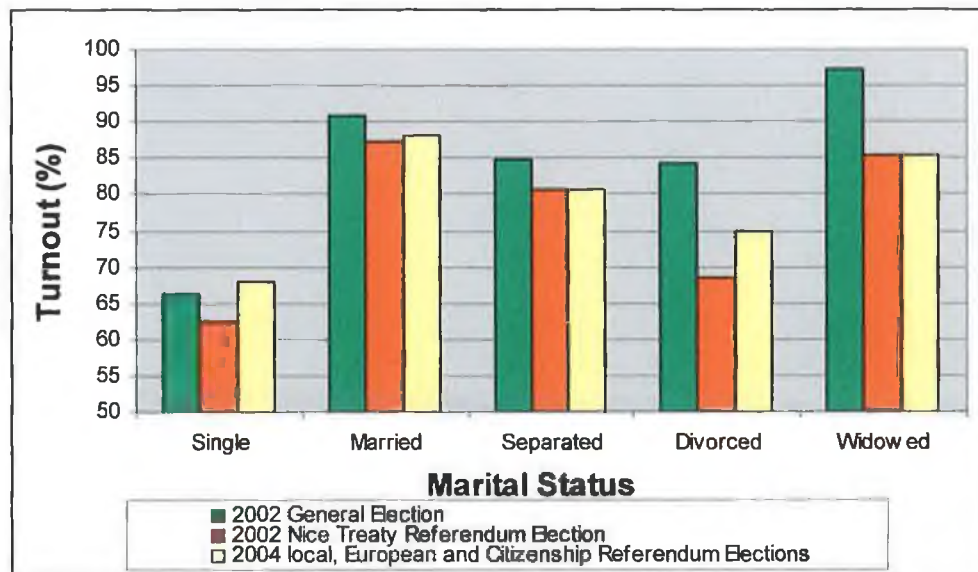
turnout in the other age cohorts was highest in relation to the 2002 General election.

The association between age and turnout is statistically significant at the 1% level for every election.

7.2.1.3 Marital Status

Figure 7.3 illustrates turnout rates in Fingal classified by marital status.

Figure 7.3: Voter Turnout Classified by Marital Status



As can be seen from Figure 7.3, the percentage of married respondents who turned out to vote was consistently high. In the 2002 General election, 90.9% of married respondents reported that they turned out to vote. In the 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum election, this figure stood at 87.4% and in the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections, 88% of married respondents turned out to vote on Election Day.

In contrast, the percentage of single respondents who turned out to vote is consistently lower than the percentage of married respondents. Specifically, only

66.2% of single respondents turned out to vote at the 2002 General election. This fell to 62.3% in the case of the 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum election but rose to 67.9% in the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections. This is in keeping with the relationship between age and turnout which displays the highest turnout rates for the youngest age cohort in the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections.

There are notable differences in the turnout rates of the different marital status categories on an electoral area basis, as illustrated by Table 7.8.

Table 7.8: Voter Turnout by Marital Status in each Electoral Area

	SW	MAL	BAL	HOW	MUL	CAS
<u>SINGLE</u>						
2002 GENERAL ELECTION	83.3	84.2	57.1	78.6	45.8	80.0
2002 NICE TREATY REF.	64.7	68.4	57.1	76.9	51.1	75.0
2004 LOCAL, EURO. & CITIZEN REF.	77.8	84.2	71.4	76.9	51.1	75.0
<u>MARRIED</u>						
2002 GENERAL ELECTION	88.5	89.1	86.2	94.0	90.9	94.7
2002 NICE TREATY REF.	80.8	84.1	72.4	95.5	88.5	94.7
2004 LOCAL, EURO. & CITIZEN REF.	86.5	84.8	72.4	95.5	86.7	94.7

* These categories contain small numbers

As discussed in chapter two, the literature suggests that turnout rates are lower amongst single members of the electorate when compared with turnout figures for married electors.

An examination of the figures for these two categories in Table 7.8 validates this contention. It is particularly true in the case of the Balbriggan and Mulhuddart electoral areas where considerably less percentages of single respondents turned out to vote when compared with turnout rates for married respondents. In relation to the 2002 General election, for example, only 45.8% of single respondents in the Mulhuddart electoral area and 57.1% of single respondents in the Balbriggan electoral area turned out to vote. This compares with turnout rates of 90.9% and 86.2% for married respondents in the Mulhuddart and Balbriggan electoral areas

respectively. This is constant across both the community group samples and the postal samples from these electoral areas. The difference in turnout rates between single and married respondents is less pronounced in the other electoral areas.

The relationship between turnout and marital status is statistically significant at the 1% level in relation to turnout at the 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum election and at the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections. This significant relationship does not hold in relation to the 2002 General election however. This may have to do with the first order-second order election model. This model states that turnout in first order elections, such as general elections, will be higher than turnout in second order elections, such as local elections or referendum elections. It suggests that the reason for higher turnouts in first order elections is due to the assumed importance of these elections in the eyes of the elector. Specifically, first order elections such as general elections are thought to be regarded as important by electors. This results in higher turnout rates across all groups. This might account for why high turnout rates were reported across all of the marital status categories in relation to the 2002 General election in comparison to the other two second order elections.

7.2.2 Socio-Structural Factors

A number of socio-economic and socio-structural factors were hypothesised in H₂ as being associated with voter turnout levels. Specifically, H₂ stated the following;

H₂: There is an association between socio-structural variables and voter turnout in Fingal, whereby residential stability and a high level of socio-economic resources is correlated with higher turnout levels.

The socio-economic variables of education and occupation, along with the factor of residential stability will be discussed in turn in the following sections.

7.2.2.1 Education

Table 7.9: Voter Turnout Classified by the Age at which Full Time Education Ceased

	2002 GEN.	2002 NICE	2004 ELECTIONS
<15	81.9	78.3	79.7
16-20	88.9	84.5	86.1
21+	85.0	80.0	81.0

Table 7.9 displays turnout rates for Fingal in accordance to the age at which full time education ceased. As can be seen, turnout rates vary little from one election to the next regardless of the age at which full time education ceased. This breakdown in terms of electoral area is presented in Table 7.10 below.

Table 7.10: Voter Turnout Classified by the Age at which Full Time Education Ceased in each Electoral Area

	SW	MAL	BAL	HOW	MUL	CAS
< 15						
2002 GENERAL ELECTION	100*	100	33.3*	83.3	78.8	100*
2002 NICE TREATY REF.	100*	91.7	40.0	83.3	71.0	100*
2004 LOCAL, EURO. & CITIZEN REF.	100*	91.7	40.0	100	65.4	100*
16-20						
2002 GENERAL ELECTION	89.8	91.5	91.3	97.7	72.5	96.1
2002 NICE TREATY REF.	77.6	85.7	78.3	100	72.5	96.1
2004 LOCAL, EURO. & CITIZEN REF.	84.7	85.6	82.6	95.3	75.4	96.2
21+						
2002 GENERAL ELECTION	82.3	85.0	76.4	87.5	81.0	90.0
2002 NICE TREATY REF.	70.5	75.0	64.7	87.5	80.5	88.0
2004 LOCAL, EURO. & CITIZEN REF.	82.3	80.0	76.4	87.5	74.4	83.7

* These categories contain small numbers (<10 respondents)

The relationship between turnout and the age at which full time education ceased appears to be somewhat random with no notable trends in the data as organised in Table 7.10 above.

There was quite a low turnout rate amongst respondents who left full time education at or before the age of fifteen years in the Balbriggan electoral area, particularly in relation to the turnout rates for this group in the other five electoral areas. It appears that in the more established electoral areas, early school leaving is a function of age whereby those in the older age cohorts are those who are likely to have left full time education at an early age. Conversely, class appears to have more of an impact on early school leaving in the less established electoral areas such as Mulhuddart. On the whole, there are no apparent trends in the data with reported turnout rates being similar across the three elections for each grouping in each electoral area.

The relationship between turnout and the age at which full time education ceased is not a statistically significant one in Fingal County.

7.2.2.2 Occupation

As stated previously, there was much variation in the stated occupations of survey respondents. Generally speaking, there were some occupational groups for whom turnout rates remained more or less the same across the three elections. These are presented in Table 7.11 below.

The lower turnout groups listed include students, the unemployed and those working in the retail/sales sector. This is in keeping with the contentions of the literature in chapter two.

Table 7.11: Voter Turnout Rates by Occupation

	2002 GEN.	2002 NICE	2004 ELECTIONS
LOWER TURNOUT			
STUDENT	44.8	48.3	55.2
UNEMPLOYED	46.7	46.7	53.3
RETAIL/SALES	53.3	60.0	66.7
HIGHER TURNOUT			
RETIRED	98.0	92.0	96.0
MANGERIAL	94.7	86.0	84.2
PUBLIC SECTOR	95.6	95.6	95.6
STAY-AT-HOME SPOUSE	85.4	84.0	83.5

Students are often associated with lower turnout rates than other occupational groups. The main reason suggested for this is the residential mobility of students and the likelihood of those in this group being away from their polling district on Election Day. Many students attend universities away from their home areas and are likely to be living away from home during term time. This adversely influences the turnout propensities of these students, particularly when polling is held on a weekday.

Unemployed people are also suggested to be more likely to abstain from voting than to vote in comparison to other occupational groups. It is thought that working alongside others increases the opportunities for political socialisation (Himmelweit et al., 1981). Being unemployed therefore, reduces the opportunity to develop an understanding of and interest in political issues through interaction with other people. As will be discussed in chapter nine, political understanding and political interest are both positive influences on turnout propensity. By deduction, unemployed people have less of an opportunity to be positively influenced to turn out to vote.

Those in the retail/sales sector also feature lower turnout rates. This may be in part be attributable to the working hours of those in this sector. Oftentimes, retail

and sales jobs involve late working hours which puts a strain on the leisure time available to those in this sector to turn out to vote.

The higher turnout groups listed include retired and stay-at-home respondents along with respondents in public sector jobs and managerial roles.

Retired and stay-at-home respondents may feature higher turnout rates as these two groups often have more leisure time available than other occupational groups which they can use for turning out to vote.

Those in public sector jobs and managerial positions often belong to the higher social class groupings. As stated in the literature review in chapter two, higher social class groupings tend to be associated with higher turnout rates. This may partially account for the higher turnout rates amongst these groups of survey respondents.

It was attempted to conduct an electoral area analysis of turnout amongst the occupational groups. However, this was deemed to be unfeasible due to the multitude of small numbers that such an analysis would rely on.

The relationship between turnout and occupational grouping is not statistically significant as tested in this research.

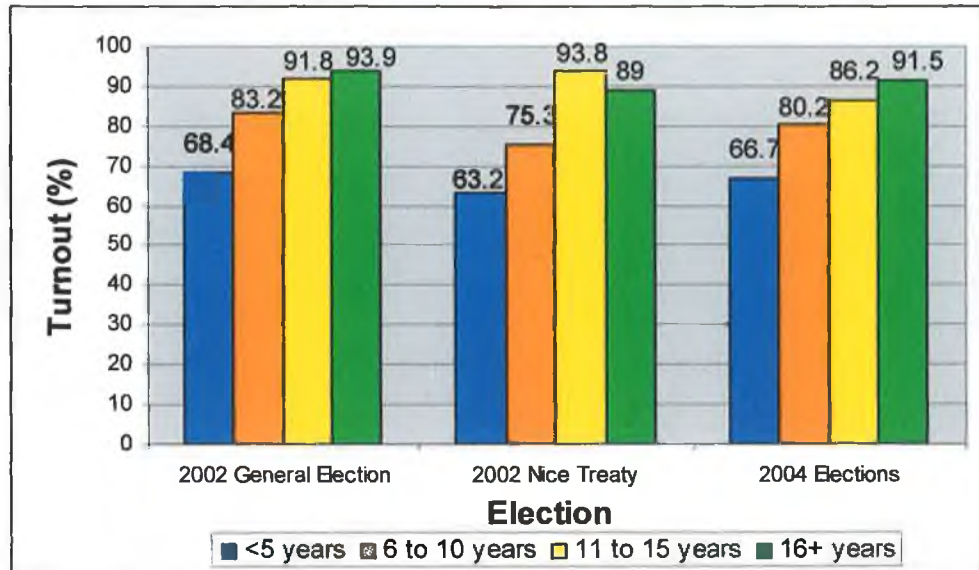
7.2.2.3 Residential Stability

Residential stability was measured by the length of time in years that each respondent had been living at his/her present address. Figure 7.4 illustrates the relationship between turnout and residential stability.

From this graph it can be seen that the general relationship between turnout and residential stability is such that turnout increases with a longer length of residence. This is in keeping with the literature which states that turnout rates are

much higher among well-established residents than among recent residents (Gimpel, 1999; Leighley and Vedlita, 1999).

Figure 7.4: Residential Stability and Turnout



The longer a citizen is resident in a particular place, the more community oriented that person becomes and the more concerned they become about issues affecting that place. Those who have been resident for a long time become integrated into the community. It is thought that these people develop a stake in the community and hence, turn out to vote in the interests of their area.

Table 7.12 displays electoral area turnout rates for the 2002 General election in accordance to residential stability. With the exception of the Howth electoral area, it can be seen that turnout amongst those respondents resident for less than five years is lower than the other groupings listed. The county trend identified is only observable in the Swords, Malahide and Mulhuddart electoral area with turnout rates in the other electoral areas following no set pattern.

Table 7.12: Residential Stability and Voter Turnout in Accordance to Electoral Area

	SW	MAL	BAL	HOW	MUL	CAS
<5 YEARS	80.6	68.3	50.0	81.8	58.1	77.8
6-10 YEARS	92.3	89.3	100	75.0	65.0	80.0
11-15 YEARS	83.3	96.2	100	92.9	84.0	100
15+ YEARS	96.6	98.6	82.0	95.2	87.5	97.0

A statistically significant relationship exists between residential stability and turning out to vote in Fingal. Although the trend of lower turnouts amongst those resident for less than five years, the relationship is only statistically significant at the county level.

7.2.3 Other Factors

Some other factors that do not fit into demographic or socio-structural categories, but that are thought to have a considerable effect on turnout were hypothesised in H₃. Specifically, H₃ stated the following;

H₃: Turnout variation within Fingal can be explained by a combination of other factors. Specifically, there is an association between turnout and;

- habit -attention to the media -civic duty

7.2.3.1 Habit

In chronological order, the three elections used as the main focus of this research are the 2002 General election, the 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum election and the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections. By examining the relationship between turnout at one election and each successive election, i.e. 2002 General election with 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum election, 2002 General election with 2004 Local, European and Citizenship Referendum election, and

2002 Nice Treaty Referendum election with 2004 Local, European and Citizenship Referendum election, it becomes possible to ascertain whether a significant relationship exists between voting in one election and voting in the next, that is, it becomes possible to establish whether or not a voting habit exists. 92.2% of respondents who voted in the 2002 General election turned out to vote again later in the year at the 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum election. 82.8% of respondents who did not vote in the 2002 General election in May 2002, failed to turn out again at the 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum election in October of that year. This is a statistically significant finding at the 1% level with voting in the 2002 General election being strongly associated with voting in the 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum election. Therefore it can be said that voting in the 2002 General election increased the likelihood of voting again later in the year at the 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum election.

A similar relationship exists between voting in the 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum election and voting again in the 2004 Local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections. In this case, 94.1% of those who turned out to vote in the 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum election turned out to vote again in the 2004 Local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections. This is a statistically significant relationship at the 1% level with there being an increased likelihood of voting in one election if having voted in the previous one.

An examination of the relationship between turnout in the 2002 General election and turnout in the 2004 Local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections conveys a similar pattern yet again. 91% of respondents who voted in the 2002 General election turned out to vote again in the 2004 Local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections. 64.5% of those who abstained in the 2002

General election also abstained in the 2004 Local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections. Once again, this relationship is statistically significant at the 1% level with there being an association between voting in the 2002 General election and voting again in the 2004 Local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections.

This analysis highlights the strong relationships that exist between turning out to vote in one election and turning out in the next. There is an increased likelihood of turning out to vote in an election if one turned out to vote in a previous election. This increased likelihood may be put down to habit and the contention that once one votes in an election, the habit of voting becomes established. This habit is then sustained by voting again in successive elections.

Table 7.13 displays the proportion of respondents in each electoral area who turned out to vote in one, two or all three of the elections.

Table 7.13: Number of Elections Voted In by Electoral Area

	TOTAL	SW	MAL	BAL	HOW	MUL	CAS
VOTED IN ONE	8.0	9.4	6.6	8.0	6.4	10.9	6.3
VOTED IN TWO	11.0	10.6	13.7	14.0	6.3	11.6	9.0
VOTED IN ALL THREE	72.5	72.9	72.6	62.0	85.3	60.6	82.0
DIDN'T VOTE	8.6	7.1	7.1	16.0	2.1	16.8	2.7

From this it can be seen that there were higher incidences of consistent non-voting in the Mulhuddart and Balbriggan electoral areas in comparison to the other electoral areas and much lower incidences of non-voting in the Howth and Castleknock electoral areas in comparison to the figures for the county. In relation to the higher percentage of respondents who didn't vote in any of the elections in the Balbriggan electoral area, the figure appears to be somewhat skewed by the community group sample from this electoral area. Specifically, 44.4% of the community group sample from the Balbriggan electoral area stated

that they did not turn out to vote in any of the elections listed. In contrast, just 9.8% of the postal sample from this electoral area also stated abstaining in the three elections. The same is not true of the Mulhuddart electoral area where there was less of a discrepancy between the community group (22.6%) and postal samples in this regard. The high percentage of respondents who voted in all three elections supports the contentions suggested above regarding voting as a habit forming activity. Upwards of 60% of respondents from all electoral areas turned out to vote in all three elections supporting the assertion that a habit of voting exists whereby once one votes, one continues to turn out to vote in subsequent elections. In support of this point, the number of occasional voters appears to be quite small, especially once accidental factors are taken into account. The high percentage of respondents who turned out to vote in all three elections is evident of the existence of consistent voters, as will be discussed in chapter eight.

7.2.3.2 Civic Duty

75.9% of respondents who voted in either the 2002 General election, the 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum election or the 2004 Local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections stated one of their reasons for doing so as being civic duty. In the case of the 2002 General election, 85.1% of those who turned out to vote did so out of a sense of civic duty that they felt. This is a statistically significant relationship at the 1% level meaning that those who voted in the 2002 General election did so in part out of a sense of civic duty.

86.1% of respondents who voted in the 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum election stated their reason for doing so as “civic duty”. This is also a statistically significant relationship at the 1% level.

Similarly, 86.5% of those who turned out to vote at the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections did so out of civic duty. This is again a statistically significant relationship at the 1% level with statistical analysis drawing attention towards the strong relationship between voting and civic duty. In keeping with the literature, it appears that viewing voting as a civic duty has a positive influence on turning out to vote. Civic duty will be addressed again in chapter eight when discussing specific reasons and motivations for turnout.

7.2.3.3 Attention to the Media

7.2.3.3.1 Daily/Weekly Newspaper Readership

Survey respondents were asked if they read a daily or weekly newspaper on a regular basis. They were also given the opportunity to list more than one newspaper if they so wished. 88.3% of respondents stated that they read a daily or weekly newspaper on a regular basis. 32.5% of respondents stated that they were regular readers of two daily/weekly newspapers while 6.9% of respondents stated that they regularly read three daily/weekly newspapers.

Table 7.14 Daily/Weekly Newspaper Readership according to Electoral Area

	NEWSPAPER READERSHIP	
	YES	NO
SWORDS	86.0	14.0
MALAHIDE	88.8	11.2
BALBRIGGAN	77.4	22.6
HOWTH	93.5	6.5
MULHUDDART	87.5	12.5
CASTLEKNOCK	91.0	9.0

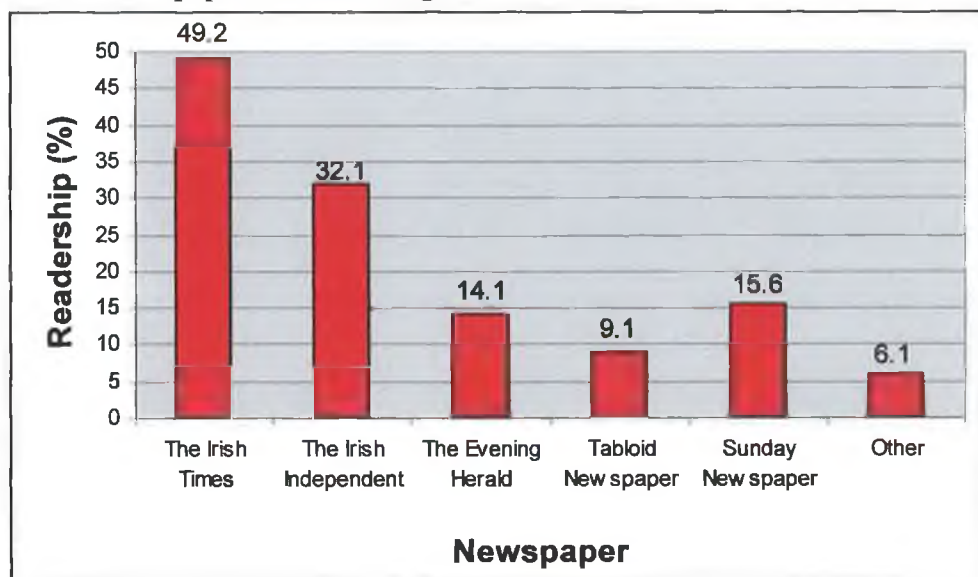
As can be seen in Table 7.14 above, a high percentage of respondents from all electoral areas stated that they read a daily or weekly newspaper.

There were slightly higher percentages of newspaper readers in the Castleknock and Howth electoral areas when compared to the other electoral areas.

Not every respondent who stated that they read daily/weekly newspapers listed the names of the newspapers that they read. Of those that did however, the figures were combined and the results are presented in Figure 7.5.

As illustrated in Figure 7.5, The Irish Times was the most widely read newspaper with 49.2% of respondents stating that this is amongst the newspapers that they regularly read. This is followed by the Irish Independent at 32.1% suggesting that there a high readership of broadsheet newspaper in Fingal.

Figure 7.5: Newspapers Read in Fingal



These findings are interesting in that they do not concur with national readership trends which suggest that the Irish Independent is the most widely read newspaper and not the Irish Times as appears to be the case in Fingal. Sunday newspapers, including the Sunday Business Post, were read by just 15.6% of respondents. This low percentage may be due to respondents simply forgetting to state the name of the Sunday newspaper that they read. It is possible that when asked to state the newspapers that they regularly read, respondents stated their daily newspapers forgetting about their once weekly Sunday newspaper. Also, when stating the names of their daily newspapers, respondents may have

believed that the Sunday edition of their newspaper was accounted for. This suggests that the figure for Sunday newspaper readership is somewhat unreliable. Just 9.1% of respondents stated that they read tabloid newspapers such as The Sun, The Star, The Mail and The Mirror. 6.1% stated that they regularly read some other newspaper, mainly referring to the British publications of “The Times” and “The Guardian”.

Table 7.15 displays newspaper readership in accordance to electoral area. While this is not a statistically significant relationship, there are obvious trends that emerge from an examination of the data.

Table 7.15: Daily/Weekly Newspapers Read in each Electoral Area

	SW	MAL	BAL	HOW	MUL	CAS
THE IRISH TIMES	34.2	56.8	22.9	81.1	28.1	61.0
THE IRISH INDEPENDENT	43.8	34.8	25.2	21.0	24.2	41.0
THE EVENING HERALD	20.5	11.6	8.3	4.7	26.6	9.0
TABLOID NEWSPAPER	12.3	2.4	10.5	2.4	24.2	2.0
SUNDAY NEWSPAPER	12.3	20.7	16.9	11.7	10.2	15.0
OTHER	5.5	3.1	10.4	5.9	6.3	9.0

One would expect the broadsheet Irish Times newspaper to be read more in those electoral areas that are considered to be of a higher socio-economic standing and tabloid newspapers to be read more widely in those electoral areas which contain a greater percentage of people in social classes five and six, and this is indeed the case.

Higher percentages of those in the Malahide, Mulhuddart and Castleknock electoral areas stated regularly reading the Irish Times newspaper in comparison to those in the other three electoral areas.

There was less of a contrast between the electoral areas with regards to Irish Independent readership and readership of Sunday newspapers with the Swords

and Mulhuddart electoral areas being the only electoral areas with a readership of over 20% for the Evening Herald newspaper.

Readership of tabloid newspapers such as The Sun, The Star, The Mail and The Mirror follow the opposite pattern to that of Irish Times readership. As can be seen from Table 7.15, higher percentages of respondents from the Mulhuddart, Balbriggan and Swords electoral areas stated that they regularly read a tabloid newspaper in comparison to newspaper readers in the Malahide, Howth and Castleknock electoral areas, suggesting that there may be a class base to tabloid readership.

The relationship between turnout at the 2002 General election and reading a daily/weekly newspaper is not statistically significant. 86.3% of those who stated that they regularly read a daily or weekly newspaper voted in the 2002 General election. In comparison, 82.9% of those who stated that they do not read a daily or weekly newspaper also turned out to vote at this election.

In contrast, the relationship between turnout at the 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum election and reading a daily/weekly newspaper is statistically significant at the 5% level and the relationship between turnout at the 2004 Local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections and reading a daily/weekly newspaper is statistically significant at the 1% level. In the case of the 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum election, 83% of those who regularly read a daily or weekly newspaper turned out to vote. With respect to the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections, 85.1% of respondents who stated that they read a daily/weekly newspaper turned out to vote.

Perhaps the reason why the 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum election and the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections enjoy a significant

relationship with newspaper readership lies in the fact that issues addressed in the referendum elections were highly contentious in nature. The holding of a second referendum election on the Nice Treaty in 2002 and the issue of citizenship alterations in the constitution in the 2004 elections received much media coverage and so it is likely that those who read newspapers regularly were aware of what the outcome of each election would imply. Also, by reading newspaper articles dealing with the different issues, these people would have been more likely to form an opinion on the topics at hand causing them to turn out to vote. In particular, readers of broadsheet newspapers are considered more likely to vote on the basis of issues, and in particular, referendum issues. The relationship between turnout and the type of newspaper read is presented in Table 7.16.

Table 7.16: Newspaper Readership and Voter Turnout

	2002GEN	2002 NICE	2004 ELECTIONS
THE IRISH TIMES	93.4	88.3	89.8
THE IRISH INDEPENDENT	90.3	83.7	88.6
THE EVENING HERALD	73.8	72.6	76.2
TABLOID NEWSPAPER	72.9	76.0	66.0
SUNDAY NEWSPAPER	89.1	90.2	91.2
OTHER	71.4	68.6	66.7
NO NEWSPAPER	82.9	72.0	70.7

From this it can be seen that higher turnout rates are associated with readership of broad sheet newspapers, and in particular, with readership of The Irish Times newspaper. Lower turnout rates are associated with readership of the tabloid newspapers which may be related to the fact that these newspapers are less concerned with addressing electoral issues than with addressing popular issues.

The implications of the geographical distribution of newspaper readership on the geography of turnout seem quite obvious given this analysis. It would be expected that given the relationship between turnout and Irish Times readership, that the electoral areas where this newspaper is most read would be high turnout

areas, and this is indeed the case. As previously noted, the Malahide, Howth and Castleknock electoral areas boast high Irish Times readership and these are the electoral areas in Fingal where turnout is highest. Conversely, the lower turnout rates associated with tabloid readership would imply lower turnouts in those areas where these tabloid newspapers are widely read. As displayed in Table 7.15, the Swords, Balbriggan and especially the Mulhuddart electoral areas are those electoral areas where tabloid readership is highest, and are also the lower turnout electoral areas in County Fingal.

7.2.3.3.2 Local Newspaper Readership

Table 7.17 displays local newspaper readership in accordance to electoral area.

Table 7.17: Local Newspaper Readership according to Electoral Area

	NEWSPAPER READERSHIP	
	YES	NO
SWORDS	75.3	24.7
MALAHIDE	75.0	25.0
BALBRIGGAN	74.0	26.0
HOWTH	50.9	49.5
MULHUDDART	73.5	26.5
CASTLEKNOCK	78.0	22.0

As can be seen, there are lesser percentages of respondents who read local newspapers when compared with the figures for daily/weekly newspaper readership in Table 7.15 and this is constant across all electoral areas. The percentage of local newspaper readers in the Howth electoral area seems to be quite low when compared to the other electoral areas. This is perhaps attributable to the fact that these figures correspond to both bought local newspapers and local free-sheet newspapers, with fewer freesheet newspapers available in the Howth electoral area than in the other electoral areas in Fingal.

Table 7.18 displays the names of the local newspapers read in accordance to electoral area.

Table 7.18: Local Newspapers Read in each Electoral Area

	SW	MAL	BAL	HOW	MUL	CAS
FINGAL INDEPENDENT	50.7	32.5	55.1	2.3	0.8	1.9
BLANCHARDSTOWN GAZETTE	-	-	-	-	11.7	22.1
SKERRIES NEWS	-	-	2.0	-	-	-
NORTH COUNTY LEADER	26.0	29.9	24.5	-	-	-
PEOPLE NEWSPAPER	26.0	31.2	4.0	43.7	41.1	31.7
COMMUNITY VOICE	-	-	-	-	34.1	29.8
CITY WIDE/WEST	-	-	-	-	1.6	0
OTHER FREESHEET	1.3	6.3	2.0	3.4	7.0	19.2
BOUGHT NEWSPAPER	50.7	32.5	57.1	2.3	12.5	24.0
FREESHEET NEWSPAPER	53.3	67.4	30.5	47.1	83.8	80.7

The three newspapers in the shaded section at the top of the table are those newspapers which must be bought. The other newspapers are free-sheet newspapers delivered door-to-door or available locally. The bottom of the table contains separate figures for bought and free-sheet newspapers according to electoral area.

The first thing to note from the table is readership of the Fingal Independent newspaper. The Fingal Independent is available for purchase across the county of Fingal and so is perhaps the best indicator of local newspaper readership. It appears that those electoral areas situated to the north of the county are where the Fingal Independent is most widely read. Readership of this local newspaper seems to dissipate sharply one moves southwards through the county and is very low in the electoral areas in the south west and south east of the county. If one were to map readership of the Fingal Independent, the resultant pattern would resemble, quite closely, the geography of Fingal identity, which will be addressed in chapter nine. This suggests that there might be a link between identity with Fingal and readership of the Fingal Independent newspaper.

The other noteworthy features of the table are the figures corresponding to bought and free-sheet local newspapers. In the Balbriggan electoral area, a higher percentage of local newspaper readership corresponds to bought local newspapers as opposed to free-sheet newspapers. This may have something to do with the rurality of the Balbriggan electoral area and hence the greater sense of community that exists about rural places. It may also be indicative of the difficulties associated with delivering freesheet newspapers in rural locations. However, the Balbriggan electoral area is the exception as free-sheet newspaper readership greatly exceeds bought newspaper readership in the Howth, Malahide, Mulhuddart and Castleknock electoral areas and exceeds it slightly in the case of the Swords electoral area.

The relationship between turnout and reading a local newspaper on a regular basis is not statistically significant. 86.3% of respondents who regularly read a local newspaper turned out to vote in the 2002 General election. The same proportion of non-readers also turned out to vote. 82% of local newspaper readers turned out at the 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum election with 81.6% of non-readers also turning out. Similarly, 84.1% of local newspaper readers turned out to vote in the 2004 Local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections with almost the same proportion (82%) of non-readers turning out to vote.

The association between turnout and bought newspaper readership is displayed in Table 7.19 for each of the three bought newspapers that respondents stated reading.

It can be seen that there are consistently high turnout rates for each of the three bought local newspapers that survey respondents reported reading. Buying local newspapers suggests that those who buy them are actively seeking information

on local issues. The better local news coverage in bought local newspapers as opposed to freesheet local newspapers also results in the readers of bought local newspapers being better informed which may account for the higher turnouts associated with readers of bought local newspapers.

Table 7.19 Voter Turnout and Bought Newspaper Readership

	F.I.	S.N .	B.G.
2002 GENERAL ELECTION	94.1	100*	86.8
2002 NICE TREATY REF.	83.8	100*	92.1
2004 LOCAL, EURO.&CITIZEN. REF.	89.7	100*	94.7

F.I. – Fingal Independent; S.N. – Skerries News; B.G. – Blanchardstown Gazette

* Small Numbers

In relation to politics, local newspaper readership implies that the person is well informed about issues affecting their local area. Actively buying local newspapers amplifies this readership effect resulting in well informed individuals who are likely to be active citizens. The high turnout rates given in Table 7.19 support this point suggesting that readers of bought local newspapers are likely to be voters. This is not a statistically significant relationship however.

7.2.3.3.3 The News

97.9% of respondents stated that they watch the news on the television, and/or listen to the news on the radio on a regular basis. The stations on which respondents frequently watched the news are listed in Table 7.20 along with the total percentage of respondents who watch the news on each of the channels.

Table 7.20: Most Frequently Watched News Channels

CHANNEL	%
RTE1	79.1
RTE2	10.1
TV3	17.8
TG4	1.0
BBC1	9.6
UTV	1.3
SKY NEWS	12.7
Other Channel	2.6

52.6% of respondents said they listen to the news on the radio. The most popular channel on which to listen to the news was RTE Radio 1 with 21.3% of respondents stating this channel. The other channels in rank order were; Newstalk 106 (8.5%), Today FM (7.1%), 98FM (4%), FM104 (3.6%), 2FM (2.2%), Q102 (1.7%), Lyric FM (1.6%), BBC Radio 4 (0.6%), and Radio 2 (0.5%). 1.1% of respondents did not state which radio channel they listen to the news on.

In relation to the frequency by which respondents watched or listened to the news, 88.8% stated that it was a daily occurrence. 6.3% of respondents stated that they watch or listen to the news 4 to 6 times per week with 2.1% watching or listening to the news 1 to 3 times per week. 0.5% of respondents stated that it was “not often” that they watched or listened to the news.

86.9% of respondents who watch or listen to the news turned out to vote at the 2002 General election. This compares with just 50% of those who do not watch or listen to the news. Statistical analysis conveys the tendency for those who watch or listen to the news to be more likely to turn out to vote than to abstain with those who do not watch or listen to the news appear more likely to abstain than to turn out. The situation is similar in relation to the 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum election. With respect to the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections, it appears that there is no notable tendency for “news watchers” or “non-news watchers” to turn out or to abstain. It appears that keeping engaged with political affairs through watching or listening to the news matters less for turnout in the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections than for the 2002 General election or the 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum election.

7.3 CONCLUSION

This chapter was concerned with using questionnaire survey data to explore the relationship between turnout and the factors hypothesized in chapter two.

The first set of factors examined were concerned with the relationship between turnout and the demographic characteristics of sex, age and marital status.

It was determined that the association between sex and turnout is not statistically significant, although on a general scale in each of the elections tested, the percentage of males who turned out to vote was greater than the percentage of females. There was a contrast however in the turnout rates of males and females when this was examined with respect to electoral area. Specifically, the percentage of females who turned out to vote in the Balbriggan and Mulhuddart electoral areas was greater than the percentage of males in each of the elections. It was determined that this trend may be partially attributable to the fact that the samples from these two electoral areas comprised a community group sample. Community groups tend to be dominated by female participation and the sex breakdown of the community group respondents reflected this.

In relation to age, it was found that a statistically significant association exists between turnout and age at the 1% level whereby turnout increases with increasing age. Turnout was lowest in the youngest age cohort (18-24 years) but appeared to increase through successive age cohorts. In converse to the other age cohorts, turnout in this age group was highest in the case of the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections. This pattern is in keeping with the literature which states that the relationship between age and turnout is curvilinear in nature with turnout being low in the youngest age cohorts, increasing in the middle age cohorts and declining late in life.

With respect to marital status, a statistically significant relationship was found to exist between turnout at two of the three elections and marital status. This association was found to exist with the 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum election and the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections at the 1% level. The direction of the relationship is such that turnout for married respondents is consistently higher than for single respondents. This confirms the findings of the literature and in particular, research conducted by Crewe, Fox and Alt (1992) which found that being unmarried lessens the likelihood of turning out to vote on polling day.

The second set of factors examined were socio-economic and socio-structural in nature. Specifically, the association between turnout and the factors of education, occupation and residential stability was explored.

In relation to education, it was found that there is no statistical association between turnout and the age at which full time education ceased. Turnout levels vary little across the three elections regardless of the age at which full time education ceased. On an electoral area basis, the association between turnout and the age at which full time education ceased appears to be somewhat random with no noteworthy trend emerging. It must be noted that although no association was found to exist between education and turnout at the individual level, there is an aggregate level education influence on voter turnout propensity, as addressed in chapter six.

With respect to occupation, it was determined that there is no statistically significant relationship between voter turnout and the stated occupation of survey respondents. However, some occupational groups do display consistently low turnout rates while some display consistently high turnout rates.

The association between turnout and residential stability in Fingal is in keeping with the literature. Specifically, it was found that there is a statistically significant association with voter turnout at the 1% level. This relationship manifests in that one is more likely to abstain than to turn out to vote if one has been resident for less than five years.

The final set of factors explored were those of habit, civic duty and attention to the media.

It was found that there is an increased likelihood of turning out to vote in one election if one turned out to vote in the previous election. This relationship between turnout at one election and turnout at the subsequent election is indicative of the habit of voting and is statistically significant at the 1% level. This is again in keeping with the literature which states that once the habit of voting is established, the elector becomes more likely to vote at each subsequent election.

With regards to attention to the media, three different aspects of media attention were explored. These were readership of a daily/weekly newspaper, readership of a local newspaper and watching or listening to the news. A significant relation was found to exist between reading a daily/weekly newspaper and voter turnout at the 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum election (5% level) and at the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections (1%). However, there is no statistically significant relationship between turnout and readership of a local newspaper or between turnout and watching or listening to the news. The literature states that newspaper readership along with television news watching increases turnout propensity. However, in the case of Fingal, it appears that this is not the case.

In relation to viewing voting as a civic duty, it was found that holding such views is statistically associated with voter turnout at the 1% level.

Thus far, turnout has been dealt with on a range of scales from average voter turnout levels to aggregate relationships between turnout and associated factors. This chapter dealt with the association between turnout and a range of hypothesized factors at the individual level. An aspect of turnout that is yet to be discussed however, is that of individual reasons and motivations for turning out to vote. The focus will now shift therefore, to respondents stated motivations for turning out to vote and for abstaining.

CHAPTER 8

VOTING AND NON-VOTING

In order to study turnout behaviour in a holistic fashion, it is important to not only determine what influences turnout in terms of demographic, socio-economic and socio-structural factors, but to take note of peoples individual motivations for choosing to vote or to abstain. Having previously addressed aggregate and individual level influences on turnout propensity in Fingal, the focus will now shift to specific reasons and motivations for turning out to vote and for abstaining. These will be looked at on an election specific basis and on an electoral area basis. Towards the end of the chapter, the difficulties that respondents determine as posing barriers to participation will be discussed along with respondents' perspectives on how to alleviate and overcome these adversaries.

8.1 REASONS FOR VOTING

Survey respondents were asked to give their reasons for having voted in any of the three featured elections; the 2002 General election, the 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum election and the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections. A list of possible reasons was provided with candidates given the instruction to choose as many as were relevant to them. To balance this prompt, an open-ended "other" option was included whereby respondents were provided with a space to scribe any other reasons for having turned out to vote. This space was utilised in many cases.

8.1.1 2002 General Election

Table 8.1: Reasons for Voting in the 2002 General Election

REASON	%
Civic duty	85.1
Support for a political party	19.9
Received help from a candidate	2.5
Family history of voting	23.9
Support for a certain candidate	22.0
Protest vote against government	12.7
Have an input in electing government	61.0
Other	5.1

The main reason given for turning out to vote in the 2002 General election was that of “civic duty”, as can be seen in Table 8.1. While it is encouraging to see that such a high percentage of respondents have this instilled “duty”, it is quite disconcerting in other ways. Voting would be a much more sustainable process if people turned out to vote as a “want” rather than a “duty”. The notion of voting out of a sense of civic duty was addressed earlier in chapter seven.

As can be seen from Table 8.1, the second most stated reason for turning out to vote in the 2002 General election was that of wanting to have a say in electing government. This is an unsurprising finding given that the motivation for holding a general election is to elect government.

Family influences emerged as the next most stated reasons for turning out to vote. It is probable that these respondents come from families who always voted at election time and as a result, they too turn out to vote. This is in keeping with the literature which states that those who have a family history of voting will themselves be more likely to turn out to vote.

Partisan attachment accounted for the next two most stated reasons for turning out to vote. 22% of respondents turned out to vote to support a particular candidate while 19.9% of respondents turned out to support a political party. This

is implicitly linked to the notion of partisan identity and will be discussed further in chapter ten.

12.7% of respondents stated that they voted out of protest against the government, presumably turning out to register their vote for the opposition, while 5.1% of respondents stated some other reason for voting.

Those reasons which enjoy a statistically significant association with turning out to vote at the 2002 General election are as follows;

- voting out of a sense of civic duty
- voting to support a political party
- voting to support a particular candidate
- having a family history of voting
- protest voting against the government
- voting to have a say in electing government

8.1.2 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum Election

As can be seen in Table 8.2, respondents' reasons for turning out to vote at the 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum election were quite similar to those reasons identified in the case of the 2002 General election.

Table 8.2: Reasons for Voting in the 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum Election

REASON	%
Civic duty	86.1
Received help from a candidate	2.3
Family history of voting	24.6
Protest vote against government	12.2
Protest over war in Iraq	9.0
Concern over local issues	9.0
Other	5.8

As was the case with the 2002 General election, the most stated reason for turning out to vote in the 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum elections was that of civic duty.

The second most stated reason for turning out to vote at the 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum election was that of a family history of voting, followed by protest voting against the government. Those respondents who stated that they voted out of protest most likely disagreed with the holding of a second referendum on the Nice Treaty. A significant proportion of respondents stated that they voted out of concern over local issues. While this referendum was not local-based in nature, these respondents were most likely concerned over what the passing of the Nice Treaty referendum would mean for their local community in terms of immigration.

8.1.3 2004 Local, European and Citizenship Referendum Elections

Again, the reasons reported for turning out to vote in the 2004 elections were similar to those stated in the case of the other two elections.

As can be seen from Table 8.3, the most common reason given for turning out to vote in the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections was the same as that stated in the other two elections, civic duty. The percentage of respondents stating civic duty as a reason for voting was just as high in the case of the other two elections. It seems therefore that this duty is persistent in nature and it may be suggested that those who feel compelled to vote as a result of this “civic duty” will continue to vote in successive elections. This strengthens the findings reported in chapter seven regarding voting as a habit forming activity whereby voting in one election makes one likely to vote in successive elections.

Table 8.3: Reasons for Voting in the 2004 Local, European and Citizenship Referendum Elections

REASON	%
Civic duty	86.5
Support for a political party	18.9
Received help from a candidate	2.0
Family history of voting	24.6
Support for a certain candidate	21.6
Protest vote against government	12.2
Protest over war in Iraq	8.9
Concern over local issues	9.4
Express opinion on citizenship issue	32.0
Protest over refuse charges	10.2
Other	6.3

Turnout increased in the 2004 elections relative to the previous contests in 1999, and it has been suggested that one of the reasons for this was the holding of the contentious Citizenship Referendum on the same day (Kavanagh, 2006). This is supported by the fact that 32% of respondents stated that they turned out to vote in 2004 to express an opinion on the citizenship issue.

In keeping with the previous two elections, a family history of voting emerged as an important factor. Similar to civic duty, this appears to be a factor that has a constant influence on individual turnout propensity. It may be suggested therefore, that voting because of family influences is a reinforcing factor in turnout propensity and that those who vote as a result of “family history” will continue to vote in subsequent elections, emphasising the notion of voting as an activity sustained by habit.

The proportion of respondents who claimed that they turned out to vote to support a particular candidate seems to be quite low given that two highly candidate-based elections, the local and European elections, were held on the day but works to further strengthen the suggestion that the Citizenship Referendum election was an important mobilising factor on Election Day in 2004 in Fingal.

Likewise, only 18.9% of respondents stated “support for a party” as their reason for turning out.

Contrary to suspicions that the introduction of the Environmental Levy on refuse collection was a large mobilising factor in the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections, just 10.2% of respondents claimed to have voted in protest to the refuse charges. This varies immensely on an electoral area basis however, as will be demonstrated later in the chapter. It is possible that discontentment with local governance over the refuse charges may have been expressed through another outlet other than by direct statement with 12.2% of respondents stating that they voted in protest to the Government. It is possible that some of this dissatisfaction is due to anger over the refuse charges. Also, 9.4% of respondents turned out to vote to express concern over local issues, which again may easily encapsulate the issue of refuse charges.

8.1.3.1 The Most Important Election in 2004

In addition to being asked their reasons for turning out to vote in 2004, respondents were also asked to rank the three elections held on the same day in 2004 in terms of importance. They were instructed to place a “1” beside the election they felt held most importance on the day, followed by a “2” beside the second most important election and a “3” beside the least important election. The three elections held were local elections, elections to the European parliament and a Referendum election on citizenship.

As previously discussed, national turnout increased slightly in 2004 and it has been suggested by some that the Citizenship Referendum election, a highly publicised issue at the time might be the reason for this. Likewise, another

pending issue at the time was the introduction of the Environmental Levy on refuse collection and it has also been suggested that this may have had the effect of politicising a previously disinterested section of the public with particular reference to the local elections.

An examination of the frequencies for each ranked election suggests that the most important election held in 2004 was that of the local elections with 50% of respondents putting this election first. This contradicts the literature on the matter, as previously mentioned, which suggests that the Citizenship Referendum election was the most important mobilising factor. The second most important election according to respondents was that of the Citizenship Referendum election with approximately one third of respondents putting this election in the number one spot.

Looking at the rankings for each of the elections singularly, the Citizenship Referendum election was ranked as the 1st, 2nd and 3rd most important election by equal percentages of respondents. There is a skew however in the case of the other two elections. With regards to the European elections, 44% of respondents ranked it of least importance with just 18.6% of respondents ranking it as the most important election. The skew is in the opposite direction in the case of the local elections whereby 50% of respondents stated this election as being the most important with just over 21% of respondents considering it to be of least importance.

Based on the responses given, it appears that the most important election held in 2004 was that of the local elections. Again, this may be influenced by the issue of the Environmental Levy on refuse collection which was highly topical at the time. The second most important election held was that of the Citizenship

Referendum election which again was extremely topical at the time. This leaves the European elections as the least important elections held on the day.

8.1.4 “Other” Reasons for Turning Out to Vote

In addition to the range of options given in response to this question, respondents had the opportunity to avail of the “other” option which provided respondents with a blank space in which to record any other applicable reason for turning out to vote. Rather than code these reasons and include them in the main analysis, it was decided to address them in a separate section so as not to lose the richness of the data. The most commonly stated “other” reason given was that voting is a privilege which people died to obtain. Some respondents felt that as the voting franchise is a right that was fought for, it should be highly regarded and its importance should not be forgotten. Others felt that they should vote out of respect for the women and men who died trying to secure the franchise for all, as is suggested by the following quote;

“Voting is a hard won right which I consider a privilege to exercise.”

This is somewhat similar to the notion of civic duty in that viewing voting as a hard won right is rooted in the notion of having a duty to vote.

Some respondents felt that voting provides them with a means of getting their opinions and perspectives heard, believing that elections give ordinary people power.

Others felt that by voting they were supporting democracy and helping to maintain and re-enforce the concept of democracy.

Others still believed that voting is a means of keeping politicians acute to public concerns and of keeping them “on their toes”. When people turn out to vote,

pressure is put on politicians to uphold their representative role and the promises made during the election campaign. However, it was also stated by a number of respondents that they are finding voting less and less efficacious with passing time. This is demonstrated by the following quote taken from one survey;

“To be honest I find it harder & harder to make myself vote. I feel it is pointless – politicians are self-serving at the end of the day.”

Some respondents also said their reasons for voting were familial in nature with one respondent stating the following;

“I have never once missed casting my vote in any election/referendum since I became 18. My family were committed voters.”

These respondents said they voted to pass on the practice to and to set an example for their children in the way that they themselves were influenced by family as a child.

8.1.5 Reasons for Voting on an Electoral Area Basis

Table 8.4 displays the frequency of each of the stated reasons for turning out to vote in accordance to electoral area.

Table 8.4: Reasons for Voting by Electoral Area

	SW	MAL	BAL	HOW	MUL	CAS
Civic Duty	77.9	78.6	62.0	84.2	60.9	91.0
Support for a party	16.3	19.0	10.0	20.0	19.9	15.3
Help from a candidate	1.2	3.6	2.0	1.1	3.2	0.9
Family always voted	23.3	23.8	26.0	18.9	17.9	23.4
Want a candidate elected	23.3	22.6	22.0	12.6	23.7	13.5
Protest against the government	12.8	10.1	18.0	7.4	14.1	9.0
Express opinion on citizenship issue	33.7	25.0	36.0	18.9	23.7	32.4
Protest over refuse charges	12.8	6.5	14.0	2.1	16.7	8.1
Concern over local issues	12.8	10.1	6.0	4.2	7.7	8.1
Protest over war in Iraq	9.3	6.0	8.0	6.3	9.6	6.3
Have an input in electing government	57.0	54.2	50.0	52.6	51.9	62.2
Other reason	5.8	2.4	6.0	6.3	7.7	5.4

From this it can be seen that there are no stark contrasts in the stated reasons of respondents from each electoral area. That is, where one reason was often stated in one electoral area, it was similarly often stated in the other electoral areas. However, there are some variations in the frequency of the stated reasons between the electoral areas which suggests that some reasons are more important in some electoral areas than in others.

There is a statistical association between the electoral area in which one resides and voting out of a sense of civic duty at the 1% level. Specifically, respondents from the Howth and Castleknock electoral areas are more likely to be influenced to vote by this factor while respondents from the Mulhuddart and Balbriggan electoral areas are more likely not to be influenced to vote by civic duty.

Turning out to vote to support a political party appears to vary little between the electoral areas with no obvious pattern emerging. Voting out of support for a particular candidate however, does. This factor appears to be less of a reason for turnout in the Howth and Castleknock electoral areas suggesting that turnout is less motivated by candidate centred politics in these two electoral areas.

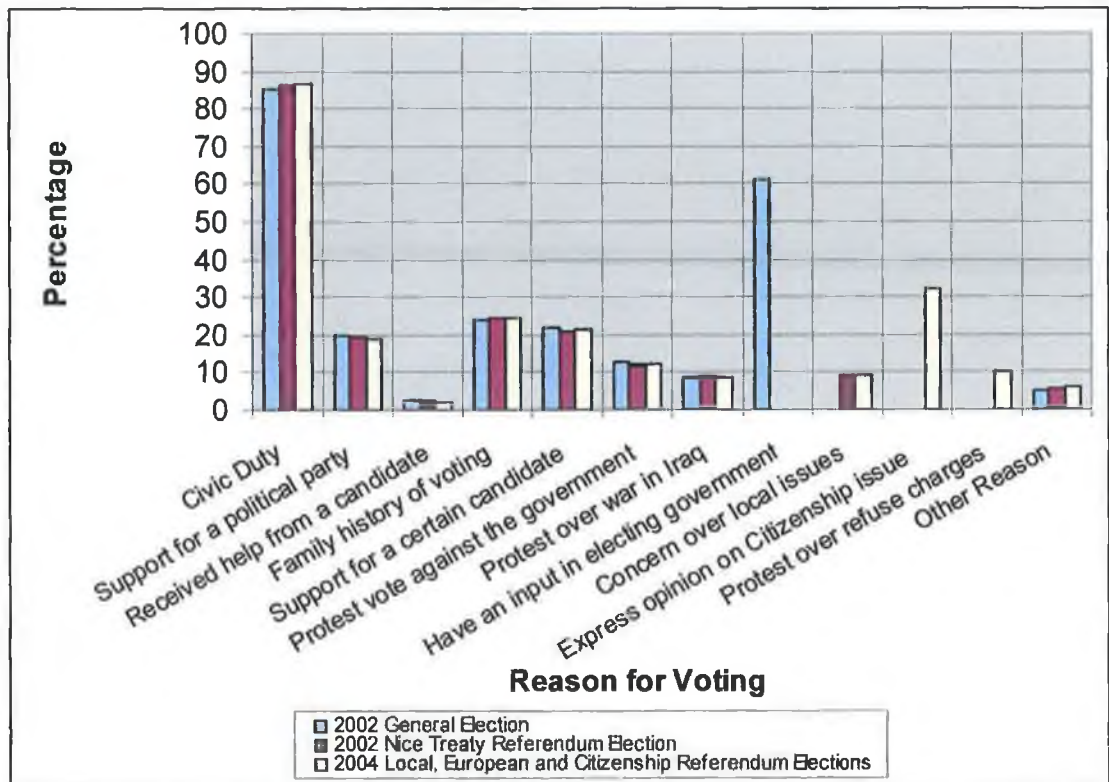
Protest voting also appears to be less of an occurrence in the higher socio-economic electoral areas of Malahide, Howth and Castleknock. Rather, those electoral areas which are considered to be of a lower socio-economic standing seem to record higher incidences of protest voting. In terms of protesting over refuse charges, significantly more respondents from the Mulhuddart and Balbriggan electoral areas stated this as a reason for turning out to vote. In relation to the Mulhuddart electoral area, a possible explanation for this may be the strong socialist party presence in the Mulhuddart electoral area at the time of the 2004 elections with Socialist TD Joe Higgins, who is based in this area, being

the only member of the Socialist Party elected to government in 2002. At the time of the elections in 2004, the Socialist Party were involved in a highly publicised campaign against the refuse charges which may account for the higher percentage of candidates who stated this as a reason for turning out to vote.

8.1.6 Synopsis of Reasons for Voting

As illustrated by Figure 8.1, the percentage of respondents who stated a given reason for turning out to vote in one election was almost exact to the percentage who stated that reason for turning out in another election. Given this, civic duty appears to be the most important motivating factor in turning out to vote.

Figure 8.1: Reasons for Voting



In the case of the 2002 General election, this was followed by wanting to have a say in electing government, a reason that is invalid with regards to the other featured elections. In relation to the 2004 local, European and Citizenship

Referendum elections, expressing an opinion on the citizenship issue, the focus of the referendum, was the second most stated reason for turning out to vote after civic duty. Consistent amongst voters in the three elections was the role of a family history of voting in mobilising one to turn out to vote. Following this, support for a particular candidate and support for a certain political party were the next most important factors, followed by protesting against the government.

In summation, it can be said that having a sense of civic duty is the strongest mobilising factor in Fingal. Other mobilising factors include believing that ones vote has an input in electing government, coming from a family who always voted, supporting a particular candidate or political party and protesting against the government.

Interviewees were asked what they believed would encourage the electorate to vote in the General election held on 24th May 2007. A common response was that the turnout decision was down to the personality of the individual elector and their understanding of how politics works. It was also suggested that what are demobilising factors for some individuals are mobilising factors for others. Some, for example, may vote in protest and to register opposition of the current government while others may refuse to turn out to vote for that same reason, in protest against the government.

With respect to election specific reasons and factors, interviewees frequently suggested that the individual elector may be fuelled by a desire for change. They may vote to register support for the opposition or smaller parties as “pay-back for negative local decisions” made during the government’s term of office. It was also suggested that many voters would be motivated by revenge. It was predicted that turnout would increase when compared with the previous general election

due to marginality and the fact that the election was considered to be a close contest, therefore awarding a greater feeling of efficacy to the voter who would feel as though their vote carried more weight and influence than in an election where the outcome was a given.

8.2 REASONS FOR NOT VOTING

8.2.1 2002 General Election

As can be seen from Table 8.5, the main reason given for failing to turn out to vote in the 2002 General election was that of not being registered to vote.

Table 8.5: Reasons for Not Voting in the 2002 General Election

REASON	%
Nothing ever changes	20.7
Government would win anyway	5.4
Was sick or away from home	19.6
Uneasy over electronic voting	1.1
Politicians have no interest in the area	13.0
Didn't know who was running	6.5
Politicians break promises	17.4
Not registered to vote	34.8
Political corruption	10.9
Too young to vote at the time	13.0
No polling card	10.9
Favourite candidate not running	1.1
Problems getting there on time	3.3

There appears to be an air of discontentment amongst non-voters in that 20.7% stated that they saw no point in voting as “nothing ever changes”. As will be discussed later in the chapter, this indicates deliberate or voluntary non-voting.

A significant number of respondents stated that they were sick or away from home on Election Day. This accidental or involuntary non-voting is somewhat promising in that these respondents abstained due to circumstantial reasons, suggesting that these non-voters would have turned out to vote if their individual situations complimented the voting day.

The number of respondents who stated that they failed to turn out as they did not receive a polling card highlights the need for voter education to become more widespread as unbeknownst to many, it is possible to vote at the polling station without a polling card once the returning officer is satisfied as to one's identity. The other stated reasons for abstention at the 2002 General election can be seen in Table 8.5.

8.2.2 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum Election

As displayed by Table 8.6, the most common reason given for abstaining in the 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum election was that of not understanding the issues relevant to the election.

Table 8.6: Reasons for Not Voting in the 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum Election

REASON	%
Nice Treaty not important	10.3
Uneasy over use of electronic voting	2.6
Too many elections held in 2002	5.1
Didn't understand the issues	27.4
Problems finding the polling station	1.7
Problems getting there on time	3.4
Was sick or away from home	21.4
Not registered to vote	24.8
Treaty was sure to be passed	4.3
Too young to vote at the time	7.7
Forgot to vote	1.7
It was on a Sunday	2.6
Why vote twice?	14.5

This highlights the need for not only more information to be available around election time, but for the information that is available to be colloquially phrased. Oftentimes, the effort that needs to be made to decipher political rhetoric far outweighs the benefits incurred from turning out to vote, and so the easier option of abstention is chosen.

As was the situation with the 2002 General election, quite a large percentage of those who abstained claimed that they were not registered to vote or that they were either ill or away from home on the day of the election.

The fact that the Nice Treaty Referendum election was held on a weekend day seemed to deter few with just 2.6% of respondents stating this as their reason for not voting. This small percentage is in keeping with the literature which suggests that weekend polling would positively influence voter turnout.

Reasons for abstention relating to polling stations raise the issue of longer polling station opening hours to facilitate shift-workers and commuters, and also begs the question of who exactly is informing new residents of the location of their polling stations. This information is not readily available to new residents. It must be actively sought which is a noteworthy issue given the multitude of new developments in Fingal County in recent years.

8.2.3 2004 Local, European and Citizenship Referendum Elections

As can be seen from Table 8.7, the reasons stated for failing to turn out to vote at the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections follow roughly the same pattern as those stated for the other two elections.

One of the main reasons given by respondents for failing to turn out to vote at the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections was due to a sense of disgruntlement with the voting and political process, articulated as “nothing ever changes”.

The next three most stated reasons convey a sense of dissatisfaction with politics and politicians in general.

Table 8.7: Reasons for Not Voting in the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum Elections

REASON	%
Nothing ever changes	21.7
Was sick or away from home	21.7
Politicians have no interest in the area	12.3
Didn't know who was running	5.7
Politicians break promises	13.2
Not registered to vote	20.8
Political corruption	9.4
Anger over bin charges	6.6
Too young to vote at the time	4.7
Forgot to vote	7.5
Problems getting there on time	1.9
Problems finding the polling station	1.9
Hard to get on supplementary register	2.8

These respondents were suspicious of the promises and guarantees stated in pre-election manifestos and so chose not to vote for anyone.

6.6% of respondents said they abstained from voting due to anger they felt over the introduction of the Environmental Levy on refuse collection, i.e. the bin tagging system. If this is compared with the 10.2% of respondents who stated that they turned out to vote in protest of the refuse charges (as discussed earlier in the chapter), it appears that slightly more respondents are using their vote as a protest tool rather than using silence as a form of protest. This is an encouraging finding.

Just 5.7% of respondents stated that they did not vote as they did not know who was running for election which reflects favourably on the 2004 election campaign.

8.2.4 Reasons for Not Voting by Electoral Area

Table 8.8 presents a synopsis of reasons for not voting by electoral area.

The percentages in the table are amalgamated from the percentages of respondents who stated each of the reasons for abstention with reference to turnout at the 2002 General elections, the 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum election and the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections.

Table 8.8: Reasons for Not Voting by Electoral Area

	SW	MAL	BAL	HOW	MUL	CAS
Nothing ever changes	3.6	4.2	15.7	1.0	13.6	4.5
Sick or away from home	8.2	8.4	10.0	7.3	12.9	10.8
Politicians have no interest in the area	4.7	2.4	2.0	1.0	8.4	0
Didn't know who was running	2.4	1.2	0	1.0	4.5	0
Political corruption	7.0	6.6	14.7	2.0	14.9	1.8
Not registered to vote	9.4	17.9	22.4	6.3	16.8	6.3
Too young	3.6	0	21.7	0	6.4	4.5
Polling station reasons	1.2	1.8	4.0	2.0	3.8	1.8
Forgot to vote	3.6	0	3.9	1.0	3.2	0
Didn't understand the issues	7.1	5.4	12.0	1.0	4.5	3.6

The assertion that “nothing ever changes” appears to play a large part in abstention in the Balbriggan and Mulhuddart electoral areas in comparison to the other electoral areas. This introduces the notion that such an attitude might be socio-economically based in that the Balbriggan and Mulhuddart electoral areas are considered to be of a lower socio-economic standing than the other electoral areas in Fingal. This finding is not a function of the community group sample in that the postal samples from these two electoral areas also recorded high percentages of respondents who abstained due to the belief that “nothing ever changes”. This highlights the need for voter information to be widely available and for voter education programs to be made more readily available in these two electoral areas.

Non registration appears to a problem that is evident in all electoral areas which suggests the need for county wide registration drives to be implemented.

A slightly higher percentage of respondents from the Mulhuddart electoral area stated that politicians have no interest in their area. This is a warranted concern and one which arose in the interviews that were conducted, as will be addressed later in the chapter.

Many of the other reasons for abstention, especially those relating to involuntary abstention, appear to be universal concerns, as can be determined from an examination of the figures in Table 8.8.

8.2.5 Synopsis of Reasons for Not Voting

As previously discussed, not being registered to vote is commonly stated as being a reason for failing to turn out to vote. This begs the question as to how facilitative the registration process is in this country. When asked if their name was on the electoral register now, 3% of respondents stated that it was not while 4.6% of respondents stated being unsure as to whether or not their name was on the electoral register. In relation to electoral area, 7.5% of respondents from the Balbriggan electoral area and 10.9% of respondents from the Mulhuddart electoral area stated being unsure as to whether their name was on the register with 9.4% of respondents from the Balbriggan electoral area stating that were not registered to vote. The higher percentages in these two electoral areas may be due the community group samples which saw higher percentages of unsure respondents in comparison to the postal samples from these electoral areas. However, the postal samples from these two electoral areas also recorded higher percentages of respondents who were unsure as to whether their name was on the electoral register in comparison to the other electoral areas, suggesting that even without the community group sample, attention would be drawn to these two

electoral areas in this regard. This may be related to the higher levels of population mobility associated with these two electoral areas.

Another commonly stated reason for voter abstention was that of being sick or away from home on the day of the election. Again this raises questions as to how facilitative the electoral system is.

The idea that nothing ever changes along with not understanding the issues relevant to an election appear to be strong demobilising factors in explaining voter abstention. This is followed by a sense of disgruntlement with politics as evident across all three elections in that respondents stated failing to turn out to vote due to the belief that politicians always break promises made in the run up to, and during, the election campaign. Adding to this sense of discontentment is the belief that politicians have no interest in the area where respondents reside.

In summation of the most commonly stated reasons for voter abstention, not being registered to vote appears to be a huge demobilising factor along with being absent on the day of polling, not understanding the relevant electoral issues, believing that one vote fails to cause change and disgruntlement with politics.

Interviewees were asked what were the most common reasons for abstention that they came across in their encounters with the electorate. It is worth noting that the reasons stated by the interviewees varied markedly in accordance to the area where that particular person worked and represented. In particular, having limited literacy skills, not being registered to vote and not knowing how to complete the ballot paper were only stated in the case of the Mulhuddart electoral area. It is surprising that non-registration was not a recurring reason given that it featured strongly in the questionnaire survey. However, it is suggested that the

anonymity that the questionnaire survey assured allowed respondents to answer more truthfully than they would in a face-to-face situation with a door-to-door canvasser. It is likely that in these face-to-face encounters, a degree of bias was introduced whereby the elector responded in a manner that caused the least amount of embarrassment to him/herself, giving the responses that they believed the canvasser wanted to hear.

A common de-motivating factor and one which corresponds to the survey findings is that of broken promises and the likelihood of nothing changing no matter who gets elected. It was suggested by one interviewee that this attitude is usually a characteristic of those with lesser educational qualifications who are inclined to accuse all political parties as being the same, even though they have little interest in or understanding of political matters. It was also suggested that there is an attitude of “better the devil you know” stemming from a lack of faith in any political party.

Voter apathy was frequently stated, particularly with reference to the youngest age cohorts and “Kidults” (kid/adults), young adults residing with their parents whose present concerns are not addressed by politics. It was suggested that these people will be marked by apathy until such a time as their worries are politically disposed, for example, tax bands, mortgage interest rates, childcare and school places.

8.3 TYPES OF VOTERS AND NON-VOTERS IN FINGAL

8.3.1 Types of Voters in Fingal

An analysis of the reasons given for turning out to vote in each of the six local electoral areas allows a picture of the types of voters in Fingal to be built up.

Referring back to section 2.3.2 Types of Voters, ten different types of voter were identified, the issue voter (Dunleavy, 1990; Campbell et al, 1964), the rational voter (Downs 1957, Pattie & Johnston, 2004), the tactical voter (Catt, 1989), the negative voter (Dunleavy, 1990, 1996), the consistent voter, the floating voter (Himmelweit et al, 1981), the complacent voter (Owen, 2005), the class voter (Campbell et al, 1964), the protest voter (Lassen, 2005) and the guilty voter (Blais, 2002).

The identification of the types of voters in each of the electoral areas in Fingal is limited by the bounds of this research. The types of voters that will be presented in this chapter are inferred from survey findings based on the reasons given by respondents for turning out to vote. Therefore, it is possible that there are other types of voters in each of the electoral areas that have not been identified.

A high percentage of the voters from each of the electoral areas stated one of their reasons for voting as being due to "civic duty". This may be indicative of a guilty voter. Those who vote due to guilt feel that voting is a moral obligation of the electorate, and therefore not voting would arouse feelings of guilt. A voter who votes due to civic duty may fit this profile in that abstention would bring on feelings of guilt and of not fulfilling a civic and moral duty.

Some respondents stated their reason for voting as being due to concern over local issues, concern over the war in Iraq and to express an opinion on the citizenship issue (in the case of the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections). This may be emblematic of the issue voter. The issue voter is preoccupied by issues that have come onto the political agenda during the election campaign, and by already existing issues that they feel should be addressed. Those voters who fall into the category of issue voters, vote for the

party that best addresses the particular issue that is of most concern to them at election time.

Many respondents stated that they turned out to vote to support a certain political party, to help elect a particular candidate or in support of a candidate whom they received help from in the past. These reasons may be indicative of the consistent voter. The consistent voter is characterised by set voting patterns and partisan alignments. These voters do not fluctuate in either their turnout decision or their vote choice. It is this type of voter who turns out to support a particular political party or candidate.

It was stated by some respondents that one of their reasons for turning out lies in the fact that their family always voted. This reason is ambiguous with respect to inferring a voter type in that it may be indicative of three types of voter, the negative voter, the complacent voter or the consistent voter. The negative voter makes a choice not out of support for a particular political party or candidate, but as a choice must be made in order to be able to vote. This voter wants to vote but is limited by the options over which they have no control. The negative voter's motivation is aptly summarised by Fiedler (1959: 184) "Do they vote to make a choice, or make a choice in order to be able to vote?". Those who feel compelled to turn out to vote as a result of a family history of voting may experience these negative voting motivations and hence fall into the category of "the negative voter". They may also, however, be complacent voters. Complacent voters are those who are not very interested in voting, the voting process and what it entails and presumes. The complacent voter takes their opportunity to vote for granted and they do not dwell on election matters. The voter who feels compelled to vote as a result of family history may fall into this category of complacent voters as

opposed to negative voters. However, for the purposes of this research, this reason for voting is taken to be indicative of the consistent voter. As previously mentioned, voting as a result of family influences appears to be a factor that has a constant influence on individual turnout propensity. It may be suggested therefore, that voting because of family influences is a reinforcing factor in turnout propensity and that those who vote as a result of “family history” will continue to vote in subsequent elections, supporting the contention that voting is a habit forming activity (see chapter seven), and indicating consistent voting.

Some respondents stated that they voted in protest to the government or in protest to a certain policy such as the Environmental Levy on refuse collection, i.e. the bin tagging system. This may be indicative of the protest voter. The protest voter experiences negative voting motivations in using his/her vote to express opposition to majority rule. For these respondents, they used their vote as a means of expressing disapproval of the government or of local policies.

There was a high percentage of respondents across all electoral areas who stated one of their reasons for voting as wanting to have an input in electing government. These voters are more difficult to categorise but may fall into the category of the floating voter. The floating voter has no partisan alignment and perceives there to be little differences between the relevant political parties (Himmelweit et al, 1981). Therefore, the floating voter’s choice may change from one election to the next. It is possible that those who stated their reason for voting as wanting to have an input in electing government have no preferential party or candidate, yet vote regardless to exercise their right.

By examining the reasons given for voting and the associated voter type on an electoral area basis, a picture may be developed of the type of voters in each of the electoral areas in Fingal.

It has been deduced that every local electoral area in Fingal contains evidence of guilty voting and float voting in accordance to the high percentage recorded for each of the respective related reasons for turning out to vote. In addition, from most prevalent to least prevalent in accordance with survey findings, it has been deduced that the types of voting presented in Table 8.9 also exist in each of the electoral areas. These were deduced from the percentage recorded for the respective reasons in each electoral area in comparison to other electoral areas. The figures following each type of voter correspond to a cumulative percentage of the figures recorded for each of the respective reasons given which amalgamate to produce a certain type of voting. Therefore, the type of voter listed first in each electoral area may not necessarily correspond to the highest percentage but it will correspond to how prevalent each of the related reasons were in that electoral area.

Swords and Balbriggan are identical in the types of voters that reside in these two electoral areas. They are marked mainly by issue voting followed by protest voting with lesser incidences of negative and complacent voting. The Castleknock electoral area is similar in that it too is characterised by issue voting. Protest voting however, is not a feature in this electoral area which has incidences of negative and complacent voting. Just one type of voting was identified with respect to the Howth electoral area, that of consistent voting. Consistent voting is also a feature of the Malahide electoral area, which in addition to this, features some degree of negative or complacent voting. The

Mulhuddart electoral area is characterised mainly by protest voting. This is followed by issue voting and finally by consistent voting.

Table 8.9: Types of Voting in Fingal by Electoral Area

ELECTORAL AREA	TYPE OF VOTING	%
SWORDS	Issue Voting	55.8
	Protest Voting	25.6
	Consistent Voting	23.3
MALAHIDE	Consistent Voting	69.0
BALBRIGGAN	Issue Voting	50.0
	Protest Voting	32.0
	Consistent Voting	60.0
HOWTH	Consistent Voting	52.6
MULHUDDART	Protest Voting	30.8
	Issue Voting	41.0
	Consistent Voting	64.7
CASTLEKNOCK	Issue Voting	46.8
	Consistent Voting	53.1

The types of voting in each of the local electoral areas appears to be conducive with the accepted socio-economic standing of the electoral areas. As would be expected, the Malahide and Howth electoral areas are characterised mainly by consistent voting. These established areas appear to have established voting types also, in that consistent voters are those who turn out to vote for the same party or candidate at each election. Protest voting on the other hand, would be expected to occur in the lower socio-economic electoral areas, and this appears to be the case with evidence of protest voting occurring in the Mulhuddart, Balbriggan and Swords electoral areas.

8.3.2 Types of Non-Voters in Fingal

As outlined in section 2.3.3.Types of Abstainers, there is more than one type of non-voter. Crewe (2002) identified six different categories of non-voters; voluntary, involuntary, apathetic, alienated, indifferent and instrumental.

As was the case with the identification of types of voters in the previous section, the identification of types of abstainers is also limited by the bounds of this research in that the inference of a type of non-voter depends upon survey findings on the reasons given by respondents for failing to turn out to vote. Therefore, it is possible that there are types of non-voting in an area that are unidentifiable given the manner in which the types are inferred from the survey data. An example of this is the instrumental non-voter or the rational non-voter. The limitations of the survey data from which the inferences are made make it unfeasible to identify true incidences of rational non-voting.

Where respondents indicated that they failed to vote due to electronic voting, political corruption or that they just forgot to vote, it was taken to be indicative of voluntary or deliberate non-voting. In the case of the 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum election, deliberate non-voting was also inferred where respondents stated that they abstained because the election was held on a Sunday or that it was the second election held on the Nice Treaty.

Those respondents who reported being sick or away from home on the day of the election, not being registered to vote, being too young to vote at the time of the election, having no polling card, having problems getting to the polling station on time or having problems finding the polling station displayed features of involuntary or accidental non-voting. The non-voter who falls into this category abstains due to uncontrollable circumstances. These are circumstantial abstainers

who would ordinarily turn out to vote if their circumstances complimented the Election Day.

Respondents who stated failing to vote because of a belief that politicians have no interest in their area, or because they believe that the election was just not important display signs of apathetic non-voting. These abstainers are marked by indifference and are simply not interested in taking part in elections.

Signs of alienated abstaining are displayed by respondents who failed to turn out due to political system constraints. This type of abstention is difficult to deduce from the survey findings but may be seen in those respondents who abstained due to their preferred candidate not contesting the election or due to there being no local candidate running for election.

The indifferent abstainer is the non-voter who is interested in politics and who would turn out to vote if there were perceived differences between the competing political parties. However, as no differences are perceived, the indifferent non-voter chooses to abstain. Those respondents who stated their reasons for not voting as not knowing who was running for election or as not understanding the issues relevant to the given election are indicative of indifferent non-voting. Similarly, those respondents who abstain from voting due to a belief that nothing ever changes may also be emblematic of indifferent non-voting. On the other hand, they may also be indicative of instrumental abstention. The instrumental abstainer is the rational non-voter. This non-voter calculates the costs of voting in terms of time and monetary losses. If these costs outweigh the benefits incurred from voting, the instrumental abstainer fails to turn out to vote as voting cannot be rationally justified. Those respondents who believe that "nothing ever changes" may be prone to this type of abstention. Likewise, in the case of the

2002 Nice Treaty Referendum election, those respondents who failed to turn out as they felt that the treaty was sure to be passed also display instrumental abstention.

Reasons for abstention and the associated non-voting type were collated for the three different elections featured in this study. When examined with respect to electoral area, a picture of the different types of non-voter was developed (see Table 8.10). For the purposes of this analysis, in order for one type of abstention to be noted in an electoral area, it must have been documented to have occurred in at least two of the three featured elections. As was the case with types of voting, the types of non-voting were deduced from the percentage recorded for the respective reasons in each electoral area in comparison to other electoral areas.

Table 8.10: Types of Non-Voting in Fingal by Electoral Area

ELECTORAL AREA	TYPE OF NON-VOTING	%
SWORDS	Involuntary Abstention	23.6
	Apathetic Abstention	7.1
	Indifferent Abstention	13.1
MALAHIDE	Involuntary Abstention	29.9
BALBRIGGAN	Voluntary Abstention	25.6
	Apathetic Abstention	9.9
	Involuntary Abstention	67.0
HOWTH	Involuntary Abstention	18.7
MULHUDDART	Indifferent Abstention	22.6
	Involuntary Abstention	42.5
	Apathetic Abstention	9.7
	Voluntary Abstention	16.6
CASTLEKNOCK	Involuntary Abstention	24.3

The figures following each type of non-voting correspond to a cumulative percentage of the figure recorded for each of the respective reasons given which

amalgamate to produce a certain type of non-voting. Therefore, the type of non-voter listed first in each electoral area may not necessarily correspond to the highest percentage but it will correspond to how prevalent each of the related reasons were in that electoral area.

It was not possible to identify incidences of alienated or instrumental abstention although this does not mean that the electoral areas in Fingal are free from this type of abstention. It merely reflects on the data collection in that it was not possible to deduce from the survey responses given, whether these types of abstention occurred regularly from one election to the next.

As can be seen in Table 8.10, each electoral area was marked by involuntary abstention on some level. It was the most common type of abstention in the Swords electoral area and the only type of documented abstention in the Malahide, Howth and Castleknock electoral areas. Apathetic abstention was the second most common type of non-voting in the Swords electoral area and the most common type in the Balbriggan and Mulhuddart electoral areas. The final type of abstention in the Swords electoral area was that of indifferent abstention which was also a feature of the Mulhuddart electoral area. In addition, there was also some degree of voluntary abstention in both the Balbriggan and Mulhuddart electoral areas.

8.4 BARRIERS TO VOTING

8.4.1 Problems with the Voting Process

Respondents were asked to state any difficulties they had with the voting process. The problems stated are listed in Table 8.11 below.

Encouragingly, over half of the respondents stated having no difficulty with the voting process. However, this may be reflective of the respondents themselves in that those who are most likely to respond to a survey such as the one in this research are likely to be interested in politics and hence have little difficulty with the process itself. On the other hand, 5.6% of respondents had more than one difficulty with the voting process.

Table 8.11: Problems with the Voting Process

PROBLEM	%
Finding the polling station	2.4
Not enough information on voting card	7.4
Filling in the ballot	1.5
Electronic voting	11.5
Registering to vote	6.5
Receiving a polling card	6.0
Time it takes to vote	4.4
Knowing who the candidates are	17.4
Other Difficulty	6.8
No Difficulty	58.3

As can be seen from Table 8.11, what posed the biggest problem to respondents in relation to the electoral process was that of “knowing who the candidates are”. This suggests that in general, the costly campaigns undertaken by candidates are inadequate in familiarising the electorate with election candidates and in providing information. It suggests there is a need for a restructuring of campaigns away from the usual “poster and leaflet-drop” and back towards a more traditional personalised approach.

Over one-tenth of the respondents stated having a problem with electronic voting. Presumably, these respondents were off-put by the prospect of using or having to use an automated electronic voting system such as that that many were faced with in the 2002 electoral contests.

7.4% of respondents complained about the lack of information on polling cards. Perhaps a reminder of the candidates, parties or choices on offer, and/or a map of how to find the polling station provided with polling cards would alleviate this problem.

Worryingly, quite a number of respondents had problems registering to vote. This questionnaire survey was conducted throughout 2006 when shortcomings with the electoral register were highlighted in the media. This suggests the need for not only a county-wide but country-wide registration initiative/drive. Forms distributed through household letterboxes are discriminatory in the sense that they exclude from registration, those with literacy problems and difficulties and those with language barrier problems. Oftentimes they are seen as off-putting from the perspective that they are returned to the county council. For many, these forms may be viewed and perceived as a method of finding out how many people are living in a particular house which may often de-motivate those living in social housing from registering to vote.

6.8% of respondents stated having some other difficulty with the voting process. Top amongst these responses was trying to distinguish between various policies and issues and trying to understand the political rhetoric used. Respondents complained of not understanding what they are voting for and put this down to the elaborate language used by the different parties. Issues relating to polling stations were the next most stated problem and in particular, the lack of parking at the polling centres. Respondents were also discontented with the opening hours of polling stations with the general consensus being that they should open earlier and stay open later. Many respondents also expressed a desire for other methods of voting to be introduced to facilitate those who are away from home

on the day of election. Of particular interest to respondents was an investigation of a feasible online or email voting system for those who are unable to access the polling station on the day.

Other issues mentioned related to electronic voting and to the electoral register, in particular, having to re-register often despite having voted in the previous election. Those who listed electronic voting as a problem to be addressed were split on the issue with some questioning the validity, integrity and expense of such a system, with others stating that they would like to see a verifiable electronic voting system in operation.

Lesser mentioned issues related to dishonesty in elections and candidate corruption, canvassing issues such as door-to-door canvassers, and environmental issues surrounding elections in relation to the resources used.

Table 8.12 displays the problems with the voting process in accordance to electoral area.

Table 8.12: Problems with the Voting Process by Electoral Area

	SW	MAL	BAL	HOW	MUL	CAS
Finding the polling station	3.5	0.6	3.8	0	4.7	2.8
Not enough information on voting card	14.0	1.8	3.8	6.4	13.3	5.5
Filling in the ballot	1.2	0.6	3.8	0	4.0	0
Electronic voting	16.3	11.2	7.7	6.4	12.7	12.8
Registering to vote	4.7	7.1	15.4	3.2	6.0	6.4
Receiving a polling card	5.8	2.9	7.7	2.1	12.0	5.5
Time it takes to vote	9.3	2.4	3.8	4.3	4.7	3.7
Knowing who the candidates are	25.6	14.7	21.2	13.8	18.7	14.7
Other Difficulty	1.2	5.9	13.5	4.3	11.3	5.5
No Difficulty	57.0	64.1	42.3	72.3	45.3	63.3

Significantly larger numbers of respondents from the Mulhuddart electoral area reported difficulties with finding their polling station, as especially compared with the Malahide and Howth electoral areas. This may have to do with the established nature of the Malahide and Howth electoral areas where people are

likely to have been resident for quite some time. The Mulhuddart electoral area, in comparison, is characterised by high population mobility. It has been the scene of much residential development in recent years and so it is likely that those with this difficulty are relatively new residents. This may be associated with the fact that a lack of information on polling cards was considered a problem by 13.3% of respondents from the Mulhuddart electoral area. This, along with the previous difficulty of finding the polling station suggests the need for additional information such as maps to be put on polling cards, especially in this area.

“Knowing who the candidates are” appeared to be less of a problem amongst respondents from the well established higher socio-economic electoral areas of Malahide, Howth and Castleknock, in keeping with previous findings in relation to newspaper readership. Specifically, higher percentages of respondents from these electoral areas stated that they regularly read newspapers in comparison to the other electoral areas. Engaging in newspaper readership is likely to increase one’s knowledge of electoral issues and by deduction, of the candidates running for election. This can be seen in the lower percentages of respondents from these three electoral areas who found knowing who the candidates are to be a problem. These lower percentages may also be associated with the greater residential stability in these electoral areas which results in these residentially stable respondents being more likely to know who the candidates in their area are.

A significant number of Swords respondents reported problems in terms of finding the time to vote. A speculative reason for this may be commuting times and the fact that Swords, while being closer to the city centre than many other parts of Fingal, is serviced only by a bus route, unlike many other parts of Fingal.

There is no observable geographical trend with regards to difficulties with electronic voting. It appears that this is a problem which transcends socio-economic circumstances with the highest percentages of respondents who stated this as a difficulty coming from the Swords, Castleknock and Mulhuddart electoral areas.

15.4% of respondents who reported difficulties with registering to vote were from the Balbriggan electoral area. This is in keeping with the age breakdown of respondents from this electoral area as presented in chapter seven. Specifically, the survey sample from the Balbriggan electoral area was comprised of quite a number of respondents in the youngest age cohort. Lack of experience with the electoral system amongst this group may have contributed to the high percentages in this electoral area who found registering to vote difficult. In comparison to other listed difficulties, there were quite high percentages of respondents in all electoral areas who found registering to vote difficult. This suggests the need for a county wide registration drive to be implemented.

12% of respondents from the Mulhuddart electoral area and 7.7% of respondents from the Balbriggan electoral area reported problems with regards to receiving polling cards. Apart from signifying the need for voter education programs, this might partially explain the lower turnout rates associated with both of these electoral areas as detailed in chapter six. Specifically, although one can vote without a polling card, lack of knowledge about this provision might cause those who have not received polling cards to abstain from voting.

8.4.2 Encouraging Non-Voters to the Polls

Respondents were asked what they believed would help and encourage non-voters to the polls. A list of their responses is given in Table 8.13 below.

Table 8.13: Factors That Might Encourage Non-Voters to Vote

ACTION	%
Evidence that voting makes a difference	69.5
Longer opening hours at polling stations	26.4
Courses in schools about voting	41.7
Weekend voting	45.6
Politicians helping the area	52.7
Locals standing for election	35.6
Better information from political parties	25.1
Maps on polling cards	16.3
Voter education programs	30.2
Other	9.7

Quite high percentages of respondents believed that seeing the effects of turning out to vote would help to entice non-voters to the polls. 69.5% of respondents stated that providing evidence that voting makes a difference would entice non-voters to the polls while 52.7% stated that politicians visibly helping their area would encourage those who do not vote to turn out on Election Day.

45.6% of respondents believed that holding elections at the weekend might help to increase turnout while 41.7% stated that holding educational courses about voting in schools would be a sustainable approach to creating greater turnouts. This is based in the fact that a greater proportion of 18-24 year olds abstain from voting than those in older age cohorts. Hence, combating abstention amongst this cohort would have knock-on effects throughout the cohorts in later years as these voters age, eliminating the generational effects of decreasing turnouts throughout all cohorts.

35.6% of respondents stated that non-voters would be more likely to turn out to vote if local people stood for election. It is often thought that local people would

do more for the area than those unacquainted with it or than those who do not live their everyday lives amongst the local community. This might be based around having a stake in the community in which one lives and wanting to improve that particular place for subjective reasons.

30.6% of respondents believe that the key to getting non-voters to turn out lies in voter education programs which would help to eradicate ignorance about the topic and quench the apprehension of non-voters about the electoral process.

9.7% of respondents availed of the “other” option in this question and stated another method of enticing non-voters to the polls. The most commonly stated of these falls under the umbrella term of “honesty”. Honesty and transparency in political life with more evidence of integrity amongst politicians is suggested as helping those who do not vote to vote by reducing scepticism amongst the non-voting population.

The introduction of compulsory voting was the next most stated suggestion with penalties imposed for failing to turn out to vote. Such penalties mentioned include monetary fines, imprisonment and losing the vote for consistent non-voting.

A simpler registration procedure was another commonly mentioned suggestion and in particular, a registration drive conducted in the same manner as the Census.

The availability of clearer information about the voting process was also suggested as a means of encouraging people to the polls and in particular, colloquially phrased leaflets and manifestos along with details of what has been achieved by each candidate since the previous election.

Politicians being forced to keep promises made during the election campaign by imposing punishment for failing to do so, along with the sacking of corrupt and incompetent politicians was also suggested by some respondents as a means of increasing turnout.

The introduction of alternative voting methods such as e-voting and text voting was also suggested as a possible means of increasing turnout amongst non-voters, followed by suggestions of better canvassing by articulate canvassers, better publicity about one's responsibility as a voter and more coherent policies. Interviewees reiterated some of the responses made by survey respondents. When asked what changes they think could be made to help and encourage the electorate to vote, the most common response was education. Non-party political education courses such as those run by the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice was suggested as an appropriate means of encouraging sustainable turnout. The introduction of compulsory voting was also suggested by some as a means of creating higher turnouts. However, it was criticised by others who stated that international experience indicates that compulsory voting coincides with greater occurrences of extremist and racist voting. With regards to polling days, it was suggested that holding polling over a two day period, preferably with one of those days being a weekend day, would facilitate more voters and hence increase turnout. Longer opening hours were also suggested as a means to increase turnout along with having "helpers" in the polling stations, i.e. people who would demonstrate how to fill out the ballot paper which would encourage those who are apprehensive about the voting process to turn out to vote.

An analysis was conducted of the possible means of enticing non-voters out to vote in accordance with electoral area. The results of this are presented in Table 8.14 below.

Table 8.14: Help Non-Voters to Vote by Electoral Area

FACTOR	SW	MAL	BAL	HOW	MUL	CAS
Evidence that voting makes a difference	73.3	74.0	72.5	64.5	67.8	64.5
Longer opening hours at polling stations	24.4	21.9	29.4	23.7	30.9	30.0
Courses in schools about voting	40.7	45.0	27.5	43.0	40.8	43.6
Weekend voting	48.8	48.5	45.1	39.8	36.8	56.4
Politicians helping the area	57.0	51.5	60.8	48.4	51.3	53.6
Locals standing for election	26.7	33.1	43.1	38.7	34.2	42.7
Better information from parties	27.9	21.9	17.6	18.3	28.9	31.8
Maps on polling cards	15.1	10.7	17.6	16.1	18.4	22.7
Voter education programs	34.9	28.4	21.6	32.3	30.3	31.8
Other	4.7	10.1	11.8	7.5	10.5	12.7

There was a general consensus amongst respondents from each of the electoral areas as to the factors that might encourage non-voters to the polls with certain trends evident in the data.

In comparison to the other electoral areas, quite a high percentage of respondents from the Castleknock electoral area stated that weekend voting might entice non-voters to the polls. Weekend voting may have been considered to be more important in the Castleknock electoral area than in the other electoral areas as the population of the Castleknock electoral area is thought to have a large commuter base. Therefore, the holding of elections on weekend days would greatly facilitate these commuters who otherwise would be under time constraints to reach the polling stations on time.

This ties in with the idea of longer polling station opening hours. A higher percentage of respondents from the Castleknock and Mulhuddart electoral areas stated longer opening hours as a means of increasing turnout. As just mentioned, the commuting base to these two electoral areas might account for why this

factor was considered to be effective at mobilising non-voters in these electoral areas.

Local people standing for election seemed to be an important factor to respondents from the Balbriggan electoral area. As will be discussed in chapter ten, the Balbriggan electoral area is marked by a high degree of place identity, especially in relation to identity with Fingal County. This suggests that politics in the Balbriggan electoral area has a strong local base to it which may partially account for why there was a high percentage of respondents from this electoral area who believed that non-voters may be enticed to vote if more local people stood for election.

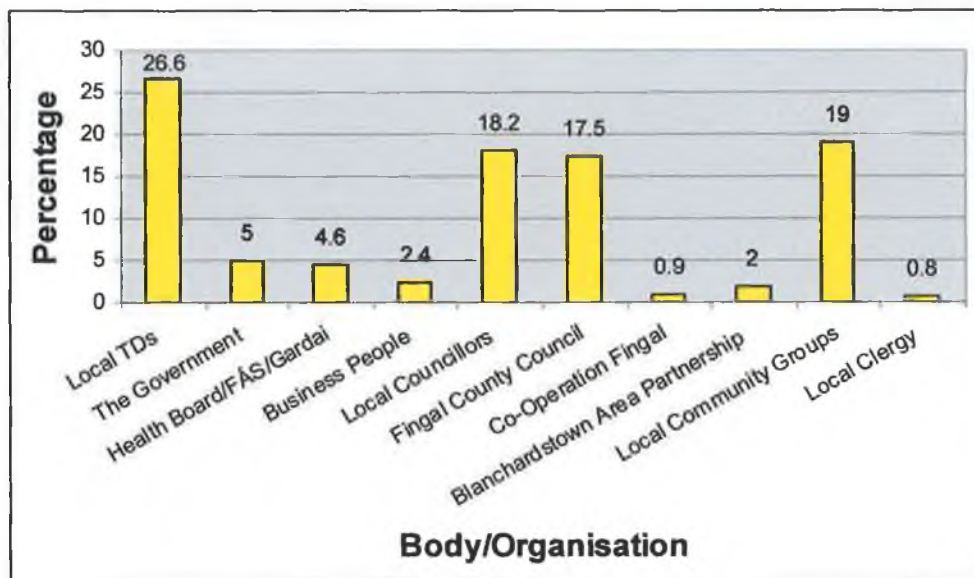
22.7% of respondents from the Castleknock electoral area and 18.4% of respondents from the Mulhuddart electoral area believed that if maps were put on polling cards detailing the location of the polling stations, more people might vote. The higher percentages for this factor in these two electoral areas may be attributed to the fact that the Mulhuddart and Castleknock electoral areas have been characterised in recent years by urban sprawl in that they have been witness to an explosion of residential building developments. It is likely that these new residents would be unsure as to the location of their polling station, especially as population growth demands the creation of new polling stations. For these voters, often the less costly option is to abstain.

8.4.3 People in the Community Likely to Help

Respondents were presented with a list of possible sources that they might turn to for information or help regarding certain matters. Respondents were asked to rank the list in accordance to who they believed were the most helpful bodies.

An analysis of the first three rankings given to each group conveys the attitudes of respondents to be very much focussed towards “the local” in terms of receiving help. Top amongst these “local” groups who might provide assistance were local TDs with 26.6% of respondents considering this their best option when seeking help. Local community groups featured next with 19% of respondents considering this their best option, followed closely by local councillors at 18.2% and Fingal County Council at 17.5%.

Figure 8.2: Perceived helpfulness of local people/bodies (1st Ranks)



Co-Operation Fingal and the Blanchardstown Area Partnership, although operating on a local basis, were considered the best chance of help by just 0.9% and 2% of respondents respectively. This may be due to the limited remit of these two groups within Fingal, and in those areas where they do operate, a lack of knowledge regarding these two community based organisations and their work. Just 5% of respondents believed the Government to be the best chance of help which adds to the general sense of disillusionment and disenchantment that seems to be a recurring theme of this questionnaire survey. Local clergy fared the worst with just 0.8% of respondents placing these in the pole position when it

comes to seeking help, although it is presumed that this has more to do with changing attitudes in society than with a failing on behalf of the clergy.

There was little difference in the responses of voters and non-voters with regards to who is perceived as helpful. The only noteworthy feature is that there is less of a definitive first place with regards to non-voters. Local TDs were considered to be the most helpful body by 27.9% of voters with local community groups coming second at 19.8%. In relation to non-voters however, this figure was 18.9% in the case of local TDs and 16.7% in the case of local community groups. Local TDs and local councillors appear to be held in high regard with respect to their perceived helpfulness. However, when questioned during interviews about their engagement with different areas in their respective constituencies and electoral areas, responses were quite mixed. Interviewees stated varying degrees of involvement with lower turnout areas and groups. Some respondents stated that most of their work involved low turnout areas where they encourage electors to participate in voter education courses and generally spend much time trying to convince voters to turn out and vote rather than to vote for them, as emphasised by the following comment;

"I am active and engage with those sections of the community that are active and fighting on issues, irregardless of whether they participate in elections or not."

Other interviewees stated that they are always engaged with low turnout areas where they campaign issues that are important to the residents which gets the residents actively engaged and beings the politicisation process. Some interviewees stated that although they are less involved with low turnout areas than high turnout areas, they are still involved on some level, as verified by the following comment;

“I generally advise [low turnout] groups, whether they be youth groups, residents groups or groups of people who feel there is no point in voting to read my parties policies.”

Others however, stated that low turnout areas simply do not get the same level of interest or resources as areas with higher turnout putting this down to common sense on the behalf of the canvasser. These interviewees stated that they basically ignore low turnout areas in favour of those areas where high turnout is a feature.

“[Low turnout areas] don't get the same level of resources or same level of attention from politicians...and that's just common sense really...”

8.4.4 Information about Voting

43.6% of respondents stated that having more information about voting and the voting process would increase their likelihood of turning out to vote while 56.4% stated that more information would make no difference to their chances of voting.

Table 8.15: Respondent Compiled List of Where Electoral Information Should Come From

SOURCES OF INFORMATION	%
Political Parties	7.5
Government	34.7
Local TDs and Candidates	12.9
Fingal County Council	16.5
Local Government Bodies	6.6
Apolitical Organisations	5.4
The Electoral Commission	1.5
Local & National Press	3.6
Public TV Broadcasts	0.6
Citizen Information Centres	0.6
Schools/Educational Courses	6.6
Libraries	1.2
Community Centres	1.5
The Internet	0.3
People Themselves	0.6

Not all respondents who stated that having more information would increase their likelihood to vote stated where they thought this information should come

from. The responses of those who did however are documented in Table 8.15 above.

The most popular choice was that of the Government. In every instance however, there was no statement of the means by which the government might provide this information.

A significant number of respondents who answered this question believed the onus is on Fingal County Council to provide voting information to the electorate in their remit.

12.9% of respondents stated that it was the responsibility of individual TDs and candidates to provide this information while 7.5% stated that it should be political parties who provide it. These respondents believed that as candidates and political parties are those ultimately seeking the vote, it is up to them to motivate and entice voters to the polls.

6.6% of respondents believed the best method of delivering political information is through educational courses and courses run in schools. These courses take the form of voter education course for adults and voting modules within the civics curriculum for those in second level education.

6.6% stated that local government bodies should provide information about the voting process. This includes 0.9% of respondents who specifically stated the Fingal Development Board as being the body who could be doing more to provide information to the electorate. Almost the same percentage, 5.4% stated that information should come from apolitical organisations to eliminate the possibility of partisan motives. Other sources of information are listed in Table 8.15 and include The Electoral Commission, local and national press, public TV broadcasts, libraries and community centres among others. 0.6% of those who

answered this question believed the onus is on the individual to inform themselves through pre-existing methods.

8.5 CONCLUSION

Consistent across the three elections for which reasons for turnout were studied are the roles that civic duty and family history play in motivating the electorate to turn out to vote. This was a consistent finding across the six local electoral areas. In actuality, there was little variation in the stated reasons for turnout amongst respondents from all electoral areas. One of the only noteworthy findings in fact, was the frequent occurrence of protest voting in lower socio-economic electoral areas when compared with those electoral areas considered to be of a higher socio-economic standing. Every electoral area was found to include cases of guilty and float voting with varying levels of consistent voting, issue voting and, as previously mentioned, protest voting depending on the electoral area.

In relation to reasons for abstention, involuntary reasons appeared to occur in every local electoral area. In particular, non-registration proved to be a major factor in abstention across Fingal. There were also varying levels of voluntary, apathetic and indifferent abstention between the electoral areas.

The most common difficulty encountered according to survey respondents was that of knowing who the candidates standing for election are. This appeared to be less of a problem however amongst respondents from those electoral areas where newspaper readership was high. Registration was also found to be a problematic procedure along with electronic voting.

Proving that turning out to vote makes a difference was the most common suggestion of how to motivate non-voters to turn out to vote. However, the most

efficacious means of achieving this proved to be subjective with the most commonly stated method being that of voter education programs, either by local bodies or via the civics curriculum in schools.

It was determined that respondents see local bodies and local people as being the best means of achieving help on different matters. In particular, local TDs, councillors and community groups along with Fingal County Council were thought of as being the most effective people and bodies to approach when looking for help. It was also thought that further information about voting and the voting process should come from these bodies, along with from the Government.

This chapter has been concerned with respondents' conscious reasons for turnout and abstention along with some related factors such as barriers to voting and means of increasing turnout amongst non-voters. Along with the demographic and socio-structural factors discussed in chapter seven, and the aggregate level factors discussed in chapter six, this has helped to build on the understanding of turnout behaviour in Fingal.

However, there are other aspects of turnout that must also be addressed in order to develop a holistic understanding of turnout behaviour in Fingal. The following chapter will deal with respondents' interest in politics and understanding of the political system in an attempt to add to the portrait of turnout behaviour in Fingal County.

CHAPTER 9

POLITICS AND POLITICIANS

The factors influencing turnout, as suggested by various researchers in the literature, have now been explored and examined in detail. Likewise, an account of respondents' personal motivations for turning out to vote and their reasons for abstaining has been given in depth. But what about respondents' interest in politics itself and how this affects turnout propensity? This chapter will deal with the level of interest that exists in national and local politics and how this interest in politics is related to turnout propensity. Recognition of political candidates is also explored along with the association between candidate recognition and voter turnout. To begin with however, the level of understanding that exists about politics is dealt with along with the effect of media attention on political understanding.

9.1 POLITICAL ISSUES

9.1.1 Understanding of Issues in Different Elections

Table 9.1: Understanding of Electoral Issues

	YES	FAIR	NO
GENERAL ELECTION ISSUES	74.7	20.1	5.2
LOCAL ELECTION ISSUES	58.5	31.4	10.2
REFERENDUM ELECTION ISSUES	62.8	27.8	9.5

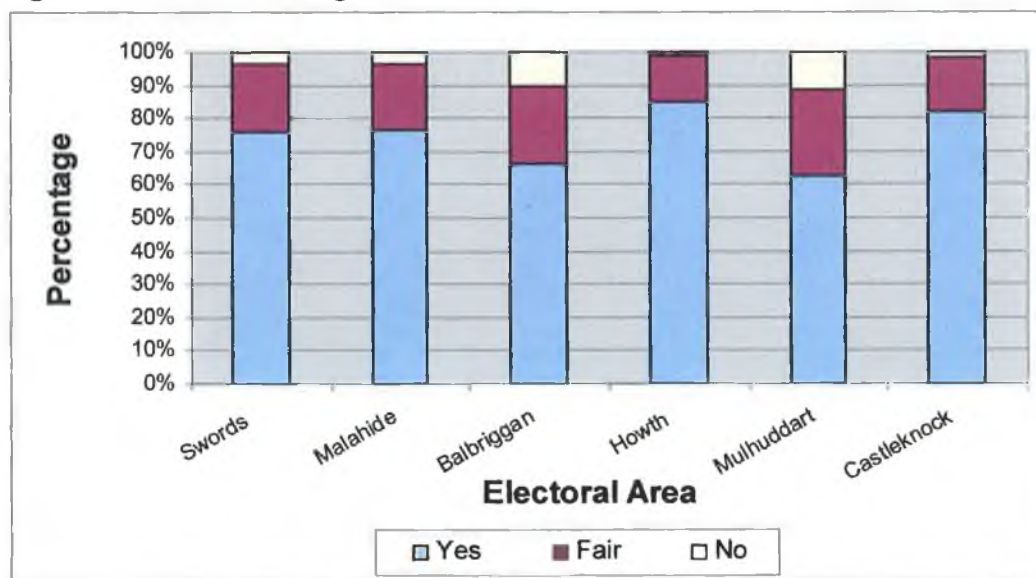
As shown in Table 9.1, 74.7% of survey respondents reported having a good understanding of the issues at stake in general elections. This figure dropped to 62.8% for referendum elections and dropped again to 58.5% in the case of local elections. The highly publicised nature of general elections and their associated campaigns along with the media time devoted to discussing the issues may

contribute somewhat to respondents' greater understanding of general electoral issues.

Worryingly, 10.2% of respondents reported having no understanding of the issues that are relevant to local elections. The blame for this may in part be placed upon campaign planners and their mobilisation techniques. The fact that local elections are very much candidate based and are influenced by the “friends and neighbours” effect can cause the focus to be adjusted to the candidates themselves rather than to what they represent. Also, there is a need for colloquially phrased manifestos and the presentation of issues through different media to reach those not currently reached through the practices in place.

There is a statistically significant relationship between understanding the issues relevant to general elections and the electoral area in which one resides, specifically in the case of the Mulhuddart electoral area.

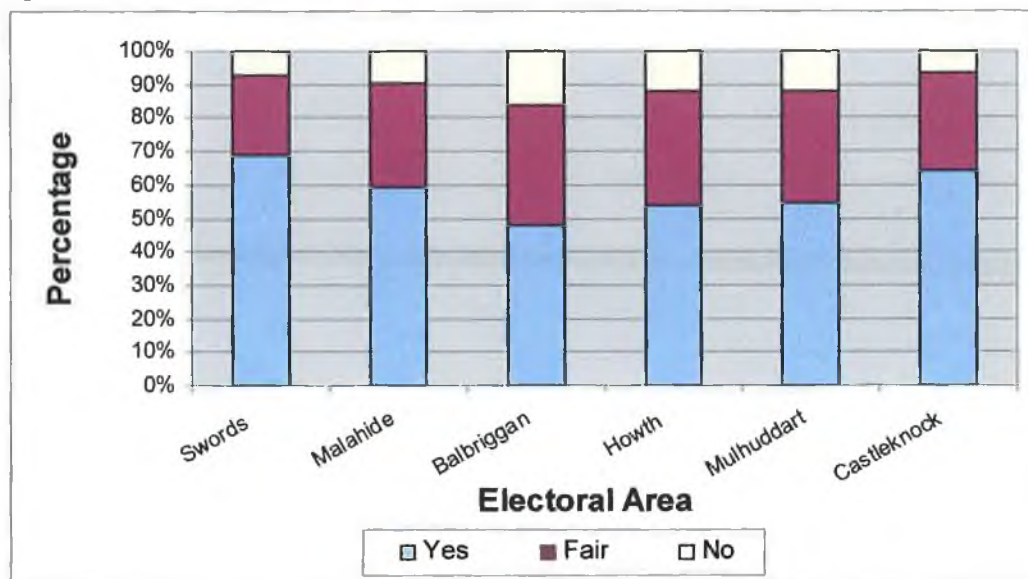
Figure 9.1: Understanding of Issues in General Elections by EA



It appears that those in the Mulhuddart electoral area are more likely to have no understanding of the issues relevant to general elections than to have a clear understanding of general electoral issues. 11.4% of respondents from this

electoral area claimed to have no understanding of general election issues. This is illustrated in Figure 9.1 where it can be seen that there is a higher proportion of respondents from the Mulhuddart electoral area in comparison to the other electoral areas who stated having no understanding of general electoral issues. The Balbriggan electoral area was not far behind at 10% but the other electoral areas in Fingal were somewhat lower at between 1.1% and 3.6%. It can also be seen from Figure 9.1 that quite a high proportion of those residing in the Howth and Castleknock electoral areas claim to have a full understanding of general electoral issues which contrasts with the Balbriggan and Mulhuddart electoral areas.

Figure 9.2: Understanding of Issues in Local Elections by EA



Differences between the electoral areas in relation to understanding the issues relevant to local elections are not statistically significant. It can be seen from Figure 9.2 that the percentages of respondents who have no understanding of the issues relating to local elections are higher for each electoral area when compared to the figures for understanding the issues relevant to general elections. In the Mulhuddart electoral area, the percentage of those who reported having no

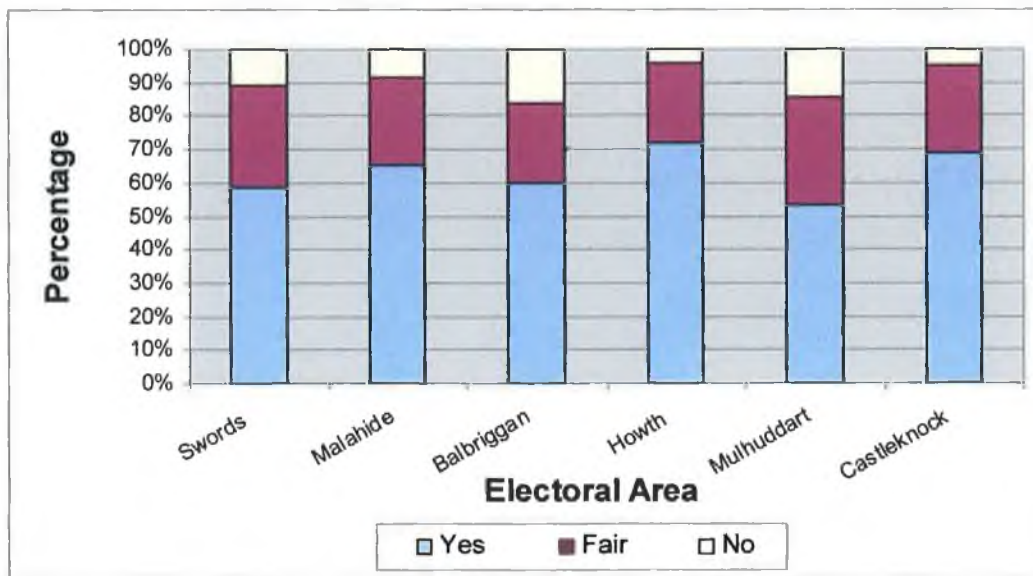
understanding of the issues relevant to local elections is almost the same as the percentages who stated having no understanding of the issues relevant to general election contests at 11.4% for general electoral issues and 11.9% for local electoral issues. This is quite interesting in that it reflects turnout levels in working class areas. Specifically, there is little difference in election specific turnout propensities in working class areas in Fingal with local election turnouts tending to be of the same order as general election turnouts in these areas. This is not in keeping with the first order-second order election model which states that turnout in first order elections, such as general elections, is higher than in second order elections, such as local elections. However, as the percentage of respondents from the Mulhuddart electoral area who stated having no interest in national politics was almost the same as the percentage stating no interest in local politics, it is not surprising that turnout rates for both orders of elections are similar.

As can be seen from Figure 9.2, there are higher percentages of respondents who have no understanding of local electoral issues in the Howth and Castleknock electoral areas when compared with general election issues. Specifically, those who have no understanding of electoral issues in the Howth electoral area rose from 1.1% in the case of general elections to 11.8% in the case of local elections. In the Castleknock electoral area, this figure increased from 1.9% to 6.6%. Please note, however, that these percentages relate to small numbers.

The relationship between electoral area and understanding the issues relevant to referendum elections is not statistically significant. However, it is apparent from Figure 9.3 that there are higher percentages of respondents from the Balbriggan and Mulhuddart electoral areas who have no understanding of the issues relevant

to referenda elections when compared with the other electoral areas. In the Balbriggan electoral area, 16% of respondents stated that they had no understanding of referenda issues with this figure standing at 14.3% in the case of the Mulhuddart electoral area. This appears to be a trend evident throughout the analysis of understanding issues in general, local and referenda elections. It suggests there is a greater need for information regarding the electoral process in these two electoral areas.

Figure 9.3: Understanding of Issues in Referendum Elections by EA



The figures relating to political understanding for the community group respondents were compared with the figures for the postal respondents to determine if the observed pattern of lower levels of political understanding in the Mulhuddart electoral area could be a function of these community group respondents. It was found that although the levels of political understanding were less for those in the community group sample, this was not a statistically significant influence on the low levels of understanding reported in this electoral area as a whole in comparison to the other electoral areas.

9.1.2 Effect of News and Newspaper Readership on Political Understanding

9.1.2.1 General Elections

27.3% of respondents who stated that they have no understanding of the issues relevant to general election contests claimed that they did not read a daily or weekly newspaper. Just 9.7% of respondents who claimed to have a full and clear understanding of general election issues fall into this category of “non-readers”. This is a statistically significant finding at the 1% level whereby those who understand the issues surrounding general elections are more likely to be readers of a daily or weekly newspaper, while those who do not understand the issues are more likely not to read a daily or weekly newspaper. Political issues, particularly surrounding election time, are given much attention through various media. Readers of newspapers are likely to come into contact with various perspectives on different issues depending on which newspapers are read (as discussed in chapter seven) and on who wrote the articles in question. Reading different perspectives on political issues assists the reader in developing an understanding about the issues and facilitates a deeper understanding of political issues. This accounts for why just 9% of respondents who stated that they fully understand general political issues were not readers of daily/weekly newspapers.

72.7% of respondents who stated that they had a full understanding of general election issues read a local newspaper on a regular basis. The proportions were almost as high for those with a fair understanding of general election issues (69.9%) and for those with no understanding of the issues (63.6%). There is no statistically significant relationship between reading a local newspaper and understanding the issues surrounding general election contests. Local newspapers are primarily concerned with reporting local news and events and in relation to

politics, local political proceedings involving local councillors and candidates. Reading local newspapers therefore, does not help in developing an understanding of national level issues and so does not facilitate an understanding of general political issues. Where general election issues are dealt with in local newspapers, it tends to be within a local context and in particular, the impact that proposed policies will have on the local area.

98.8% of respondents who reported fully understanding issues in general elections reported that they watched or listened to the news. This percentage was slightly lower for those who did not understand general electoral issues at 91.2%. While there is no noteworthy difference in the percentage of people who watch the news, there is more of a discrepancy in the frequency of news watching. Specifically, 91.8% of those who fully understand the issues relevant to general elections reported watching or listening to the news on a daily basis which compares to just 65.6% who reported having no understanding of the issues. In relation to those respondents who reported watching or listening to the news “1-3 times per week” or “not often”, the percentages of those with no understanding of general election issues were much higher than for those with a fair or full understanding of the issues. 12.5% of those who do not understand general elections reported watching or listening to the news “1-3 times per week” while 3.1% of the group stated that they watched the news “not often”. By deduction, it appears that the more often one watches or listens to the news, the more likely it is that he/she will understand the issues relevant to general elections.

9.1.2.2 Local Elections

As was the case with understanding general electoral issues, there is a statistically significant relationship between understanding local electoral issues and reading a daily or weekly newspaper at the 5% level. Although specific local electoral issues are not likely to be addressed in national newspapers, it is probable that reading about political issues on a broad scale facilitates understanding of local electoral issues.

In contrast to general electoral issues, there is a statistically significant relationship between understanding the issues in local elections and reading local newspapers. This manifests in that 78.1% of respondents who stated that they fully understand local elections reported that they read local newspapers. This compares to just 58.7% of those who stated that they do not understand local electoral issues. Local newspapers focus on issues affecting their remit. In relation to local politics, local newspapers tend to concentrate on local election candidates and what they propose they can do for the area along with the issues that residents are concerned with and how the respective candidates propose to resolve such issues. By deduction, it is likely that readers of local newspapers would be much more aware of the issues surrounding local elections than non-readers.

As was the case with general electoral issues, higher proportions of those who have a “full” or “fair” understanding of local elections watch or listen to the news on a daily basis in comparison to those who do not understand local electoral issues.

9.1.2.3 Referendum Elections

As was the case with general and local electoral issues, there is a statistically significant relationship between understanding referendum elections and reading a daily or weekly newspaper. 23.3% of those who do not understand what referenda elections entail do not read daily or weekly newspapers. This compares to just 8.4% of those who do understand referenda elections. The relationship between understanding referendum elections and newspaper readership is especially true for readers of broad sheet newspapers (see Chapter 7).

As was the case with general electoral issues, the relationship between understanding referendum elections and reading local newspapers is not statistically significant.

Similar to both general and local elections, a greater percentage of respondents who fully understand the issues relevant to referenda elections watch or listen to the news than those who have only a fair understanding, or no understanding of these issues. 92.2% of respondents who have a full or fair understanding of the issues in referenda elections watch the news on a daily basis. This compares to only 67.3% of those with no understanding of referendum elections, suggesting that it is the frequency of news watching that matters in understanding electoral issues.

In summary, it appears that the more one is exposed to electoral issues through the media, the greater the level of understanding about these issues that exists. This appears to be true in the case of general, local and referendum elections.

9.1.3 Understanding Political Issues and Voter Turnout

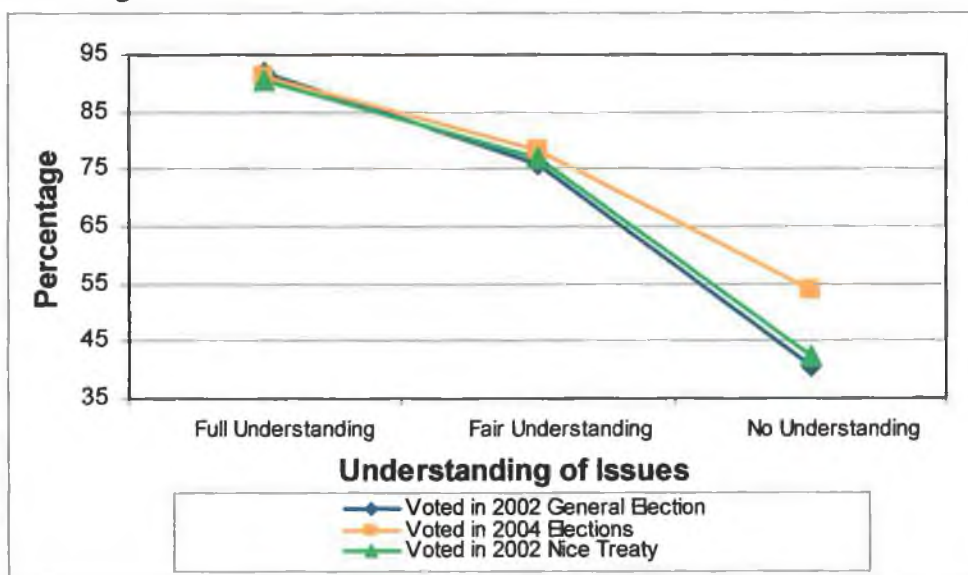
It has now been established that there are varying levels of political understanding between the electoral areas in Fingal, and that newspaper readership impacts on this level of understanding.

The relationship between voter turnout and understanding electoral issues is illustrated in Figure 9.4. The graph represents turnout at the 2002 General election, the 2004 local elections, the 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum election and the 2004 Citizenship Referendum election, and the associated level of understanding at general, local and referendum elections.

Figure 9.4 reveals that the relationship between turnout and understanding electoral issues is constant across all election types following the same pattern regardless of election.

92% of respondents who had a full understanding of the issues relevant to general election contests turned out to vote at the 2002 General election. 75.8% of those who reported having a fair understanding of General election issues also turned out to vote.

Figure 9.4: Relationship between Turnout at Different Elections and Understanding Electoral Issues



In contrast, 59.4% of those who reported having no understanding of the issues relating to general elections abstained from voting in the 2002 General election. This is a statistically significant relationship at the 1% level whereby those who have a full understanding of general electoral issues are more likely to vote than to abstain while those who do not understand the issues are more likely to abstain than to vote.

Similar relationships exist between turnout and understanding the issues relevant to local elections and referendum elections. Specifically, 91% of respondents who stated that they fully understand local electoral issues turned out to vote at the 2004 elections while 46% of those who stated that they do not understand local electoral issues failed to turn out to vote on Election Day in 2004. Amongst those respondents who reported having a full understanding of the issues relevant to referendum elections, 90.3% turned out to vote at the 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum election while 57.6% of those who stated having no understanding of referendum election issues abstained from voting.

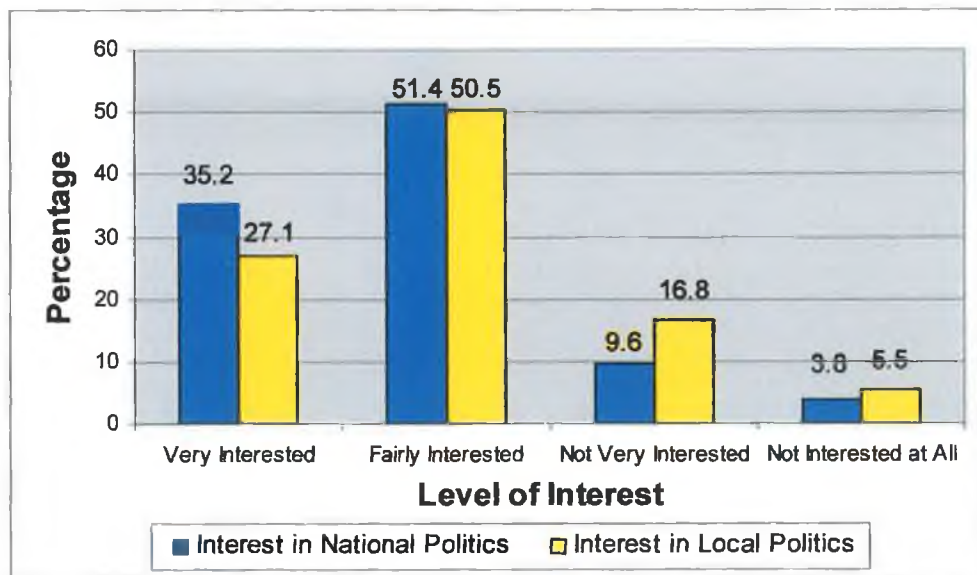
The relationship between understanding electoral issues and turnout can be explained with reference to self-mobilisation. Those who understand the issues and matters pertaining to a particular election will be likely to develop an opinion on these issues and hence, will be motivated to turn out to vote to represent their self interests. Understanding electoral issues helps one to develop an interest in politics which also acts as a mobilising influence, as will be discussed in the following section.

9.2 INTEREST IN POLITICS

Figure 9.5 communicates the level of interest respondents reported having in national and local politics. It appears that there is a slightly higher level of interest amongst respondents in national politics than in local politics with 86.6% of respondents stating that they were either “very interested” or “fairly interested” in national politics in comparison to 77.6% of respondents stating these levels of interest in local politics.

An interest in political issues develops from exposure to the arguments surrounding certain issues. Much of this exposure comes from attention to the media, and in the case of Fingal, newspaper readership. As noted in chapter 7, there is a greater readership of daily/weekly newspapers than of local newspapers in Fingal. This may account for the trend illustrated by Figure 9.5.

Figure 9.5: Interest in Politics



Specifically, readers of daily/weekly newspapers are likely to be exposed to political issues on the national level. The greater readership of these papers therefore, results in a greater interest of national level politics than of local level politics. The lesser interest in local politics may also be attributable to

community stability. As discussed in chapter four, recent years have seen the population of Fingal increase dramatically. It is possible that these new residents may be yet to develop an interest in local political issues as they are yet to establish a stake in the community.

As highlighted in Figure 9.5, a high percentage of respondents stated being “fairly interested” in national politics and this is constant across all electoral areas, as demonstrated by Table 9.2.

Table 9.2: Interest in National Politics by Electoral Area

	VERY INT.	FAIRLY INT.	NOT VERY INT.	NOT INT. AT ALL
SWORDS	33.3	57.1	6.0	3.6
MALAHIDE	40.8	48.5	7.1	3.6
BALBRIGGAN	34.7	46.9	14.3	4.1
HOWTH	42.2	51.1	4.3	2.2
MULHUDDART	26.3	49.3	17.8	6.6
CASTLEKNOCK	34.6	56.1	7.5	1.9

The Mulhuddart electoral area appears to be the outlier with respect to those respondents who reported being “very interested” in national politics. The figures for this electoral area compare unfavourably to the other electoral areas and in particular to the Malahide and Howth electoral areas. It was thought that the community group respondents from the Mulhuddart electoral area might account for this lower figure. When the figures for the community group and postal samples were examined separately, it became apparent that the proportion of those who stated being “very interested” in national politics in the Mulhuddart electoral area was lower for the community group sample when compared with the postal sample. However both figures, 30% in the case of the postal sample and 16% in the case of the community group sample were lower than the percentages for the other local electoral areas suggesting that without the inclusion of the community group sample, attention would still be drawn to the

Mulhuddart electoral area in this respect. The Mulhuddart and Balbriggan electoral areas stand out in the case of those respondents who reported being either “not very interested” or “not interested at all” in national politics.

Differences in the level of interest in national politics between the electoral areas are statistically significant at the 5% level. The relationship relates mainly to the Mulhuddart electoral area whereby those respondents from this electoral area appear more likely to be “not very interested” or “not interested at all” in national politics and less likely to be “very interested” in national political affairs.

In each electoral area, there was a greater level of reported interest in national politics than local politics with the exception of the Mulhuddart electoral area where the level of interest in local politics was purportedly higher than the level of interest in national politics (see Table 9.3). As noted in previous chapters, Mulhuddart is considered a working class area which is consistently marked by lower than average turnout rates. Those residing in areas such as this are typically mobilised by smaller left-wing parties focussing on issues that the people can relate to. The 2004 elections, for example, saw an increase in turnout from the previous local elections held in 1999. During the 2004 election campaign, the Mulhuddart electoral area received much attention from the Socialist Party and Sinn Fein. Both parties focussed on issues directly relevant to the people. An example of this is the bin tagging system which introduced an additional cost that working class people might find difficult to meet. It is possible that the increased attention from political parties during this time mobilised voters to the polls. There may be a greater interest in local politics than national politics in this electoral area for similar reasons. National politics dealing with national level issues and the larger political parties provide little

motivation for the lesser interested elector to vote. Oftentimes, lower turnout areas such as the Mulhuddart electoral area are ignored by general election candidates belonging to the larger parties. This was explicitly stated in an interview with one such candidate, who claimed that ignoring these areas was “common sense” on the part of the politician. Hence, electors residing in these ignored areas have little opportunity to develop an interest in national level politics and to be mobilised to turn out to vote. This may in part explain why a greater level of interest was reported in local level politics as opposed to national level politics in the Mulhuddart electoral area.

Table 9.3: Interest in Local Politics by Electoral Area

	VERY INT.	FAIRLY INT.	NOT VERY INT.	NOT INT. AT ALL
SWORDS	25.0	53.6	17.9	3.6
MALAHIDE	29.3	50.9	15.0	4.8
BALBRIGGAN	34.7	42.9	10.2	12.2
HOWTH	18.5	58.7	19.6	3.3
MULHUDDART	28.0	46.0	21.3	4.7
CASTLEKNOCK	28.3	50.0	13.2	8.5

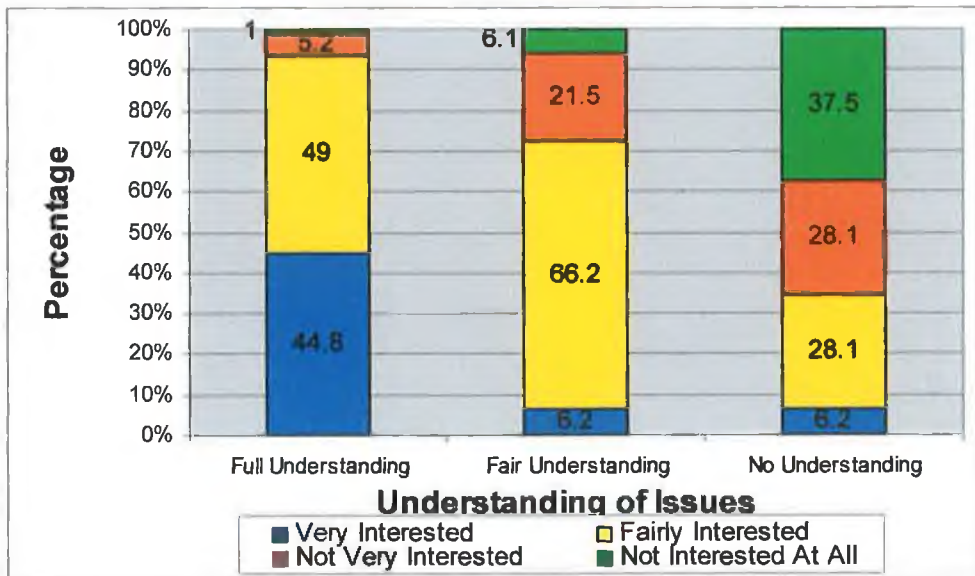
As was the case with interest in national politics, quite a high percentage of respondents in each electoral area claimed to be “fairly interested” in local political affairs. The Howth electoral area stands out as being the electoral area with the lowest percentage of respondents who reported being “very interested” in local politics although this is counterbalanced by the fact that it had the highest percentage of respondents, 58.7%, in the “fairly interested” category.

The percentages for all electoral areas are much higher for the negative categories of “not very interested” in local politics and “not interested at all” in local politics when compared to interest in national politics which reaffirms the findings presented in Figure 9.5.

9.2.1 Understanding Political Issues and Interest in Politics

There is a statistically significant relationship between understanding the issues relevant to general elections and having an interest in national politics. This is illustrated by Figure 9.6 which demonstrates how the level of interest in national politics decreases with waning levels of understanding.

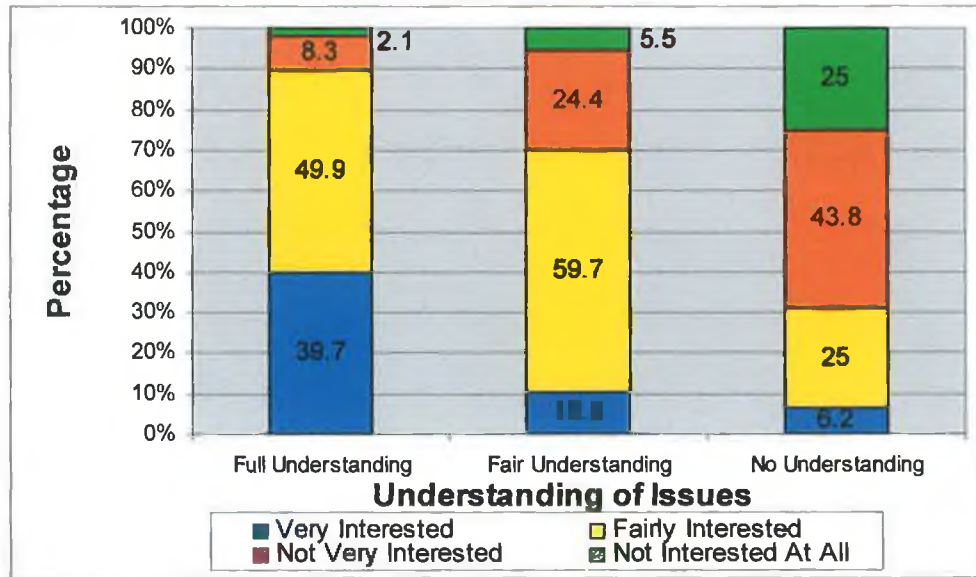
Figure 9.6: Relationship between Understanding General Electoral Issues and Interest in National Politics



44.8% of those respondents who reported having a full understanding of the issues surrounding general elections stated that they were “very interested” in national politics. This compares with just 6.2% of respondents who claim to have a fair understanding or no understanding of general electoral issues.

Figures 9.7 and 9.8 illustrate the respective relationships between understanding local electoral issues and interest in local politics, and between understanding referendum election issues and interest in national politics.

Figure 9.7: Relationship between Understanding Local Electoral Issues and Interest in Local Politics



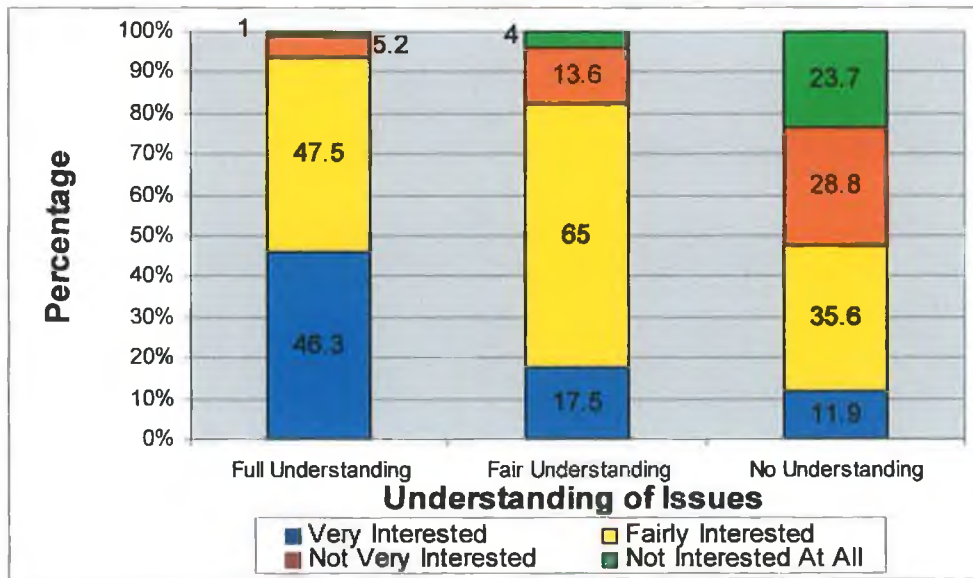
Both relationships mirror the trends identified above with regards to the relationship between understanding general electoral issues and interest in national politics. Specifically, it can be clearly seen that as levels of understanding of politics decrease, levels of disinterest in politics (i.e. “not very interested” and “not interested at all”) increase.

The documented relationship is the relationship that would be expected to exist between understanding political issues and interest in politics.

This suggests that by clarifying electoral issues and educating the electorate as to the purpose and particulars of elections, the level of interest that exists about politics may increase.

As demonstrated in previously, political understanding has a positive influence on turnout propensity. Political interest also has a positive influence on turnout propensity (as will be discussed later in the chapter). This suggests that by increasing political understanding, the resultant effect would be an increase in political interest and a knock-on effect of increased turnout levels.

Figure 9.8: Relationship between Understanding Referendum Election Issues and Interest in National Politics



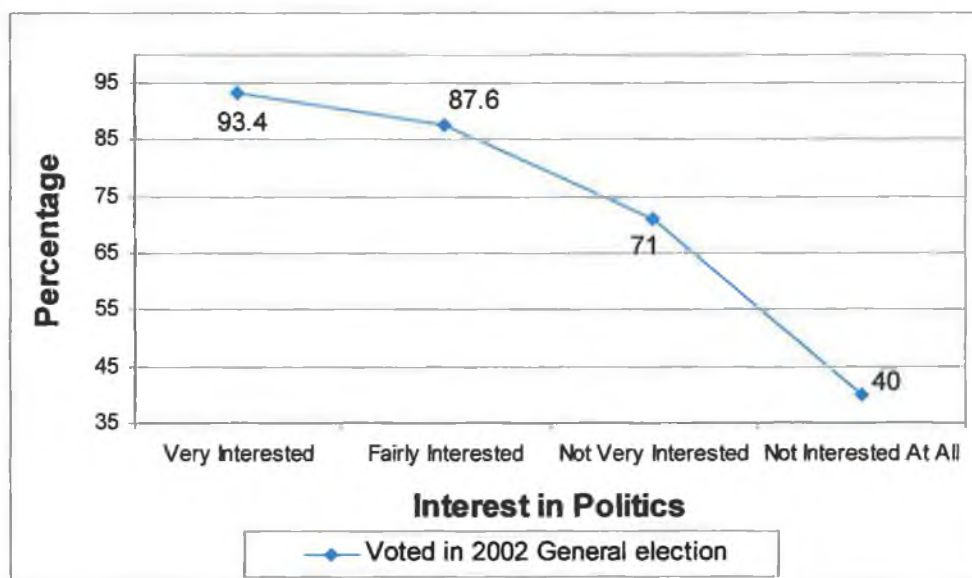
Some suggested means of increasing electoral awareness were discussed in chapter 8 in the context of non-voting.

9.2.2 Interest in Politics and Voter Turnout

The relationship between turning out to vote and interest in national politics is illustrated by Figure 9.9. From this it can be seen that turnout declines with waning levels of political interest.

93.4% of respondents who stated that they were “very interested” in national politics turned out to vote at the 2002 General election. This figure decreases with declining levels of interest in national politics; that is, 87.6% of “fairly interested” respondents, 71% of respondents who were “not very interested” in national politics and 40% of respondents who were “not interested at all” turned out to vote at the 2002 General election.

Figure 9.9: Interest in National Politics and Turnout at the 2002 General Election



A similar relationship exists between interest in national politics and turnout at the 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum election and between interest in local politics and turnout at the 2004 local elections, as can be seen by Figure 9.10 and 9.11 respectively.

The relationship between having an interest in politics and turning out to vote is statistically significant in all cases meaning that those who report having a strong interest in politics are more likely to turn out to vote than to abstain while those who state that they have no interest in politics are more likely to abstain from voting than to turn out. As previously noted, this suggests that increasing the level of interest that exists about politics (which is implicitly linked with political understanding), might increase turnout levels in Fingal. Chapter 8 suggested some possible means of achieving this in the context of enticing non-voters to the polls.

Figure 9.10: Interest in National Politics and Turnout at the 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum Election

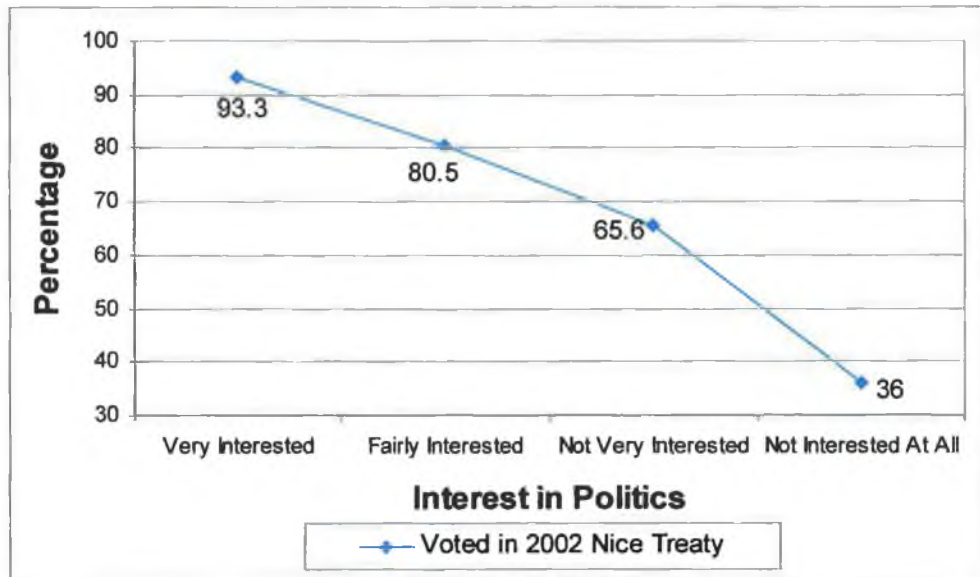
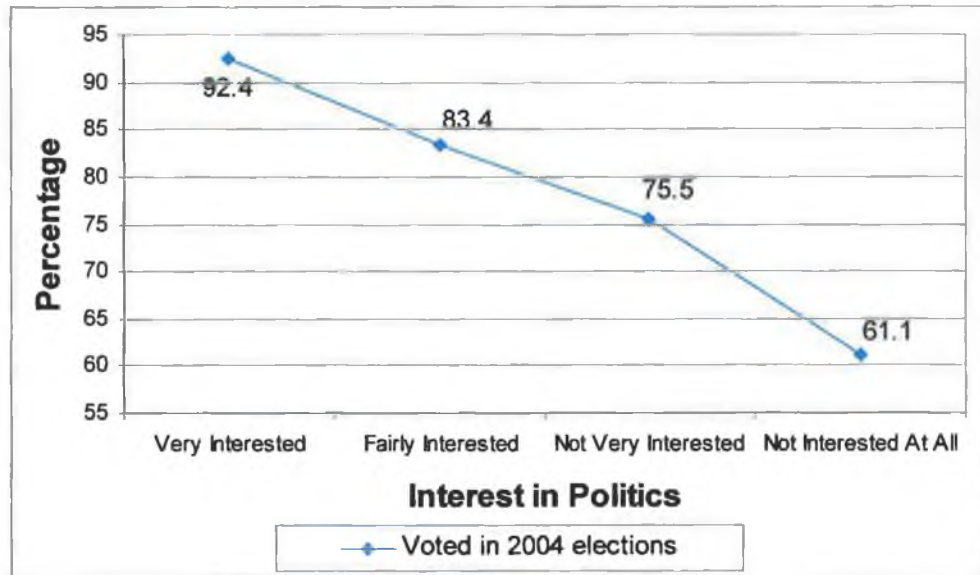


Figure 9.11: Interest in Local Politics and Turnout at the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum Elections



9.3 CANDIDATE RECOGNITION

Due to the high number of descriptive tables that accompany this discussion of candidate recognition, it was decided to place the tables into the appendices so as to maintain the flow of the text. Owing to this, the local candidate recognition tables can be found in appendix two while the general candidate recognition

tables can be found in appendix three. Please note, the names presented in bold in the tables are those candidates who were subsequently elected at each of the respective elections.

Along with a short discussion of specific candidate recognition, this section is concerned with the impact of candidate recognition on voter turnout propensity at both local and general elections.

9.3.1 Local Candidate Recognition on a Local Electoral Area Basis

There were similarities in the number of candidates recognised by respondents in each of the local electoral areas in Fingal. The specific figures are given in Table 9.4. It was thought that the 42.9% of respondents from the Mulhuddart electoral area who stated that they were not familiar with any of the local election candidates who stood for election in 2004, might be a function of the community group sample. However, this was not the case. When separate figures for the community group and postal samples were studied, equally high percentages of respondents from both samples stated that they did not recognise any of the local election candidates.

Table 9.4: Number of Candidates Recognised on an Electoral Area Basis

	SW	MAL	BAL	HOW	MUL	CAS
1 Candidate	8.0	25.7	24.0	16.0	17.9	30.4
2 Candidates	14.9	20.5	10.0	21.3	12.2	17.0
3 Candidates	55.0	24.6	40.0	41.5	26.9	24.1
No Candidates	21.8	28.7	26.0	21.3	42.9	28.6

An examination of the tables relating to local candidate recognition in appendix two reveals disparities between the electoral areas in terms of those candidates whom respondents were most familiar with and those candidates who were elected. It would be expected that elected candidates would be the candidates that

respondents were most familiar with given the raised profile that elected candidates would inevitably have enjoyed since election. However, it appears that this is only the case with respect to the Swords and Castleknock electoral areas. In these electoral areas, the most familiar candidates were elected at the local elections in 2004. Given this, the familiarity of respondents with these candidates may be consequential in that it may be a direct result of media coverage received following their 2004 election.

In the other electoral areas however, there are disparities in terms of the most recognised candidates and those candidates who were elected to local council in 2004. In saying this, in the Malahide, Howth and Mulhuddart electoral areas, elected candidates came within the top five most recognised candidates. In the Balbriggan electoral area however, there appears to be little pattern in the recognition of elected and unelected candidates. On closer examination however, it can be seen that two of the unelected candidates who stood for local election in 2004 in the Balbriggan electoral area serve as councillors on the Balbriggan town council. This explains the high level of recognition with these candidates. Also, it appears that there are equal levels of recognition amongst a number of candidates which, once accounted for, closes the gap between recognition of elected and unelected councillors in this electoral area.

9.3.2 Local Candidate Recognition and Turnout at the 2004 Elections

An analysis was conducted between recognition of local election candidates and turnout in the 2004 local, European and Citizenship referendum elections to ascertain whether recognising local candidates standing for election had a positive effect on voter turnout. In almost every case for each local electoral area,

voter turnout was higher amongst those who recognised a certain candidate than amongst those who did not. In some instances however, the difference was very slight (in the case of Geraldine Wall from the Howth EA for example, where the percentage difference was just 1.6%). An analysis was also conducted between turnout and the number of candidates recognised by respondents. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 9.5.

An examination of the figures in Table 9.5 conveys a clear pattern in the relationship between turnout and candidate recognition. This is particularly true in the case of non-voters where only a small proportion of non-voters reported being familiar with three or more candidates. Rather, high percentages of non-voters stated being familiar with just one candidate as opposed to with two or three candidates.

With respect to voters, the opposite appears to be true. In five of the six local electoral areas, there are higher percentages of voters who claim to be familiar with three or more candidates than the percentage who claim to be familiar with two candidates or one candidate.

The figures presented in Table 9.5 are not statistically significant. However, there are some obvious trends to the data as detailed above.

Table 9.5: Local Election Turnout and Candidate Recognition

		TURNOUT (%)	
		VOTED	DIDN'T VOTE
FINGAL	1 candidate	79.4	20.6
	2 candidates	88.0	12.0
	3 + candidates	94.5	5.5
	No candidates	70.8	20.2
SWORDS	1 candidate	71.4	28.6
	2 candidates	81.8	18.2
	3 + candidates	91.7	8.3
	No candidates	73.7	26.3
MALAHIDE	1 candidate	86.0	14.0
	2 candidates	88.6	11.4
	3 + candidates	92.7	7.3
	No candidates	71.1	28.9
BALBRIGGAN	1 candidate	66.7	33.3
	2 candidates	100	0
	3 + candidates	95.0	5.0
	No candidates	36.4	63.6
HOWTH	1 candidate	93.3	6.7
	2 candidates	90.0	10.0
	3 + candidates	100	0
	No candidates	78.9	21.1
MULHUDDART	1 candidate	53.6	46.4
	2 candidates	77.8	22.2
	3 + candidates	92.9	7.1
	No candidates	66.1	33.9
CASTLEKNOCK	1 candidate	90.9	9.1
	2 candidates	94.7	5.3
	3 + candidates	96.3	3.7
	No candidates	83.9	16.1

9.3.3 General Candidate Recognition on a Constituency Basis

An examination of the tables relating to general election candidate recognition in appendix three reveals disparities between the three constituencies in terms of those candidates whom respondents were most familiar with and those candidates who were elected.

The Dublin West constituency was the only constituency where the most recognised candidates were also those who were elected to the Dáil in 2002. Each of these candidates had been involved in politics in the area for a long period prior to the 2002 General election. Along with their increased profiles in the years subsequent to the elections, this might partially explain the level of recognition that was reported with these three candidates.

In relation to candidate recognition in the Dublin North constituency, one of the unelected candidates that respondents reported being more familiar with than some elected candidates was a long serving TD in the area prior to the 2002 General election. The residual pattern of candidate recognition in the Dublin North constituency can be easily explained with reference to the local elections held between the General election in 2002 and the conducting of the survey. The other unelected candidates that respondents reported being more familiar with than some elected candidates were elected to local council in 2004. These local elections raised the profile of the respective candidates and this, along with the local elections being the most recent elections held when the survey was conducted, accounts for the level of recognition that existed with these candidates.

There is a similar situation in the Dublin North East constituency. Here, the two unelected candidates in the 2002 General election who were higher in the table than one of the elected candidates were in fact serving politicians some time prior to this election. Each were subsequently elected to local government in the 2004 local elections which would have raised their profile leading to the stated level of recognition with these candidates in Dublin North-East.

9.3.4 General Candidate Recognition and Turnout at the 2002 General Election

For 26 of the 31 candidates who stood for election in the three General election constituencies contained within Fingal, turnout was greater amongst those who reported knowing the specific candidates to see or to talk to than amongst those who were not familiar with the candidates at all. An analysis was conducted between general election turnout and the number of general election candidates recognised by respondents. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 9.6.

Table 9.6: General Election Turnout and Candidate Recognition

		TURNOUT (%)	
		VOTED	DIDN'T VOTE
DUBLIN NORTH	1 candidate	76.9	23.1
	2 candidates	87.2	12.8
	3 + candidates	94.2	5.8
	No candidates	65.3	34.7
DUBLIN N-EAST	1 candidate	87.5	12.5
	2 candidates	92.9	7.1
	3 + candidates	92.9	7.1
	No candidates	90.5	9.5
DUBLIN WEST	1 candidate	78.3	21.7
	2 candidates	78.4	21.6
	3 + candidates	90.4	9.6
	No candidates	60.9	39.1

Some of the trends identified in relation to local candidate recognition and local election turnout were again observable in the case of candidate recognition and turnout at the 2002 General election.

Specifically, there were a higher percentage of voters familiar with three or more candidates than the percentage of voters familiar with one or two candidates.

The higher percentages of respondents in the Dublin North-East constituency who were not familiar with any candidates but who nonetheless, reported turning out to vote, may be a reflection of the fact that a number of the candidates who

stood for election in the 2002 General election in this constituency were not Fingal based but were based in Dublin City.

As was the case with local election turnout and local election candidate recognition, the relationship between general election turnout and general election candidate recognition is not statistically significant.

9.3.5 Canvassing and Campaigning

As this research was conducted subsequent to the featured elections taking place, it was expected that those candidates who were most recognised in the community would be those who were elected, given the fact that their profiles would be widely publicised following their election. However, as can be seen from the above tables, this is not necessarily the case. Often, elected candidates featured lower down the recognition scale than some of their unelected contemporaries. This is a surprising finding and may be based on the fact that TDs, councillors and electoral candidates tend to focus around the same areas repeatedly. Those TDs, councillors and candidates that are most recognised are likely to be those who work in close proximity to the elector. This suggests that there is a “friends and neighbours” effect in candidate recognition as well as in turnout propensity, that is, regardless of the media attention that basks the majority of candidates at election time, and regardless of the advertisements, posters campaigns and leaflet drops, those candidates who receive recognition from a member of the electorate are those who work in close proximity to a given elector.

Drawing on some interview findings, it was stated that some candidates only canvass certain areas while ignoring others, stemming from the fact that different

areas are marked by differing turnout levels and differing levels of party support.

This is implied by the following quote taken from one interview;

“Lower turnout areas don’t get the same level of resources or same level of attention from politicians and that’s just common sense really...politicians invest more time and effort into an area where more people are going to come out and vote.”

Most interviewees suggested that the key to effective canvassing is communication. Most also believed that the election campaign is instrumental in influencing whether or not a given elector votes as well as influencing who that person votes for. This is illustrated by the following comment;

“I don’t think it’s possible to arrive on the scene of an election and promise the sun, moon and stars and hope to get elected. The candidate or party should have a track record that is an important support baseline [and] the election campaign itself, not in terms of auction politics or the phenomenal amounts of money being spent on spin and promises, but the actual opportunity to engage with people in the doorsteps can have an impact on if and how people vote.”

Those interviewees who stated that they spend the majority of their time in lower turnout areas said that the objective of their canvassing efforts was simply to encourage the person to use their vote as opposed to trying to convince them to vote a certain way;

“...more time is spent encouraging people to exercise their vote, as opposed to exercising it for you. It is also difficult to convince the canvass team of the merits of canvassing an estate with 25% turnout ahead of an estate with 70% turnout”

Interviewees were asked what they would say if they were trying to encourage a non-voter to vote. The responses were extremely varied and tended to reflect their assertions regarding who and how they canvass. Some interviewees stated that they would stress the argument that abstention gives support to the current government with the beneficiaries of someone not voting being the establishment parties who would get their vote out anyway. They suggested that this is a

particularly effective approach when the person is intending not to vote out of protest to the current government. Another approach suggested was that of explaining to the person that they have the option of “more of the same” or something different, stressing that “if you don’t vote, you don’t count”. One interviewee stated that a particularly effective means of getting people out to vote was to say to them;

“Fianna Fail people always vote. You are helping them greatly by abstaining!”

Some interviewees stated that they would take a different approach and remind the non-voter of the struggle for suffrage in the first place, encouraging the person to vote, even if not for themselves or for their party. This approach abandons partisan preferences and instead, plays upon the conscience of the elector. This suggests that some political activists display a degree of altruism in their canvassing efforts. Rather than trying to convince the elector who he/she should vote for, they concern themselves in ensuring that person will simply turn out to vote in the first place. This also suggests that certain political people are implicitly concerned with the well-being of their areas and are more concerned about the people in that area receiving political attention and representation than about increasing their personal vote. Unsurprisingly, this response was limited to those interviewees who work in and represent lower turnout areas in Fingal.

Finally, it was stated by a number of interviewees that they would explain the implications of non-voting to the person in lay-man’s terms, i.e. they would highlight the services and amenities in areas where turnout is high and compare them to the lack of services and amenities in the non-voter’s area, accentuating the fact that abstention fosters a lackadaisical attitude of politicians towards the

areas which results in a vicious circle that can only be permeated by turning out to vote.

In relation to canvassing and receiving assistance from TDs and councillors, only 24.9% of respondents stated that they received help at some time. Turnout was examined with respect to whether or not a given respondent had ever received assistance from a TD or councillor. There was found to be a statistically significant relationship between turning out to vote and receiving some degree of assistance from political personnel. Specifically, it was found that the relationship between receiving assistance from a TD or councillor and turnout at the 2002 General election and at the 2002 Nice Treaty Referendum election was significant at the 1% level while the relationship between this variable and turnout at the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections was significant at the 5% level. The adjusted residual values convey the direction of relationship as turnout being more likely amongst those who have received help at some time from a politician or councillor. Depending on the election, between 88.6% and 93.2% of respondents who stated that they had received assistance in some form from politicians or councillors stated that they also turned out to vote

9.4 ISSUE CONCERNS

This section details the issue concerns of survey respondents and explores whether the issue concerns of voters and non-voters differ in any way.

Table 9.7 lists the issues that were deemed most important by survey respondents in rank order form most important to least important.

Table 9.7: Important Issues in Next Election by 1st Rank Given (%)

ISSUE	TOTAL	VOTERS	NON-VOTERS
Health	39.7	42.1	27.7
Crime	24.0	22.8	30.9
Traffic Management	6.0	6.4	3.2
Housing	4.9	4.5	8.5
Public Transport	4.5	4.5	3.2
Drugs abuse	4.2	4.1	3.2
Unemployment	4.0	2.9	9.6
Immigration	4.0	3.9	5.3
Education	3.4	3.4	4.3
Environment	2.1	3.4	4.3
Youth Issues	1.5	1.2	3.2
Estate Management	0.7	0.7	1.1
Leisure Facilities	0.3	0.4	2.1

The figures in Table 9.7 refer to the percentage of respondents who ranked that particular issue as being the most important issue to be addressed at the next general election, which at the time of the questionnaire survey, was due to be held on 24th May 2007.

As clearly evident by the high percentages attached to these two issues as opposed to the other issues, the issues of health and crime appear to be of most concern to survey respondents. These are unsurprising findings considering the position health related issues and in particular, public hospitals and bed management have taken on the public agenda in recent years. Likewise, waves of crime and correlated Garda resources have also been a much debated issue.

What is evident from Table 9.7 is that what are of utmost concern to respondents are those issues with immediate consequences where effects would be immediately evident once change is implemented. Apart from the lowest ranked issue of estate management (which was of most concern to just 0.7% of respondents) the list of rankings from top to bottom reads like a list of instantaneous change from immediately evident to long-term. What are of concern to respondents are those issues which can be solved straight away. This

introduces the assertion that public ignorance of certain issues is to blame for them being seen as relatively unimportant.

Initially it was thought that an examination of the issue concerns of voters and non-voters would determine the concerns of the voting population to be those issues that are covered in depth in the media and the concerns of the non-voting population to be very much unaddressed. However, when the issue concerns of voters and non-voters were examined independently in Table 9.7, it became apparent that there was little difference in the issue concerns of voters and non-voters. The two major issues of concern to both voters and non-voters were those of health and crime. Crime appeared to be a more important issue to non-voters as opposed to voters while health was more important to voters as opposed to non-voters. As previously stated, those electoral areas with higher percentages of non-voting (that is, those areas with lower turnout rates) are considered to be of a lower socio-economic standing than other electoral areas in Fingal. It would be expected therefore, that crime would be an important concern to those residing in these electoral areas, and this indeed appears to be the case. Following this, the most important issues concerning voters were those of traffic management, public transport, housing and immigration while the next issues of great importance to non-voters were those of housing, education and drugs with traffic management also being of concern. It is interesting to note that the percentages of non-voters who considered unemployment and housing to be of utmost concern were greater than the percentages of voters, in keeping with the social class theme mentioned previously. The analysis of the issues concerns of voters and non-voters suggests that the issues that are considered to be important are not critical mobilising factors at election time. As addressed in chapter seven, there is

evidence of issue voting in the Swords, Balbriggan, Mulhuddart and Castleknock electoral areas. This implies that there are other influencing factors at play that cause some electors to turn out to vote out of concern for a certain issue, while others, also concerned about similar issues, choose to abstain.

11.1% of respondents stated another issue, other than those listed in Table 9.7, as being cause for debate at the next election. These “other” issues are presented in Table 9.8 from most stated to least stated.

The most commonly stated issue falls under the umbrella term of “poor governance”.

Table 9.8: “Other” Issues in Order of Importance

ISSUE
1. Poor governance
2. Housing developments
3. Poverty/ Services for those at risk
4. Driving and road safety
5. Childcare
6. Beach maintenance
7. Police force
8. Energy
9. Health services
10. Immigration-integration issues
11. Waste management
12. Employee rights
13. Gay unions/dog fouling/neglect of Irish language

Many respondents believed that a general sense of discontentment at how the current government operates will be a major issue with one respondent stating that “the nature and integrity of all other matters [is] coloured by this”. Poor governance and the associated corruption, overspending, ethical questionability and the “failure of current politicians to do their job correctly for the national good” was the most commonly mentioned “other” issue that would feature in the next election with one respondent accusing the government as being “inefficient” and “stale”.

The second most stated “other” issue was centred around housing issues and in particular, planning or lack of. New housing estates built without adequate assessments of the facilities or infrastructure needed, and the provision of affordable housing, were of main concern to respondents.

The growing poverty gap and the lack of services for those deemed “at risk” was the third most stated “other” issue, followed by issues related to driving and road safety. Under this heading, respondents appeared to be particularly concerned about road deaths with one respondent going so far as to suggest that road accidents are the cause of the state;

“...accidents are not accidents but state murder by neglect”

The other issues mentioned are displayed in Table 9.8 and include childcare, Garda resources, alternative energy sources, immigration-integration issues and waste management, amongst others.

When examined with respect to electoral area, it becomes possible to ascertain what issues are important to respondents coming from different areas. Table 9.9 displays the top five issues in order of importance in accordance to electoral area, along with the percentage of 1st rankings received by each issue.

Respondents from all electoral areas stated that the two most important issues to be addressed at the next election are those of health and crime. With the exception of the Mulhuddart electoral area, “health” was deemed to be the most important issue followed by “crime” in second place. In the Mulhuddart electoral area, this was reversed and “crime” was considered to be the most important issue with “health” considered to be the second most important issue.

It is clearly evident from Table 9.9 that after “health” and “crime”, the issues that are deemed to be important vary from one electoral area to the next.

Table 9.9: Most Important Issues According to Electoral Area

	ISSUE	%
SWORDS	1. Health	43.0
	2. Crime	20.9
	3. Public Transport	8.10
	4. Education	7.00
	5. Housing	4.70
MALAHIDE	1. Health	51.5
	2. Crime	25.4
	3. Traffic Management	6.50
	4. Education	4.70
	5. Environmental Issues	3.60
BALBRIGGAN	1. Health	43.4
	2. Crime	13.2
	3. Housing	11.3
	4. Public Transport	7.50
	5. Unemployment	5.70
HOWTH	1. Health	41.9
	2. Crime	29.0
	3. Traffic Management	5.40
	4. Unemployment/Public Transport	4.30
	5. Immigration/Drugs	3.20
MULHUDDART	1. Crime	26.5
	2. Health	20.0
	3. Unemployment	9.60
	4. Drugs	9.00
	5. Housing	7.70
CASTLEKNOCK	1. Health	42.3
	2. Crime	21.6
	3. Immigration/Traffic Management	8.30
	4. Public Transport	5.50
	5. Housing	4.60

The third most important issue in the Swords electoral area was that of “public transport”. This is unsurprising as the town of Swords is the largest town located in the Swords electoral area and is only serviced by buses. The frequency of the

bus service is considered to be somewhat limited although in recent years, the number of buses running per day has increased.

In the Malahide electoral area, the third most important issue was that of traffic management. This was followed by education and environmental issues. These issues reflect the socio-economic standing of the Malahide electoral area to some degree in that issues of an environmental nature would be of most concern to those who are unscathed by other issues which would be deemed as more important in other areas, for example, unemployment and drugs.

In saying this however, unemployment and drugs do feature in the top five most important issues in the Howth electoral area which is considered to be of the a similar socio-economic standing to the Malahide electoral area. However, the degree of importance attached to these issues in the Howth electoral area is quite small at 4.3% and 3.2% respectively.

In the Balbriggan electoral area, housing is considered to be the third most important issue which is unsurprising given the explosion in residential development in northern parts of the county in recent years.

Unemployment was the third most important issue in the Mulhuddart electoral area followed by drug and housing issues. These issues are very much predictable in the case of the Mulhuddart electoral area which is the electoral area with the highest proportion of people in social classes five and six in Fingal.

In the Castleknock electoral area, immigration and traffic management issues were considered to be the third most important issues followed by public transport and housing issues.

There are no notable trends in the issue concerns of voters and non-voters with respect to electoral area.

The responses given by survey respondents correspond with the issues that interviewees stated are declared on the doorsteps. The “big four” were said to be healthcare, crime, traffic/public transport and housing along with affordable childcare and primary school places. Most interviewees stated that the issues that are deemed as important depend on who the person is. It was suggested that middle class electors, for example, are most concerned about traffic and transport while young couples with children are concerned about school places and childcare costs. It was also stated that people are most concerned about issues that affect them personally rather than community issues. This conflicts with the literature which suggests that people turn out to vote when they develop a stake in the community. One interviewee stated that in opinion polls, people will say what they believe is the correct answer, but in terms of affecting how one votes, people are quite self-centred. It was also suggested that issues that are personally important are often rooted in the community. A person’s interest in a particular issue stems from a selfish interest in having their needs addressed, but, often these issues are much broader than an individual concern. An example of this is the issue of public transport. This is an issue that affects a whole community, but people only become concerned about it once they have to travel via bus or train.

9.5 CONCLUSION

There are varying levels of political understanding between the electoral areas in Fingal. It appears that newspaper readership impacts on the level of understanding that exists with there being a significant association between daily/weekly newspaper readership and understanding general electoral issues and referenda issues, and between daily/weekly and local newspaper readership

and understanding local electoral issues. There was also found to be a significant relationship between voter turnout and understanding electoral issues whereby one is more likely to turn out to vote if one has some degree of understanding of the issues relevant to a particular election. This is in keeping with the contentions of the literature which suggest that the media is the predominant source of political information for the majority of people. Therefore, by engaging in newspaper reading, one becomes more aware of political issues and develops an understanding of these issues. In chapter seven, there was found to be a significant relationship between newspaper readership and turnout propensity. It appears that this relationship transfers to political understanding suggesting that the relationship between turnout and political understanding is a function of newspaper readership. If one reads newspapers, the more likely it is that he/she will develop an understanding of political issues which positively influences turnout propensity.

The association between having an interest in politics and turning out to vote was found to be statistically significant with turnout decreasing with waning levels of interest in politics. This is in keeping with Pattie et al. (2003) who found that the more interested a person is in politics, the more likely it is that he/she will be an active citizen.

Respondents reported a greater degree of interest in national than local politics. As noted previously, an interest in political issues develops from exposure to the arguments surrounding certain issues. Similar to political understanding, much of this exposure comes from attention to the media, and in the case of Fingal, newspaper readership. As noted in chapter 7, there is a greater readership of daily/weekly newspapers than of local newspapers in Fingal County. This may

account for why there is a greater level of interest in national than local politics in the county. Readers of daily/weekly newspapers are likely to be exposed to political issues on the national level as opposed to on the local level. The greater readership of these papers therefore, results in a greater interest of national level politics than of local level politics. The lesser interest in local politics may also be attributable to community stability. As discussed in chapter four, recent years have seen the population of Fingal increase dramatically. It is possible that these new residents may be yet to develop an interest in local political issues as they are yet to establish a stake in the community.

Interest in politics and political understanding were found to be statistically associated. This association was such that the level of political interest decreased with waning levels of political understanding. This suggests that if the general level of political understanding was to increase, it would increase the level of interest that exists in politics and subsequently, would positively affect voter turnout. This suggests the need for informative campaigns, voter education programs and voter education literature to be widely available which might increase the level of political understanding that exists and hence increase turnout levels.

Although the relationship between voter turnout and candidate recognition was not found to be significant, it was determined that turnout was higher amongst those who recognised some particular candidate than amongst those who did not. It was also determined that receiving help from a TD or councillor was a positive influence on voter turnout with those who had received some type of help in the past being more likely to turn out to vote than those who had never associated with a politician or councillor in this way.

An examination of the issue concerns of respondents found health and crime to be the issues of most concern in every electoral area. A separate analysis of the issue concerns of voters and non-voters found that health and crime were also the two most important issues. In fact, it was found that the issue concerns of voters and non-voters do not actually differ in any noteworthy manner. This suggests that being concerned over certain issues is not a substantial mobilising factor on Election Day, implying that there are other influential factors at play that cause some electors to turn out to vote out of concern for certain issues, while others, also concerned about similar issues, choose to abstain.

Thus far, turnout has been examined with respect to aggregate and individual level influences. Respondents' individual reasons and motivations for turning out to vote and for abstaining were also studied and from this, the types of voters and non-voters that exist in the different electoral areas in Fingal were inferred. This chapter was concerned with examining themes related to politics and politicians and the impact of these various subjects on turnout itself. There is one final aspect which must be explored before the significant influences on turnout can be brought together in the creation of a voting and non-voting profile. The following chapter is concerned with exploring the abstract notion of identity, and in particular, the relationship between place identity and turning out to vote.

CHAPTER 10

IDENTITY IN FINGAL

10.1 FORMS OF IDENTITY

As discussed in chapter two, the political geography literature identifies three main forms of politically related identity; partisan identity, group identity and place identity.

Place identity is debatably the most significant form of identity with regards to Fingal, owing to the fact that Fingal is a relatively new area. As mentioned in chapter four, Fingal was created as an administrative county on 1st January 1994 following the Local Government Act of 1993 which divided Dublin County Council into three new local authority areas; South Dublin, Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown and Fingal.

The administrative nature of the Fingal is assumptive of the notion of space, a complex aspect of geographical theory. However, the task that has been undertaken by the Fingal Development Board is the transformation of Fingal from a “space” into a “place” which warrants its own sense of place, and the creation of a sense, amongst those who reside in Fingal, of belonging to the county of Fingal.

The significance of place identity with respect to turnout stems from this attachment to place. It is thought that those who identify strongly with a particular place become concerned about issues affecting that place and work to preserve or change the existing situation to benefit that specific place. If these issues can be dealt with in the political arena (as is often the case), those with a strong attachment to place become motivated to vote. This sense of attachment to

place and place identity is usually a function of length of residence. This may partially explain the apparent lack of a Fingallian identity in the Dublin 15 area which will be discussed later in the chapter. However, the situation in Fingal is much more complex than the attribution of low place identity to a short length of residence. As the county of Fingal is a newly created place, it is necessary to work towards the creation of a Fingallian sense of place.

This chapter is concerned with documenting the level of identity that exists within Fingal. H₄ surmises that the level of identity with Fingal and in Fingal is low given the relatively new status of Fingal as a county. As party identity and group identity are also features of identity in political geography, both of these aspects will be discussed before an account of place identity in Fingal is given.

10.1.1 Party Identity

The level of partisan identification in Fingal was measured using two variables on the questionnaire survey; support for a particular political party and support for a particular candidate.

Overall, 17.8% of respondents stated that one of their reasons for turning out to vote was to support a particular political party while 19.9% stated that they turned out to vote as a result of wanting a particular candidate elected. These two variables are statistically related at the 1% level implying that those who vote to support a particular party are also likely to vote to support a particular candidate. The Irish PR-STV system facilitates this candidate based voting. As discussed in chapter six, the voter's choice in the Irish political system is not restricted by party lists, as is the case in other PR systems, and voters may indicate a preference for a multitude of candidates across political party lines. Therefore, it

is not surprising that almost one fifth of respondents stated that they turned out to vote to support a particular candidate. Likewise, voters in the PR-STV system may indicate a preference for a particular party by voting for all candidates contesting the election from that specific party. Given this, it is also not surprising that almost one fifth of respondents stated that they turned out to vote to support a particular political party.

The Chi-Square test for independence conveys a significant relationship between turning out to vote at the 2002 General election and voting to support a political party. The relationship is significant at the 1% level with 19.9% of those who turned out to vote in this election stating “support for a party” as a reason for doing so. 22% of respondents who voted in the 2002 General election stated that they did so because they wanted a specific candidate to be elected. This is also a statistically significant relationship at the 1% level.

With respect to the local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections of 2004, 18.9% of respondents who turned out to vote did so to support for a political party. This is not a statistically significant finding. However, the relationship between turnout at the 2004 elections and support for a particular candidate is statistically significant at the 5% level with 21.6% of respondents who turned out to vote in the 2004 elections stating that they did so out of support for a particular candidate. The insignificant association between turnout and support for a certain political party at this election may be due to the fact that local elections are predominantly candidate based. General elections tend to be focused around political parties and what policies the parties themselves will implement. Local elections, on the other hand, tend to be focused around individual candidates and what the candidates themselves will do for the local

community. This may account for why an insignificant relationship was found to exist between turnout at the 2004 local, European and Citizenship referendum elections and support for a particular political party while a significant association was found to exist between turnout at this election and support for a certain candidate. Also, government party supporters may abstain in local elections in protest against the government.

In summary, the findings for partisan identification are as anticipated. General elections endeavour to arouse party support and so it is not surprising that a significant relationship exists between supporting political parties and turning out to vote. Likewise, local and European elections concern the election of individual candidates and so finding that a significant relationship exists between turning out to vote at these elections and supporting a particular candidate is as expected.

10.1.2 Group Identity

According to the literature, those who are members of some sort of group are more likely to turn out to vote than those who do not involve themselves in elective activities. In establishing a measure of group identity, it was assumed to be a function of group membership. Hence, by examining the percentages of survey respondents who are members of some type of group it became possible to determine whether or not a significant relationship exists between turning out to vote and group identity.

22.9% of respondents claimed to be members of some type of group. The most commonly stated group residents/tenants associations with 13.8% of respondents belonging to one of these groups. The next most recurrent group was that of a political party with 1.9% of respondents claiming to be members of a certain

political party. 1.5% of respondents stated that they were members of a community council/association while 1% of respondents belonged to some type of sports group. The other groups mentioned, from most to least populous, were as follows; youth/community development group, family support/lone parents group, environmental group, charity group and neighbourhood watch.

Just 3.1% of respondents stated that they are members of more than one group. The most commonly stated second group was that of a political party followed by residents/tenants association, environmental group, neighbourhood watch, community council/association, youth/community development group and finally, a sports group.

92.8% of respondents who were members of some type of group voted in the 2002 General election. This is a statistically significant finding at the 1% level with turning out to vote being positively influenced by being a member of some sort of group. It appears that those who are members of a group are more likely to turn out to vote rather than to abstain.

With regards to the Nice Treaty Referendum election in 2002, 89.4% of those who belonged to a group turned out to vote. This is significant at the 1% level with there being an association between being a member of a group and turning out to vote. The situation is similar with respect to the 2004 local, European and Citizenship Referendum elections whereby 93.4% of those who were a member of a group turned out to vote. Again, this is statistically significant at the 1% level.

The above analysis seems to validate the contentions of the literature with regards to group membership and turnout. Cassell (1999) stated that those who are actively involved in non-political voluntary groups are more likely to turn out

to vote than those who are not members of such groups. This is in keeping with the findings of this research as discussed above. A number of reasons have been suggested for the increased turnout associated with group membership. As mentioned in chapter two, Olsen (1972) suggested that being involved in elective groups increases essential social interactions which promote the activity of voting. Verba and Nie (1972) suggested that the reasons for increased turnout with associated group membership have to do with the socialisation involved with being a member of a group in which political discussion is facilitated.

It is also suggested in the literature that being a member of a group is an assumed explanation of minority voting behaviour. This was addressed in the aggregate level analysis of turnout presented in chapter six whereby there was found to be negative correlation coefficients between a number of nationalities and voter turnout. However, an individual level exploration of this goes beyond the confidentiality limits of the questionnaire survey conducted.

10.1.3 Place Identity

As a measure of place identity, survey respondents were asked to rank a list of places and regions in accordance to how strong an affiliation was felt with each of these places. The list given was respective to the local electoral area of the respondent. Those from the Swords electoral area for example, were asked to rank Swords, North County Dublin, County Dublin, Fingal and Dublin City from the place with which the strongest affiliation or identity is felt to the place with which the weakest affiliation is felt. The results are discussed on an electoral area basis and are presented in Table 10.1. The rankings for Fingal are excluded from the main analysis and are discussed separately at the end of the chapter.

Table 10.1: Place Identity on an Electoral Area Basis in Accordance to 1st and 2nd Ranks Received (%)

	PLACE	1 st Rank	2 nd Rank
WHOLE COUNTY	Fingal	5.4	18.9
SWORDS	Swords	54.7	14.0
	North County Dublin	19.8	33.7
	Dublin City	11.6	3.5
	Fingal	7.0	7.0
	County Dublin	5.8	14.0
MALAHIDE	Malahide	88.7	5.3
	North County Dublin	7.1	42.0
	Fingal	2.4	22.5
	County Dublin	1.8	9.5
	Dublin City	0	7.3
BALBRIGGAN	North County Dublin	43.1	25.5
	Balbriggan	31.4	5.9
	Fingal	17.4	29.4
	Dublin City	3.9	5.9
	County Dublin	0	19.6
HOWTH	Howth	85.1	9.6
	Fingal	7.3	25.5
	North County Dublin	3.1	31.9
	County Dublin	1.0	6.4
	Dublin City	1.0	16.0
MULHUDDART	Dublin 15	59.6	20.6
	Mulhuddart	21.9	14.2
	Dublin City	9.0	7.7
	Fingal	5.8	14.2
	West Dublin	1.9	15.5
CASTLEKNOCK	Castleknock	67.3	6.3
	Dublin 15	26.4	50.0
	West Dublin	3.6	11.6
	Dublin City	1.8	6.3
	Fingal	0	8.9

With respect to the Swords electoral area, it appears that quite a small percentage of respondents ranked “Swords” first. This may seem surprising given that Swords is the county town of Fingal. However, the geographical remit of the Swords LEA includes other towns also, namely Donabate, Lusk and Portrane,

and it is likely that respondents from these towns have little or no affiliation to Swords apart from falling within the local electoral area boundary of the same name. This may account for the 19.8% of Swords respondents who stated “North County Dublin” as being the area they most closely identify with and also for the 11.6% who identified first and foremost with “Dublin City”.

The situation is quite different with respect to the Malahide electoral area. 88.7% of respondents from the Malahide local electoral area stated that they identify most closely with Malahide itself. This is indicative of the well established nature of the area and is in keeping with the contentions of the literature which suggests that well established areas with low population mobility will be characterised by high place identity. While “Malahide” is indisputably the area that is most closely identified with amongst respondents from the Malahide electoral area, 7.1% of respondents placed “North County Dublin” as their first choice. It is possible that this encapsulates respondents from the Malahide electoral area who actually live in the Portmarnock area.

43.1% of respondents from the Balbriggan electoral area ranked “North County Dublin” as the area they most closely identify with, with only 31.4% identifying most closely with Balbriggan itself. The Balbriggan electoral area encapsulates, in large part, the rural areas of Fingal with the exception of the towns of Balbriggan, Skerries and Rush. These rural parts of the Balbriggan electoral area are often referred to collectively as “North County Dublin” and so it is not surprising that the majority of respondents from this electoral area uphold a strong place affiliation with “North County Dublin”. Also, the Balbriggan electoral area occupies the north of the county of Fingal and the north of the county of Dublin. The respective location of the Balbriggan electoral area

therefore, might also account for the high percentage of respondents who stated “North County Dublin” as their closest place identifier. A similar argument will be presented in relation to Fingal identity in the Balbriggan electoral area later in the chapter.

The situation in the Howth electoral area is comparable to that in the Malahide electoral area in that the vast majority of respondents identified most closely with Howth itself (83.3% of respondents). This is again in keeping with the idea that greater place identity will be found in well established areas given that Howth is considered to be an established area. Only 3.1% of respondents stated “North County Dublin” as being the area they most closely identify with although this is unsurprising considering that the Howth electoral area is contained within the Dublin North East general election constituency boundary and politically linked to Dublin City rather than Dublin North as a result. Only 1% of respondents stated “Dublin City” or “Dublin County” as the area they most closely identify with but this is again unsurprising given the Howth postcode of Dublin 13.

The Dublin 15 area of Fingal encapsulates the electoral areas of Mulhuddart and Castleknock. For the purposes of the identity question, the “County Dublin” and “North County Dublin” options were replaced by “Dublin 15” and “West Dublin”.

What becomes obvious when studying the responses to the place identity question for the Mulhuddart and Castleknock electoral areas is that respondents from these electoral areas have a strong affiliation to Dublin 15.

59.6% of respondents from the Mulhuddart electoral area stated that they identify most closely with Dublin 15. 21.8% of respondents stated “Mulhuddart” as being the place they affiliate with the most while 9% said they identified most with

Dublin City. Just 1.9% of respondents identified most strongly with “West Dublin”.

With respect to the Castleknock electoral area, 67.3% of respondents stated that their closest affiliation is to Castleknock itself. Castleknock is considered to be a well established area. Its hinterland however has experienced quite an explosion in house-building in recent years. This, therefore, may account for the lower percentage of identity with Castleknock than might otherwise have been expected, especially when compared to Fingal’s other well established areas, Malahide and Howth. 26.4% of respondents stated “Dublin 15” as being the area that they most closely identify with, with 3.6% of respondents identifying most with “West Dublin” and 1.8% with “Dublin City”.

The Mulhuddart and Castleknock electoral areas are often collectively referred to as the Dublin 15 area. They are also located on the periphery of Fingal in the sense that these electoral areas encapsulate the most southerly electoral divisions in Fingal. This might account for the high percentage of respondents who identified closely with Dublin 15 as opposed to West Dublin or Dublin City. Also, the fact the addresses of those in these electoral area explicitly state “Dublin 15” might go some way to explaining the high percentage of respondents who identify most closely with Dublin 15 from the Mulhuddart and Castleknock electoral areas.

10.1.3.1 Fingallian Identity

In relation to identity with Fingal on a county level, just 5.4% of respondents identified most closely with Fingal (see Table 10.1). A higher percentage of respondents stated that Fingal was their second closest identifier at 18.9% with

an even higher percentage (25.1%) stating that Fingal was their third closest identifier.

Identity with Fingal on a local electoral area basis appears to vary somewhat. It is interesting to note that no respondents from the Castleknock electoral area identified most closely with “Fingal”. The reason for this may be found in the multitude of new developments that have cropped up in the area in recent years. There are many newly built housing estates in the area which have attracted residents from outside of Fingal. The Castleknock area is colloquially referred to as “corporate land” with the area’s reputation and the regular train service making it an attractive place to live for city centre commuters. These new residents, originally from outside of Fingal in many cases, may also work outside of Fingal’s boundaries and have little opportunity to develop ties to the area that would result in them considering themselves to be of Fingallian identity.

Surprisingly, only 2.4% of respondents from the Malahide electoral area stated “Fingal” as being the place which they most closely identify with. However as previously mentioned, Malahide is a very well established area with low population mobility; so while it might be expected that place identity with Fingal would be high, it is not surprising that the primary affiliation is felt towards Malahide itself. In fact, the percentage of respondents who listed “Fingal” as second in their rankings of identity was quite high at 22.6%.

In the Mulhuddart, Howth and Swords electoral areas, Fingal was considered to be the area most closely identified with by between 5.8% and 7.3% of respondents.

However, in the Balbriggan electoral area, 17.4% of respondents stated that they identify most closely with “Fingal”. This is a much higher percentage than that of

any of the other local electoral areas. The reason for this may lie in the rural nature of the Balbriggan electoral area. Many rural parts of North County Dublin are situated within the Balbriggan electoral area. It is likely that these rural residents feel closer ties to “Fingal” than their counterparts in towns and suburbs closer to the city. The rural parts of north county Dublin situated within the Balbriggan electoral area consist of a considerable amount of farming land. The crest of Fingal itself is associated with the phrase “Fluirse Talaimh is Mara” meaning “abundance of land and water” tying in with the notion of farming. It is likely that the historical significance of “Fingal” has greater meaning for people in the rural north of the county where these farming activities take place. This is addressed further later in the chapter.

Fingal was ranked second by approximately 20% of respondents in the Swords, Malahide, Howth and Balbriggan electoral areas. In the case of the Mulhuddart electoral area, this figure was lower at 14.2% and was just 8.9% in the Castleknock electoral area, with respondents from these two electoral areas identifying more closely with “Dublin 15” than with “Fingal”.

10.2 IDENTITY IN FINGAL

As previously mentioned, there are three different components of identity in Fingal. The main point to note with respect to party identity is that identifying with a particular political party or candidate results in a greater turnout propensity.

With respect to group identity, turnout propensity is also greater amongst those who are members of some manner of elective group.

Place identity in Fingal is of most interest however. Mackenzie (1976) believed that by default, people who identify with a particular place also identify with each other;

“Those who share a place, share an identity”

(Mackenzie, 1976: 130)

Agnew (2002) offers three theoretical viewpoints which each equate to explaining why this may be so. Firstly, taking a spatial-analytical approach, it is existing boundaries that are influential in creating and/or re-enforcing political identities. Social and jurisdictional boundaries “help to define political identities” (Agnew, 2002: 125). This is the most straight-forward of the three theoretical perspectives given by Agnew. A simple manifestation of this can be seen in the followers and fans of the GAA in which “place” greatly effects affiliations. In this example, it is county boundaries which determine where your support will be directed and vicious rivalries may result between differing counties. However, within counties themselves, much rivalry can be observed as people identify with one particular club. The scale of the competition, whether at the club or county level, determines who is friend and who is foe. This example is intended only as an explanation of the most basic underpinnings of the spatial-analytical approach. With regards to political identities, the relationship is much more abstract.

The second approach given by Agnew as an explanation of the politics of identity is that of a political-economic one. From this perspective, it is the processes of spatial inclusion and exclusion which work to create identities. According to Agnew (1995: 158), “some regions or localities are net beneficiaries [while other] place[s] and localities are net or absolute losers”. What the political-economic perspective boils down to is an emphasis on whose

interests have been best served? Those in similar circumstances acquire similar identities.

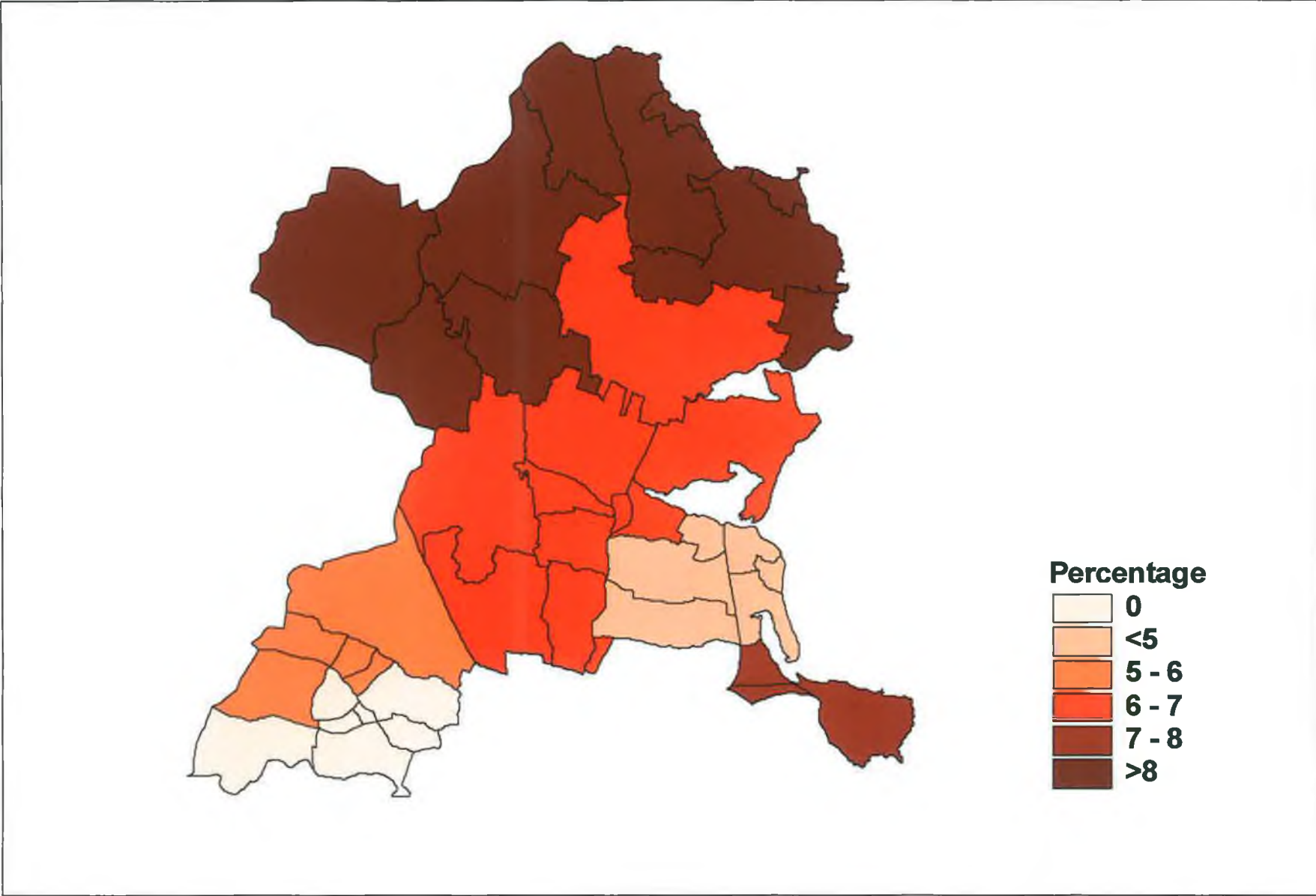
Place features strongly in the final perspective which “privilege[s] ways in which identities are expressed through attempts at associating identities with places” (Agnew, 2002:125). From this approach, identities are not predefined by borders, or aroused by political-economic circumstances. Rather, it is your individual identity which creates a place that you may then identify with. This abstract perspective is duly named the postmodern approach.

According to Agnew, place is central to political identity. As place is so closely integrated with “the local”, it can be deduced that it is “the local” which is the largest determining factor in creating identity. According to Hummon (1986), the strongest forms of bonding are local. When asked where they are from, people respond with local reference.

With respect to Fingal, it appears as though place identity dissipates from the north of the county towards the south with the strongest sense of affiliation with Fingal being in the north of the county and weakening as one moves southwards. This is illustrated by Figure 10.1. It appears that the more rural areas of the county located towards the north of the county in the Balbriggan LEA are those areas where a place identity with Fingal has begun to materialize.

As one moves southwards into the Swords electoral area and towards the south east to the Malahide electoral area, the level of identity with Fingal begins to wane. This is also the case with respect to the Mulhuddart electoral area located to the west of the county until one reaches the most southerly located local electoral area in Fingal, Castleknock, where 0% of respondents identified most with Fingal out of the list of options given.

Figure 10.1: Identity with Fingal, Classified by Number of 1st Ranks Given



10.3 TURNOUT AND PLACE IDENTITY

Table 10.2 displays voter turnout rates in each of the electoral areas in Fingal classified by place identity with Fingal County. In particular, turnout rates are listed for those respondents who identified primarily with Fingal itself, along with for those respondents who ranked Fingal last in terms of place identity.

Table 10.2: Voter Turnout and Place Identity with Fingal

	TOTAL	SW	MAL	BAL	HOW	MUL	CAS
Identify Primarily With Fingal							
VOTED, 2002 GEN. ELECTION	84.8	100	75.0*	62.5	100	87.5	-**
VOTED, 2002 NICE TREATY	78.8	100	75.0*	37.5	100	87.5	-**
VOTED, 2004 ELECTIONS	85.3	100	100*	50.0	100	88.9	-**
Do Not Identify With Fingal							
VOTED, 2002 GEN. ELECTION	80.0	80.0	80.0	50.0*	100*	75.0	72.7
VOTED, 2002 NICE TREATY	78.3	50.0	73.3	50.0*	100*	75.0	72.5
VOTED, 2004 ELECTIONS	79.1	70.0	71.4	100*	100	75.0	80.0

*These categories contain small numbers

**No figures for this category

There appears to be a slight trend in the turnout rates between those who primarily identified with Fingal and those who did not in the Swords and Mulhuddart electoral areas. This trend appears to be such that turnout was higher amongst those respondents who considered Fingal to be their primary place of identity. As can be seen in Table 10.1, in both of these electoral areas, Fingal was the fourth most common place identifier only coming before Co. Dublin in the case of the Swords electoral area and West Dublin in the case of the Mulhuddart electoral area.

Fingal was the third most common place identifier in the Balbriggan and Malahide electoral areas. However, as can be seen from Table 10.2, the associated pattern of turnout in these electoral areas is somewhat random.

As Table 10.2 demonstrates, the relationship between voter turnout and place identity with Fingal is random in nature. The association between these variables

is not statistically significant with no obvious differences in the turnout rates for Fingal and non-Fingal identifiers.

Table 10.3 displays turnout rates according to place identity with specific reference to local electoral areas.

Table 10.3: Voter Turnout and Place Identity with LEA

	2002 GEN. ELEC. TURNOUT	2002 NICE TREATY TURNOUT	2004 TURNOUT
<u>SWORDS</u>			
PRIMARY IDENTIFIER	87.0	76.1	84.8
NON IDENTIFIER	100*	66.7	66.7
<u>MALAHIDE</u>			
PRIMARY IDENTIFIER	88.4	80.6	84.6
NON IDENTIFIER	100*	100*	0*
<u>BALBRIGGAN</u>			
PRIMARY IDENTIFIER	85.7	85.7	71.4
NON IDENTIFIER	50.0	50.0	50.0
<u>HOWTH</u>			
PRIMARY IDENTIFIER	91.3	92.5	91.3
NON IDENTIFIER	100*	100*	100*
<u>MULHUDDART</u>			
PRIMARY IDENTIFIER	81.8	84.4	75.8
NON IDENTIFIER	76.2	66.7	81.0
<u>CASTLEKNOCK</u>			
PRIMARY IDENTIFIER	94.6	89.2	91.9
NON IDENTIFIER	100*	100*	75.0*

*These categories contain small numbers

The general trend that turnout appears to follow for each of the elections is higher turnouts amongst those who identify primarily with their local areas and lower turnouts for those who do not identify with their local areas. Although this is the trend that appears to emerge in the data, it does not apply to every case in the table and the association between voter turnout and identity with local areas is not statistically significant.

It would be expected that turnout in the 2004 elections is where local place identity is most relevant given that the 2004 elections included local elections. With the exception of the Malahide and Howth electoral areas (where the categories contain small numbers), three of the remaining four electoral areas

recorded higher turnouts amongst those respondents who identified primarily with their local areas than amongst those who did not. In the Mulhuddart electoral area however, turnout appeared to be higher amongst those who did not identify with Mulhuddart than amongst those who did. Only a small part of the Mulhuddart electoral area is comprised of the village and area of Mulhuddart itself. Blanchardstown comprises the majority of the Mulhuddart electoral area. Of the five EDs contained within the Mulhuddart electoral area, four of them encapsulate some part of Blanchardstown. These are the Blanchardstown-Mulhuddart, Blanchardstown-Corduff, Blanchardstown-Tyrrelstown and Blanchardstown-Coolmine electoral divisions. With Mulhuddart itself comprising only a small portion of the local electoral area, it is not surprising that local place identity appears not to matter in the case of the Mulhuddart electoral area.

Although hypothesised as a possible explanatory variable in turnout variation, it appears that on the whole, there is no significant association between turnout and place identity.

10.4 CONCLUSION

Although there were three types of identity addressed in the literature review in chapter two, the main concern of this chapter was that of place identity and the resultant effect of place identity on individual turnout propensity.

There appears to be a geography to identity with Fingal County with place identity dissipating from the north of the county towards the south. The strongest sense of affiliation with Fingal appears to be in the north of the county and appears to weaken as one moves southwards. This was illustrated in the chapter

by Figure 10.1 which displayed the highest level of Fingal identity in the north of the county with the lowest level of identity in the south-west and south-east of the county.

The relationship between turnout and place identity was found to be somewhat random with no evidence of significant turnout differences between those respondents who identify closely with Fingal and those who do not identify with the county of Fingal. The only identifiable trend was in respect to turnout rates between those who primarily identified with Fingal and those who did not in the Swords and Mulhuddart electoral areas. This trend appeared to be such that turnout was higher amongst those respondents who considered Fingal to be their primary place of identity.

In relation to voter turnout and local place identity, turnout appeared to be slightly higher amongst respondents who identified most closely with their local areas than amongst those respondents who did not identify with their local areas. However, this is merely an observation and not a statistically significant trend. It was expected that the 2004 local elections would be the elections where local place identity mattered most and this appeared to be the case in three of the local electoral areas. In the Mulhuddart electoral area however, turnout was higher amongst respondents who reported that they did not identify with Mulhuddart at all. It was suggested that local place identity matters little in the Mulhuddart electoral area due to the fact the majority of the local electoral area is comprised of the Blanchardstown area and not the Mulhuddart area.

There appears to be no direct relationship between turnout and place identity. However, it cannot be conclusively determined that there is no relationship between the two variables. It is possible that place identity may have an indirect

influence on turnout levels in that it may be related to how connected one is to the community. As demonstrated in previous chapters, this has an influence on turnout in how concerned one is about one's local area and on related factors, such as newspaper readership and community motivations for turning out to vote.

CHAPTER 11

CONCLUSION

11.1 INTRODUCTION

Identifying the factors that have an input in influencing turnout propensity is a complex process. Defining who voters and non-voters are is not an easy task. There are no “black and white” identifiers that allow one to apply the labels of “voter” or “non-voter”. What there are however, are certain factors that allow the researcher to predict turnout, and warning signs or warning characteristics that alert the researcher to the risk of abstention. There are varying traits that appear time and again in voters and in non-voters. These traits are developed owing to a range of personal background factors of a demographic and socio-structural nature, along with sociological and psychological influences. What complicates matters further is that the factors and influences causing one particular person to turn out to vote or to abstain may not necessarily be the same factors that result in another person voting or abstaining. Perhaps the reason for this lies partially in that the exercise of identifying voting and non-voting influences is a place specific one. What constitutes a non-voter in one particular place may not necessarily apply in another. Given this, it is perhaps more applicable to speak of the factors that influence turnout propensity in terms of susceptibility. That is, rather than making definitive statements of who voters and non-voters are; for example, “non-voters are young, uneducated and socially deprived”; it is more precise to speak in terms of the factors that make one susceptible to abstention; for example, “those who are young, uneducated or socially deprived are more

likely to be non-voters". This is the manner in which this concluding chapter will be based.

This study of turnout behaviour in Fingal was approached in a holistic manner, concerned with not only exploring the individual levels influences on turnout propensity but with providing a context in which these influences could be interpreted by examining aggregate level influences also. The study was conducted in this manner in order to allow an inclusive picture of turnout behaviour in Fingal to be developed and to accommodate a greater understanding of turnout behaviour in Fingal.

The remainder of the chapter will address both the aggregate and individual level influences on turnout propensity that were found to exist throughout the course of the research.

11.2 FACTORS INFLUENCING TURNOUT PROPENSITY IN FINGAL

As previously mentioned, a consistent concern throughout this research has been the study of individual turnout behaviour in a holistic fashion. While the main concern of the research has been to develop an understanding of those factors which influence turnout propensity at the individual level, it was realised that in order for this to be achieved, aggregate level influences on turnout must also be considered. Consequently, correlation and regression analyses were conducted based on marked register data and relevant census variables for the forty two electoral divisions in Fingal. The variables selected for the correlation analysis were based upon insights from the literature review with the variables with significant correlation coefficients being entered into the stepwise regression analyses. The results of both of the aggregate analyses were presented in chapter

six and the significantly correlated factors will be drawn upon later in the chapter. The questionnaire survey carried out across the county of Fingal was concerned with identifying the individual level influences on turnout propensity in Fingal. A range of possible influential factors were identified from the literature review and the statistical significance of each of these factors with respect to turnout was addressed in chapters seven, eight, nine and ten. Those factors which were proved to be significant influences on turnout propensity will also be drawn upon later in the chapter.

Following the literature review in chapter two, a number of factors were hypothesised as influencing turnout variation at the individual level in Fingal. The five hypotheses that were developed are listed below;

H₁: There is an association between demographic variables (i.e. sex, age and marital status) and turnout variation within the county of Fingal.

H₂: There is an association between socio-structural variables and voter turnout in Fingal, whereby residential stability and a high level of socio-economic resources is correlated with higher turnout levels.

H₃: Turnout variation within Fingal can be explained by a combination of other factors. Specifically, there is an association between turnout and;

- habit
- civic duty
- attention to the media

H₄: Differing levels of place identity are associated with turnout variation in Fingal County.

In addition, a fifth hypothesis was developed based around the place specific nature of turnout research. This was as follows;

H₅: The factors influencing voter turnout vary from one electoral area to another.

The following discussion will be based around the major themes in these research hypotheses. However, rather than address only the significant individual level influences that were found to exist on turnout, the aggregate level influences that were found to exist will also be discussed in unison. This will offer a stronger base for proving or disproving the hypotheses later in the chapter.

11.2.1 Demographic Influences on Turnout Propensity

It was suggested in the literature that the general trend in relation to sex and turnout is for men to be slightly more likely to vote than women. In relation to Fingal, this same trend was identified in the data collated from the questionnaire surveys. It has been suggested that the reason for the different turnout propensities is related to the amount of time available to the woman to vote. It is thought that an unequal division of labour in the home with women assuming a disproportionate share of the domestic and childcare responsibilities restricts the amount of time available to the woman to vote; time which, according to Downs (1957) is a valuable resource. It is suggested that by using time to vote, the

woman reduces her personal sense of efficacy, as her influence in the political realm is much less efficacious than her influence in the home. However, findings by Burns et al. (1997: 376), suggest that “men and women differ little in the amount of time they have available after they have honoured their commitments to a job, household and school”. When the association between sex and turnout in Fingal was tested for statistical significance, it was found that a statistically significant relationship did not exist. On a spatially acute scale, it was found that males were more likely to turn out to vote than females in just three of the six local electoral areas. In the Castleknock electoral area, both sexes proved equally as likely to turn out to vote while in the Balbriggan and Mulhuddart electoral areas, females appeared to be more likely to vote than males. However as stated in chapter seven, a higher percentage of females to males in the community group samples from these two electoral areas explains this anomaly to some extent. The aggregate influence of sex on turnout propensity is not consistent with the survey findings. A negative (but insignificant) correlation coefficient was found to exist between the percentage of males in an area and turnout propensity. The 2002 General election turnout regression model determined the percentage of males in an area to be a negative influence on turnout propensity. This may be explained by reference to the fact that Fingal is an urban area. In urban areas, it is often found that there is a negative association between males and turnout in ecological analyses owing to the tendency for there to be a higher percentage of males in urban working class areas. It is possible therefore, that the negative association between males and turnout at the aggregate level is rooted in social class and that the association is merely reflective of social class differences between areas as opposed to sex.

The effect of age on turnout propensity in Fingal was found to be statistically significant at both the individual and aggregate levels. The relationship is such that those in the youngest age cohorts are less likely to turn out to vote than those in older age cohorts. This is in keeping with the contentions of the literature which suggests that a curvilinear relationship exists between age and turnout whereby turnout is low in the youngest age cohorts, increases in the middle age cohorts and declines late in life. It appears that the relationship between age and turnout propensity applies to some but not all of the local electoral areas in Fingal. Specifically, there is a significant association between age and turnout in the Malahide, Balbriggan, Howth and Castleknock electoral areas. The relationship is also observable in the Mulhuddart electoral area where the youth effect is particularly pronounced. In the Swords electoral area however, the relationship is not as strong. There does appear to be a notable trend of those in younger cohorts being more likely to abstain than to vote but the relationship is not statistically significant. It has been suggested that the relationship between age and turnout propensity results in the young and the elderly assuming a subordinate position in terms of power to the middle age cohorts (Millar et al., 1981). There have been various attempts to explain the reasons behind the association between age and turnout propensity. One such explanation is that of the life-cycle effect, as detailed in chapter two. Blais et al. (2004) and Teixeira (2002) both suggest that the effect of age on turnout propensity is attributable to generational effects. Some other explanations for lower turnouts in the youngest age cohorts have focused around voter apathy, the lack of political representation for those in younger age cohorts, geographical mobility of those in the youngest age groupings and the lack of the habit of voting. As will be discussed later,

geographical mobility and habit are both significantly associated with turnout propensity in Fingal suggesting that these two reasons are effective explanations of the age effect on turnout propensity in Fingal. What this implies for Fingal is that those areas with a high percentage of their populations in young cohorts will be marked by lower turnout levels. The findings of the questionnaire survey maintain this to be true with the two electoral areas with a high percentage of youthful respondents (i.e. Balbriggan and Mulhuddart) recording lower self-reported turnout rates as detailed in chapter seven.

The findings of this research reiterate the contentions of the literature in regard to marital status and in particular, confirms the findings of Crewe, Fox and Alt (1992) and Straits (1990). The relationship between marital status and turnout propensity was found to be statistically significant whereby those who are married are much more likely to turn out to vote than those who are single and than those who are separated, divorced or no longer married. This relationship was found to exist at both the individual and aggregate levels. The aggregate level analysis pointed towards a high percentage of single people in an area as adversely influencing turnout levels in that area with a high percentage of married people in an area positively influencing turnout rates in that area. The regression analysis regarding turnout in the 2004 elections contradicted this, finding that turnout in an area was adversely influenced by a higher percentage of married people in that area. As discussed in chapter six however, this finding was a circumstantial function of the positive relationship between turnout and owner occupancy in the regression model and not a reflection on the positively correlated "married" variable. On an electoral area basis, the individual level

analysis conveys the significant relationship between marital status and turnout propensity to exist in four of the six local electoral areas. Specifically, the association was observable in the Balbriggan, Howth, Mulhuddart and Castleknock electoral areas. The implication of the association between marital status on turnout propensity is such that turnout rates will be lower in those areas where there is a higher percentage of the population who are single. This is implicitly linked with the age factor previously mentioned. Those areas with a higher percentage of the population in the youngest age cohorts are by default, also likely to be characterised by high percentages of single people. The findings of the individual level analysis confirm this assertion in that self-reported turnout rates in the two electoral areas which contained the highest percentages of young respondents and single respondents (i.e. Balbriggan and Mulhuddart) were lower than the turnout rates reported in the other local electoral areas.

In terms of nationality, aggregate level analyses pointed towards the percentage of those of Irish nationality in an area as being positively and significantly correlated with voter turnout. This contrasts to the other nationalities included in the aggregate analysis whereby the respective correlation coefficients indicated a significant negative correlation with voter turnout. This is in keeping with the literature which suggests that apart from the obvious restrictions of citizenship status on electoral participation, there are a number of other intermitting factors that might explain the negative coefficients between other nationalities and voter turnout. Areas characterised by high in-migration of foreign immigrants tend to experience lower turnout levels. Firstly, it has been suggested that a short length of residence is negatively associated with turnout propensity. This will be

discussed later in the chapter. Secondly, one of the main obstacles facing non-national populations is the language barrier, as was suggested by Tam Cho (1999). Without fluency in the language, procedural obstacles, such as registering to vote, may hinder political participation. Other problems associated with language barriers manifest in the type of political information available and obtainable by the non-national elector. If there is a discrepancy in the information obtained by the individual, the political socialisation process will be adversely affected resulting in alienation from politics and low turnout levels. The actual process of casting a vote may also prove problematic to non-nationals owing to the fact that the Irish PR-STV electoral system is one of few PR-STV systems in operation worldwide. The implication of this for Fingal is lower turnout levels in those areas where there are higher proportions of resident non-nationals. It suggests the need for electoral information to be readily available in a variety of different languages so as to alleviate some of the barriers to participation faced by non-national populations.

11.2.2 Socio-Structural Influences on Turnout Propensity

According to the literature, the length of time spent living in a particular place affects turnout propensity. In relation to this research, the length of time in years that a given respondent had been living at their present address was taken to be a measure of residential stability. There was found to be a statistically significant relationship between voter turnout and residential stability at the individual level whereby those resident for less than five years were more likely to abstain than to turn out to vote. In expanding areas that are growing quickly, the tendency is for low turnout to dominate. This may be due to high in-migration, that is, new

residents who are not affiliated with the area as of yet, or due to a characteristic young population who have yet to be mobilised and become habitual voters. Participation rates are expected to be much higher among well-established residents than among recent residents (Gimpel, 1999; Leighley and Vedlita, 1999). As Caldeira et al. (1990: 194-5) suggests; “those who have lived in a place for a longer time become more integrated and involved and thus participate more”. The relationship between turnout and residential stability was also found to exist at the aggregate level with significant correlation coefficients existing between the two variables. There was found to be a negative association between turnout and a short length of residence, that is, those residing in a new housing estates built since 2001. Likewise, there was found to be a negative association between turnout and residential mobility which was computed owing to the percentage of people who had been living at a different address some time during the 12 months prior to the census being held. This implies that turnout in Fingal will be higher in those areas that are more established. As noted in chapter six, this is indeed the case with turnout in the Malahide, Howth and Castleknock electoral areas being generally higher than turnout in the less established electoral areas in Fingal.

The findings of this research in relation to the individual level influence of education on turnout propensity are not in keeping with the literature which suggests that educational attainment positively influences turnout propensity (Marsh, 1991; Sigelman et al., 1985; Berelson and Steiner, 1964). In relation to Fingal, voter turnout levels and the age at which full time education ceased appear not to be statistically associated at the individual level. The observable

trend however, is for those who left full time education before fifteen years of age to be more likely to abstain from voting than to turn out to vote. On a disaggregated level, this trend is only observable in two of the six local electoral areas. Specifically, those who left school before fifteen years of age were more likely to abstain than to turn out to vote in the Balbriggan and Mulhuddart electoral areas, which may be implicitly linked with social class. In converse to the individual level analysis, there was found to be a relationship between turnout and educational attainment at the aggregate level. The strongest relationship between turnout propensity and education applies to upper secondary level education whereby a relatively strong, statistically significant correlation exists between the two variables. Contrary to what might be expected, the relationship between third level education and turnout was found to be decidedly weak and not statistically significant. It is possible that the weakness of this relationship is a function of the age in that the majority of those educated to third level will have done so since university fees were abolished in the 1990s. Therefore, many of those educated to third level belong to the youngest age cohorts, the cohorts negatively associated with turnout. In contrast to the individual level findings, the aggregate level analysis conveyed a significant negative association to exist between turnout and education to primary or lower secondary level suggesting that lower levels of educational attainment in a given area do affect turnout levels in that area. Although there was found to be a significant association between education and turnout on some level in Fingal, the nature of the relationship was not in keeping with the literature. However, the findings of this research in relation to education do corroborate the findings of

Buckley (2000: 25), who asserts that “non-voting has transcended all educational boundaries”.

The general findings of the literature suggest that those in the higher income brackets are more likely to vote than those who are less affluent (Pattie et al. 2003; Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980). Income level is a function of an individual's occupation. Therefore, this research focused on the influence of occupational group on individual turnout propensity. Generally speaking, there were some occupational groups for whom turnout rates remained more or less the same across the three elections studied. The consistently lower turnout groups included students, the unemployed and those working in the retail/sales sector. This is in keeping with the contentions of the literature. Residential mobility has been blamed for the reduced propensity of students to turn out to vote. Those who are unemployed are thought to be deprived of political socialisation opportunities (Himmelweit et al., 1981) which would otherwise facilitate the development of an understanding of political issues and of an interest in politics, which are both positive influences on turnout propensity. The lower turnout rates associated with those in the retail/sales sector are thought to be partially attributable to the working hours of those in this sector which limits the leisure time available to turnout out to vote. The higher turnout groups included retired and stay-at-home respondents along with respondents in public sector jobs and managerial roles. It was suggested in chapter seven that retired and stay-at-home respondents may feature higher turnout rates as these two groups often have more leisure time available than other occupational groups which they can use for turning out to vote. It was also suggested that those in public sector jobs and

managerial positions often belong to the higher social class groupings, with social class being significantly associated with turnout, as will be discussed later in the chapter. Occupational grouping was found not to be a statistically significant influence on turnout propensity in Fingal.

Social class on the other hand, was found to be statistically associated with turnout in Fingal. This relationship was found to exist at the aggregate level with significant positive correlation coefficients existing between turnout and the percentage of people in social classes one and two and negative correlation coefficients existing between turnout and the percentage of people in social classes five and six. These findings are very much in keeping with the contentions of the literature which assert that social class is associated with turnout propensity (Shields and Goidel, 1997). Sinnott (1995) speaks of the association between social class and turnout as being rooted in party support. If there is no political party to address the needs and concerns of a particular social class grouping, there is no reason for that group to vote. The lack of a strong left-wing presence in recent years led to widespread abstention among the lower social classes. The aggregate level influence of social class on turnout propensity in Fingal implies that those areas with higher than average proportions of the population in social classes one and two will be characterised by higher turnout levels while those areas with higher than average proportions of the population in social classes five and six will be marked by lower turnout levels. As discussed in chapter six, this indeed appears to be the case.

There was found to be an association between car ownership and turnout at the aggregate level. Specifically, there was found to be a significant relationship between the percentage of households with no car and voter turnout whereby having no car negatively influences turnout levels. What this implies for Fingal is lower turnout in those areas where there are lower percentages of car ownership. The lack of a vehicle is a crude wealth indicator in that those households without the use of a car are likely to be lower income households. As previously noted, low income households fall into the social class categories of one and two which have been determined to be prone to voter abstention. Also, the lack of a vehicle results in limited mobility for the non-owners making attending the polling station a costly activity in terms of travel time.

The findings of this research are very much in keeping with the literature in relation to housing tenure. The literature contends that housing tenure influences turnout propensity to the effect that those residing in owner occupied housing are more likely to turn out to vote than those in private rented, affordable or social housing (Johnston and Pattie et al., 2001; Hoffman-Martinot, 2006; Sinnott and Whelan, 1991). This relationship was found to exist in Fingal at the aggregate level. Specifically, there was found to be a positive correlation coefficient between owner occupied housing and turnout propensity and negative correlation coefficients between turnout propensity and rented housing, flat/bedsit accommodation and local authority/ Fingal County Council rented housing. As mentioned in chapter six, housing tenure and social class are implicitly linked with both variables being significantly associated with voter turnout at the aggregate level.

11.2.3 Personal Influences on Turnout Propensity

It was found that those who come from a family who always turned out to vote will themselves be more likely to turn out. This finding compliments the literature which contends that family influences are an important aspect of political socialisation (Himmelweit et al., 1981; Stacey, 1978; Hymen, 1959). Not only does a family history of voting increase individual turnout propensity, but the political socialisation associated with the family also implicates partisan preferences (Connell 1972).

Another familial influence on turnout propensity is the family cycle. There are significant family cycle associations with turnout in Fingal at the aggregate level. As discussed in chapter six, there are negative correlation coefficients between turnout and the percentage of pre-family couples (i.e. childless couples), the percentage of families with pre-school age children and the percentage of families with children of early school age. The coefficients are positive however in the case of families with adolescent children, families with adult children and families with children who no longer reside in the family home. The relationship between turnout and the family cycle can be explained with reference to time limitations and community socialisation. In relation to time, the time constraints of caring for young children might occupy time that might otherwise be available to partake in the electoral process. With respect to community socialisation, parents and caregivers are likely to be drawn into the socialization process of their older children. Through these interactions, which more often than not involve interactions with other adults in the community, the parents begin to become involved in the community and develop a stake in the community. The

aggregate effects of the family cycle on turnout in Fingal might also be connected with the positively correlated variable of residential stability discussed previously. Specifically, the ageing of the family cycle is likely to correspond with residential stability and a longer length of residence. As previously mentioned, residential stability is significantly associated with turnout propensity at both the individual and aggregate levels.

11.2.4 Other Influences on Turnout Propensity

It was found that habit is a significant influence on turnout propensity in Fingal. Specifically, there was found to be an increased likelihood of turning out to vote in an election if one turned out to vote in the previous election. This is in keeping with the literature which suggests that voting is an activity sustained by habit (Gerber et al., 2003). This research found that upwards of 60% of respondents in each of the six local electoral areas in Fingal turned out to vote at three successive elections, supporting the notion that voting is an activity sustained by habit.

In keeping with the literature, it appears that viewing the activity of voting as a civic duty positively influences turnout propensity. Civic duty refers to the degree or extent to which an individual feels an obligation to vote (Campbell et al., 1964). It has been suggested that the widespread belief that voting is a civic duty is evidence of social conformity in turnout behaviour (Coleman 2004; Cialdini, 1993). There is evidence of such behaviour in this research in that there was found to be a statistically significant relationship between turning out to vote and viewing voting as a civic duty and moral obligation.

A counteracting psychological effect to the influence of civic duty on turnout propensity is the individual elector's sense of political efficacy, and in particular, perceptions of a lack of efficacy. The literature states that there is an implicit link between political efficacy and the habit of voting in that the development of a sense of political efficacy is integral in developing the habit of voting. The literature suggests that if an individual feels that their vote has been efficacious in causing change or in maintaining the status quo, they will become motivated to vote again and will easily develop the habit of voting. However, people with a low sense of political efficacy are unlikely to vote in the first place as they feel their vote will have no impact whatsoever. This research found political efficacy in Fingal to be somewhat lacking. A dominant reason given for abstention was that of a lack of a sense of efficacy. There appears to be a prevailing attitude of disillusionment whereby the common milieu is dominated by the belief that voting yields no change. Following on from this, there also appears to be a prevailing belief that the current government will win regardless. A sense of efficacy might also be linked with political engagement and attention to the media.

Daily/weekly newspaper readership was found to have a positive influence on turnout propensity in Fingal. This is in keeping with the literature which contends that there is an association between newspaper readership and voter turnout (Newton and Brynin, 2001: 280). In relation to Fingal, those electoral areas which were marked by higher levels of newspaper readership were also those areas where turnout was highest. With respect to specific newspapers read, higher percentages of those in the Malahide, Mulhuddart and Castleknock

electoral areas read "The Irish Times" newspaper in comparison to those in the other three electoral areas. Conversely, tabloid newspaper readership was higher in the Swords, Balbriggan and Mulhuddart electoral areas as opposed to in the other electoral areas. This suggests that there is a class base to newspaper readership with those in the higher social classes being more likely to read broadsheet newspapers while those in the lower social classes are more likely to read tabloid newspapers. The implications of this on turnout in Fingal is that turnout is higher in the electoral areas where broadsheet newspapers are read and lower in those areas where tabloid newspapers are read. Newspaper readership was found to be implicitly linked with political understanding.

There was found to be a greater level of understanding about general electoral issues than about local election or referendum election issues. It was found that the more one is exposed to electoral issues through the media, the greater the level of political understanding that develops. There was found to be a statistically significant relationship between understanding electoral issues and turnout propensity. It was suggested that this relationship can be explained with reference to self-mobilisation. Those who understand the issues and matters pertaining to a particular election will be likely to develop an opinion on these issues and hence, will be motivated to turn out to vote to represent their self interests. Understanding electoral issues helps one to develop an interest in politics which also acts as a mobilising influence.

Having an interest in politics is statistically related to voter turnout in Fingal to the effect that those who report having a strong interest in politics are more likely

to turn out to vote than to abstain while those who state that they have no interest in politics are more likely to abstain from voting than to turn out. This is in keeping with the literature which suggests that there is an association between turnout propensity and the level of interest an individual has in politics and political matters (Pattie et al., 2003). This appears to be the case in Fingal as discussed in chapter nine. The relationship between political interest and turnout in Fingal County is such that voter turnout levels decline with waning levels of political interest. As previously mentioned, the level of interest an individual had in politics is significantly associated with levels of political understanding. What this suggests is that if comprehensible electoral information were widely available in Fingal, the resultant effect may be increased levels of political understanding which may in turn, increase the level of interest that the individual electoral has in politics and hence, increase turnout propensity.

11.2.5 Identity and Turnout Propensity

It was found that partisan identification positively influences individual level turnout propensity in Fingal County. This is in keeping with the literature which suggests that when a party identification exists, the individual is likely to turn out to vote to express support for that particular party. In relation to Fingal, supporting a political party was found to be significantly related to individual level turnout propensity at general elections. Similarly, supporting a certain candidate was also found to be a significant influence on voter turnout in local elections. General elections endeavour to arouse party support in an attempt to convince the electorate to vote for many candidates belonging to one particular party. Local elections on the other hand, are very much candidate based and

focus on what the individual politician can achieve for local areas. This accounts for the respective relationships noted above. As both party and candidate support are significantly related to voter turnout, this implies that any level of partisan identification in Fingal is a positive influence on turnout propensity regardless of whether the main interest is in national level or local level politics.

There was also found to be a significant relationship between individual level turnout propensity and group identity in Fingal. Specifically, higher turnouts were associated with those who were members of some manner of elective group. This confirms the findings of the literature which states that those who are actively involved in non-political voluntary groups are more likely to turn out to vote than those who are not members of such groups (Cassel, 1999). Olsen (1972) suggested that being involved in elective groups increases essential social interactions which promote the activity of voting. Verba and Nie (1972) suggested that the reasons for increased turnout with associated group membership have to do with the socialisation involved with being a member of a group in which political discussion is facilitated. With regards to Fingal, this implies that it may be possible to increase voter turnout levels in lower turnout areas by encouraging participation in elective groups. There are a number of community groups in operation around Fingal. The findings of this research suggest that if participation were to increase in these groups, the resultant effect on turnout would be positive in nature.

Place identity with Fingal was found to vary across the six local electoral areas in Fingal. As discussed in chapter ten, the pattern of place identification with Fingal

itself follows a north-south line dissipating from the north of the county towards the south with the strongest sense of affiliation with Fingal being in the north of the county and weakening as one moves southwards. It was determined that the more rural areas of Fingal located towards the north of the county in the Balbriggan LEA were those areas where place identity with Fingal was found to be strongest. As one moved southwards into the Swords electoral area, south east to the Malahide electoral area and south west into the Mulhuddart electoral area, it was found that the level of identity with Fingal begins to wane with the weakest place identity evident in the Castleknock electoral area. Although there was an identifiable pattern in relation to place identity with Fingal, there was not found to be any statistical evidence of significant turnout variations between those respondents who primarily identified with Fingal and those who did not. This is not in keeping with the literature which suggests that turnout propensity increases with a strong place identity. However, the lack of a significant relationship might be based upon the strength of the identity with Fingal. Specifically, the fact that there is a low place identity with Fingal might have resulted in the non-significant association with turnout detailed above. Although there was deemed to be no direct relationship between turnout and place identity, it was not possible to conclusively determine that the variables are not associated. It is a possibility that place identity may have an indirect influence on turnout levels in that it may be related to how connected one is to the community. As discussed previously, this has an influence on turnout in how concerned one is about one's local area and on related factors, such as newspaper readership and community motivations for turning out to vote.

11.3 SUMMARISING THE RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The first research hypothesis was concerned with the demographic influences on turnout propensity in Fingal. It was found that there is no significant association between sex and turnout propensity in Fingal. There was however, found to be significant relationships between turnout propensity and age and between turnout propensity and marital status. Both of these relationships were observable at the individual and aggregate levels proving the strength of the associations. In addition, there was found to be an aggregate level association between nationality and turnout.

The second hypothesis was concerned with certain socio-structural influences on turnout propensity in Fingal. There was found to be both an individual level and aggregate level influence on turnout propensity in terms of residential stability. In relation to education, it was determined that there is no association in Fingal between education and individual level turnout propensity. Conversely, education and turnout were found to be associated at the aggregate level. There were found to be some occupational groupings which displayed evidence of consistent voting and some which displayed evidence of consistent non-voting. These trends however, were not found to be significantly associated with turnout in Fingal. Social class on the other hand, was found to be statistically related to turnout at the aggregate level along with two interrelated factors, housing tenure and car ownership. This research suggests that there is little influence of socio-structural factors on individual turnout propensity. In contrast however, there are significant socio-structural influences on turnout at the aggregate level in Fingal County.

The third research hypothesis was concerned with identifying a range of other factors on individual turnout propensity. Specifically, there were found to be significant associations between turnout propensity and voting in successive elections, between turnout propensity and viewing voting as a civic duty and between turnout propensity and newspaper readership. In addition, individual political efficacy, understanding politics and having an interest in politics were all found to be significantly related to individual turnout propensity in Fingal County.

The fourth hypothesis focused on the topic of identity in Fingal. In converse to the hypothesis, there were found to be high levels of partisan and group identification in Fingal County which were positively and significantly related to turnout variation in Fingal. On the other hand, there was found to be no direct statistical relationship between turnout variation and place identity with Fingal.

With respect to the final hypothesis, a variety of place variations were found to exist in relation to the various influences on turnout propensity already detailed. These place variations were noted throughout the main body of the research as appropriate.

11.4 MODELS OF PARTICIPATION

In chapter two, a number of explanatory models of political participation were discussed. To recapitulate on these, Leighley and Vedlita (1999) suggested that a combination of socio-economic theory, the theory of psychological resources and the theory of social connectedness offer the best predictor of political participation.

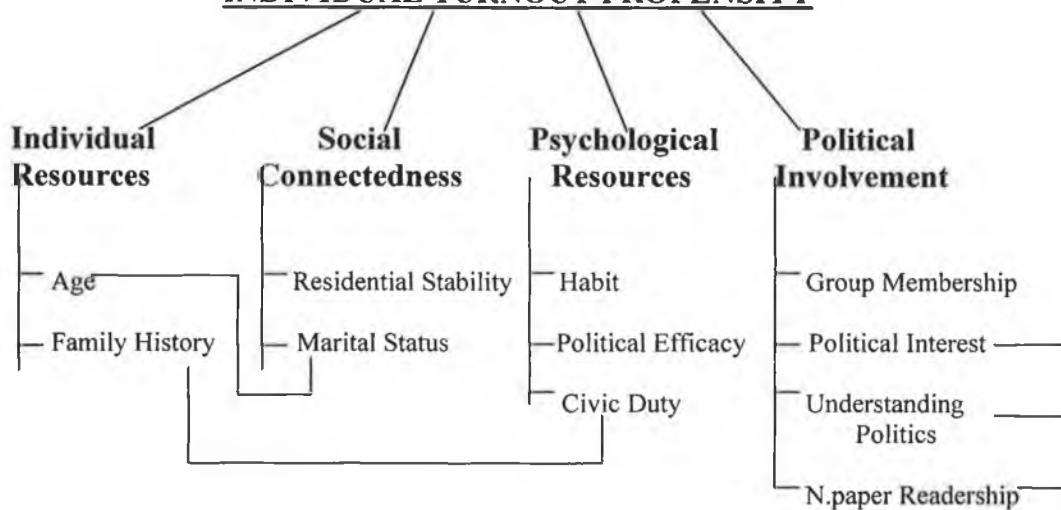
An alternative to Leighley and Vedlita's (1999) combination of theories is Perea's (2002) Individual Incentives Theory. This encapsulates each of the theories put forward by Leighley and Vedlita (1999). The Individual Incentives Theory has three levels; the level of individual resources, the level of social integration and the level of political involvement. The level of individual resources is concerned with factors relating directly to the individual, i.e. age, education and occupation. The level of social connectedness is concerned with factors such as marital status and length of residence while the level of political involvement is concerned with interest in politics and group membership.

Perea's (2002) Individual Incentives Theory is the closest attempt at encapsulating all of the factors which influence the individual turnout decision in Fingal. However, there is no all encompassing model that can explicitly claim to represent all of the individual level influences on turnout in Fingal County. It is suggested that this may be due to two reasons. Firstly, there are many different types of voters and non-voters, all susceptible to varying influences. Secondly, and a major theme in this research, some of the factors that influence turnout propensity appear to be somewhat influenced by place variations. The following section develops a model of individual level influences on turnout propensity in Fingal using aspects of the theories already summarised along with other extenuating factors.

11.4.1 Model of Individual Level Influences on Turnout Propensity in Fingal

A number of factors that influence turnout propensity have been identified by this research. The following model of turnout propensity was developed following the identification of these factors.

Figure 11.1: Model of Individual Turnout Propensity in Fingal
INDIVIDUAL TURNOUT PROPENSITY



The model contains four groupings of influential factors adapted from the models in the literature; individual resources, social connectedness, psychological resources and political involvement. The factor of age is the main individual resource that appears to influence turnout propensity in Fingal along with a predisposition to turn out due to family history. Marital status and residential stability are found under the heading of social connectedness. Psychological resources include political efficacy, civic duty and habit. The final grouping, political involvement, encapsulates political understanding, political interest, newspaper readership and group membership.

The model should be interpreted within the context of place, i.e. Fingal, and also within the context of circumstance. That is, a person who fits the profile of a likely voter may not turn out to vote due to circumstantial reasons.

11.4.2 The Voter and the Non-Voter in Fingal

As a result of the model that was developed, it is possible to make a statement as to who the voter and the non-voter in Fingal is, or rather, what characteristics they are likely to have.

The voter in Fingal is likely to have some or all of the following characteristics.

The voter is likely to;

- Belong to one of the older age cohorts
- Be married
- Be living at their present address for more than 5 years
- Have developed the habit of voting through voting at successive elections
- Believe their vote counts
- Come from a family who always voted
- Believe that voting is a civic duty that must be upheld
- Be a member of some sort of elective group
- Read a daily or weekly newspaper on a regular basis, particularly broadsheet newspapers
- Have a genuine interest in politics
- Understand politics and political issues

Conversely, the non-voter in Fingal is likely to have some or all of the following characteristics. The non-voter is likely to;

- Belong to one of the younger age cohorts
- Be single
- Be living at their present address for less than 5 years
- Believe that nothing ever changes regardless of whether or not they vote
- Be readers of tabloid newspapers or not engage in newspaper readership
- Have little understanding of politics and political issues
- Have little interest in politics or political affairs

11.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The main concern of this study has been the identification of individual level influences on turnout propensity in Fingal. There have been many studies conducted on voting and non-voting and this particular study confirms some of the findings of these studies and refutes others. Perhaps the reason for this is rooted in the notion of place. Place is a central theme in this research and in particular, how the factors influencing turnout propensity vary from one place to the next. This may be the reason why similar studies always seem to yield varying results.

The problem with turnout research is that it is subject to temporal influences, being valid for only one particular time-frame. Referring to turnout propensity research must be done within the context of the time frame in which the research was conducted. This problem is a product of the turnout paradox, that is, that a non-voter in one election may turn out to vote in the next election and vice versa. However with this in mind, the profiles detailed above are likely to describe the voter and the non-voter in Fingal.

Redressing the issue of turnout variation in Fingal will involve an inclusive approach concerned with addressing all of the factors that adversely influence turnout propensity in Fingal. Addressing the factors that influence turnout at the aggregate level is a complicated process that must begin with addressing individual level factors. By identifying the individual level influences on turnout propensity, an attempt can be made to rebalance political representation between areas and hence, political influence. This research has attempted to identify these factors hence setting the foundations for future strategies which will focus on sustaining satisfactory and acceptable levels of turnout in Fingal County.

APPENDIX 1

Copy of Questionnaire Survey for Swords Electoral Area

QUESTIONNAIRE ON VOTING BEHAVIOUR IN CO. FINGAL

It's very important for people to vote for their area to get attention. Many people in Fingal don't vote and we in the Fingal Development Board would like to know why. We would ask you to kindly take the time to answer the questions in this questionnaire. This will take about 5-10 minutes.

CONFIDENTIALITY IS ASSURED.

So please answer these questions as honestly as possible. Thank you for your assistance.

Q. 1 Where do you live? Please Give the Name of your STREET or HOUSING ESTATE or TOWNLAND (To ensure confidentiality, please do not include your house number)

.....

Q. 2 Are you Male or Female? (Tick one box)

Male

Female

Q. 3 What is your marital status? (Tick one box)

Single
Divorced

Married
Widowed

Separated

Q. 4 Which of the following age categories are you in? (Tick one box)

18 to 24 years old
45 to 54 years old

25 to 34 years old
55 to 64 years old

35 to 44 years old
65 years or over

Q. 5 How many years have you been living in your present house? (Please write in number)

For Years.

Q. 6 What is your current occupation? Please state here:

.....

Q. 7 Are you Irish? Please tick one box.

Irish

Other Nationality

If you are not Irish, please write your nationality here:

Q. 8 What age were you when you finished Full Time Education (Primary or Secondary or Third Level)? Please write in number here: years old.

Q. 9 The last General Election was held in May 2002. A Referendum on the Nice Treaty was held in October 2002. The last Local and Europeans Elections, as well as the Citizenship Referendum, were held in June 2004. Which of these elections did you vote in? (Tick either the Yes or No box for each Election)

	YES	NO
2002 General Election		
2002 Nice Treaty Referendum		
2004 Local and European Elections, Citizenship Referendum		

Q. 10 If you voted in any of the Elections above, why did you do so? (Please tick any of the boxes below)

- I always vote in elections, as part of my civic duty
- I want to support a certain political party
- Because a politician helped me (at a Clinic or otherwise)
- My family always voted and as a result so do I
- I want to make sure that a local candidate is elected
- Protest vote against the Government
- To express my opinions on the Citizenship issue
- To protest over the imposition of Bin Charges
- Concern over local issues, such as the status of Dublin Airport
- To protest against the War in Iraq
- To make sure I have a say in electing the Government/Council

If You Have Other Reasons For Voting, or Other Comments; Please State Here:

.....

Q. 15 Is your name on the Electoral Register now? (Tick one box)

- YES; for my Present Address
- YES; but for my Previous Address
- I am not sure
- NO
- YES; both for my Present and Previous Addresses

Q. 16 Have you ever received assistance from a local TD, local Councillor, or other local politician, at a Clinic or otherwise? (Tick one of the boxes)

- YES
- NO

Q. 17 Are you a member of a Group, or Groups,(e.g. Tenants Associations, Political Parties...) in your locality? If so, which one(s)? (Please state)

.....

Q. 18 Which of the following issues do you think will be most important in the next General Election? (Please rank issues in terms of importance, putting '1' for your most important issue, '2' for your second most important issue, and so on.)

- Unemployment
- Crime
- Youth Issues
- Immigration
- Traffic Management
- Housing
- Estate Management
- Drug Abuse
- Education
- Health
- Public Transport
- Leisure Facilities
- Environment
- Other (Please State:

Q. 19 Which of the following groups do you think are the most likely to address your area's needs? Please rank these groups, putting 1 in the box for the group you see as being most likely, 2 in the box of the second most likely group, and so on.

- Local TDs
- The Government
- Health Board/FAS/Gardaí
- Business People
- Local Councillors
- Fingal County Council
- Co-operation Fingal
- Local Community Groups
- Local Clergy and Religious

Q. 20 Which of the following areas do you identify with the most? Please rank these, putting 1 in the box for the area you most identify with, 2 in the box of the second, and so on.

- Swords
- North County Dublin
- Co. Dublin
- Fingal
- Dublin City

Q. 21 (a) Do you read a Daily or Weekly Newspaper?

Yes

No

If Yes, which one(s)? (Please state.)

.....

(b) Do you read a Local Newspaper?

Yes

No

If Yes, which one(s)? (Please state.)

.....

Q. 22 Do you watch the News on TV, or listen to it on Radio?

Yes

No

If Yes, what TV/Radio channels do you watch, or listen to, the News on?

.....

If Yes, how often do you watch, or listen to, the News? (Please state.)

.....

Q. 23 Please list all the different geographic areas in Co. Fingal that you are familiar with.

.....

.....

.....

**Q. 24 Which of the following aspects of the voting process do you have difficulties with?
(Tick any of the boxes that apply)**

Finding the Polling Station

Not enough information on the Polling Card

Filling in the Ballot Paper

Electronic Voting

Registering to Vote

No Voting Card sent in post

No time to vote

Knowing who the Candidates are

I have no difficulties

Other (Please State Below)

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

If Other; Please State Here:

.....

**Q. 25 Which of the following do you think could help people, who don't vote, to vote ?
(Tick any of the boxes that apply)**

- Evidence that voting makes a difference
- Polling Stations to open earlier and stay open longer
- Courses about voting in Schools
- Weekend Voting
- Seeing better links between politics and the area's needs
- Local people standing for election and representing their own communities
- Better information from political parties
- Maps, showing where your Polling Station is, on the Polling Cards
- Voter Education programmes

If Other; Please State Here:

.....

Q. 26 (a) What is your level of interest in National Politics? (e.g. Government, General Elections...)

Very Interested

Fairly Interested

Not Much Interested

Not Interested At All

(b) What is your level of interest in Local Politics? (e.g. Local Elections, Fingal County Council, Tenants Associations)

Very Interested

Fairly Interested

Not Much Interested

Not Interested At All

Q. 27 Do you have a clear, or fair, understanding of the issues at stake in the following elections? (Tick one box for each election.)

General Elections

Yes	
Fair	
No	

Local Elections

Yes	
Fair	
No	

Referendums

Yes	
Fair	
No	

Q. 28 Do you know (see/to talk to) any of these candidates who stood in the local elections in Swords? Please indicate those you know - tick any box that applies.

Martine Coombes
 Sean Dolphin
 Ken Farrell
 Emer Kernan
 Michael O'Brien

<input type="checkbox"/>	Clare Daly
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bob Dowling
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tom Kelleher
<input type="checkbox"/>	Matt McCormack
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mary O'Donnell

<input type="checkbox"/>	Anne Devitt
<input type="checkbox"/>	Kenneth B. Duffy
<input type="checkbox"/>	Michael Kennedy
<input type="checkbox"/>	Gerry McGuire
<input type="checkbox"/>	Joe O'Neill

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

Q. 29 Do you know (see/to talk to) any of the candidates who stood in the general election in Dublin North? Please indicate those you know - tick any box that applies.

Cathal Boland
 Jim Glennon
 Nora Owen
 Trevor Sargent

<input type="checkbox"/>	Clare Daly
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ciaran Goulding
<input type="checkbox"/>	Eamonn Quinn
<input type="checkbox"/>	David Walshe

<input type="checkbox"/>	Mick Davis
<input type="checkbox"/>	Michael Kennedy
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sean Ryan
<input type="checkbox"/>	GV Wright

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

Q. 30 Would having more information about voting and the election process increase your likelihood to vote? (Tick either the YES or NO box)

YES
 NO

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

Q. 31 Who do you think should provide this information?

.....

Q. 32 What makes you, or would make you, want to vote? (Please state here.)

.....

Thank you very much for taking the time to fill in this questionnaire. Please return it to us, or to the person who gave it to you.

ONCE AGAIN, PLEASE BE ASSURED THAT THE CONTENTS OF THIS WILL BE TREATED IN A CONFIDENTIAL MANNER

APPENDIX 2

Local Election Candidate Recognition Tables

Table 1: Recognition of Local Election Candidates in Swords

CANDIDATE	PARTY		%
1 = Clare Daly	Socialist Party	SP	62.1
2 = Michael Kennedy	Fianna Fáil	FF	55.2
3 = Anne Devitt	Fine Gael	FG	40.1
4 = Tom Kelleher	Labour Party	Labour	39.1
5 = Gerry McGuire	Labour Party	Labour	28.7
6 = Seán Dolphin	Fine Gael	FG	24.1
7 = Bob Dowling	Fine Gael	FG	23.0
8 = Martina Coombes	Fianna Fáil	FF	11.5
9 = Ken Farrell	Labour Party	Labour	9.20
9 = Joe O'Neill	Independent	Non-Party	9.20
10 = Mary O'Donnell	Progressive Democrats	PD	6.90
11 = Michael O'Brien	Socialist Party	SP	2.30
11 = Matt McCormack	Sinn Fein	SF	2.30
11 = Kenneth B. Duffy	Green Party	Greens	2.30
12 = Emer Kernan	Fine Gael	FG	0.00

Table 2: Recognition of Local Election Candidates in Malahide

CANDIDATE	PARTY		%
1 = Darragh O'Brien	Fianna Fáil	FF	53.2
2 = Peter Coyle	Labour Party	Labour	34.5
3 = Nicola Byrne	Progressive Democrats	PD	24.0
4 = Alan Farrell	Fine Gael	FG	20.5
5 = Robert Kelly	Green Party	Greens	12.9
6 = Paul Cuddy	Fine Gael	FG	6.40
7 = Barbara Foley	Fianna Fáil	FF	5.30

Table 3: Recognition of Local Election Candidates in Balbriggan

CANDIDATE	PARTY		%
1 = Mary McKeon	Independent	Non-Party	30.0
2 = Ciarán Byrne	Labour Party	Labour	26.0
3 = Tommy Ryan	Independent	Non-Party	22.0
4 = David O'Connor	Independent	Non-Party	20.0
4 = Monica Harford	Labour Party	Labour	20.0
5 = Liam Butterly	Fianna Fáil	FF	16.0
5 = Seán Brown	Fine Gael	FG	16.0
6 = Kevin Thorp	Labour Party	Labour	14.0
6 = Gerry Gaughan	Progressive Democrats	PD	14.0
6 = Thomas O'Leary	Fine Gael	FG	14.0
6 = Joseph Corr	Green Party	Greens	14.0
7 = Dermot Murray	Fianna Fáil	FF	12.0
8 = James Archer	Independent	Non-Party	8.00
9 = Paddy Boyle	Independent	Non-Party	4.00
10 = Stephanie Davis-O'Brien	Fianna Fáil	FF	0.00
10 = Tadhg Kenehan	Socialist Party	SP	0.00

Table 4: Recognition of Local Election Candidates in Howth

CANDIDATE	PARTY		%
1 = Joan Maher	Fine Gael	FG	63.8
2 = Michael Joe Cosgrave	Fine Gael	FG	54.3
3 = Liam Creaven	Fianna Fáil	FF	39.4
4 = David Healy	Green Party	Greens	25.5
5 = Geraldine Wall	Fianna Fáil	FF	17.0
6 = Brian Greene	Socialist Party	SP	6.40
6 = Noelle Ryan	Progressive Democrats	PD	6.40
7 = Brian Geoghegan	Fianna Fáil	FF	4.30
8 = Vivienne Kelly	Labour Party	Labour	3.20
9 = Bernadette Quinn	Sinn Fein	SF	2.10

Table 5: Recognition of Local Election Candidates in Mulhuddart

CANDIDATE	PARTY		%
1 = Michael O'Donovan	Labour Party	Labour	34.6
2 = Gerry Lynam	Independent	Non-Party	31.4
3 = Margaret Richardson	Fianna Fáil	FF	26.3
4 = Ruth Coppinger	Socialist Party	SP	23.7
5 = Jon Rainey	Fine Gael	FG	6.40
6 = Gary O'Connor	Fine Gael	FG	5.80
6 = Helen Redwood	Socialist Party	SP	5.80
7 = Martin Christie	Sinn Fein	SF	5.10
8 = Ben Howe	Progressive Democrats	PD	4.50
9 = Michael Smyth	Fianna Fáil	FF	2.60
10 = Gerard Murray	Independent	Non-Party	1.90
11 = Paul Hand	Independent	Non-Party	1.30
11 = Robert Bonnie	Green Party	Greens	1.30

Table 6: Recognition of Local Election Candidates in Castleknock

CANDIDATE	PARTY		%
1 = Leo Varadkar	Fine Gael	FG	60.7
2 = Peggy Hamill	Labour Party	Labour	32.1
3 = Mags Murray	Progressive Democrats	PD	25.9
4 = Brenda Clifford	Fianna Fáil	FF	16.1
5 = Luke Stynes	Sinn Fein	SF	5.40
6 = Marian Quinlan	Fianna Fáil	FF	3.60
7 = Fergal Molloy	Independent	Non-Party	1.80
7 = Susan Fitzgerald	Socialist Party	SP	1.80
8 = Roderic O'Gorman	Green Party	Greens	0.90

APPENDIX THREE

General Election Candidate Recognition Tables

Table 1: Recognition of General Election Candidates in Dublin North

CANDIDATE	PARTY	
1 = Trevor Sargent	Green Party	Greens
2 = Nora Owen	Fine Gael	FG
3 = GV Wright	Fianna Fáil	FF
4 = Sean Ryan	Labour Party	Labour
5 = Clare Daly	Socialist Party	SP
6 = Michael Kennedy	Fianna Fáil	FF
7 = Jim Glennon	Fianna Fáil	FF
8 = Cathal Boland	Fine Gael	FG
9 = Ciarán Goulding	Independent	Non-Party
10 = David Walshe	Christian Solidarity Party	CSP
11 = Eamonn Quinn	Independent	Non-Party
11 = Mick Davis	Sinn Fein	SF

Table 2: Recognition of General Election Candidates in Dublin North-East

CANDIDATE	PARTY	
1 = Tommy Broughan	Labour Party	Labour
2 = Michael Woods	Fianna Fáil	FF
3 = Michael Joe Cosgrave	Fine Gael	FG
4 = David Healy	Green Party	Greens
5 = Martin Brady	Fianna Fáil	FF
6 = Gavin Doyle	Fine Gael	FG
7 = Larry O'Toole	Sinn Fein	SF
8 = Noelle Ryan	Progressive Democrats	PD
9 = Mark Harrold	Independent	Non-Party
10 = Thomas Jenkinson	Independent	Non-Party

Table 3: Recognition of General Election Candidates in Dublin West

CANDIDATE	PARTY	
1 = Joan Burton	Labour Party	Labour
2 = Brian Lenihan	Fianna Fáil	FF
3 = Joe Higgins	Socialist Party	SP
4 = Sheila Terry	Fine Gael	FG
5 = Tom Morrissey	Progressive Democrats	PD
5 = Mary Lou McDonald	Sinn Fein	SF
6 = Deirdre Doherty Ryan	Fianna Fáil	FF
7 = Robert Bonnie	Green Party	Greens
7 = John Smyth	Christian Solidarity Party	CSP

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