

Who is the Cornish voter? Social variables and party choice in Cornwall

In his pioneering analysis of Cornish electoral politics in 1993 Adrian Lee suggested that the Cornish voter marched to 'a different drum'. He detected a 'distinctive pattern of electoral politics which does not match the English pattern' at the parliamentary level. While devoting less space to the local level, Lee noted that the in-migration that Cornwall had experienced after the 1950s had not had the expected effect. Support for Independents remained high, while there was a less than comprehensive electoral intervention by the three bigger parties and no evidence for the surge in the Tory/Labour vote that might have been expected, given the demographic shift.¹

Since Lee's work, it's become axiomatic that the Cornish electorate's voting behaviour diverges from that across the Tamar. In Cornwall, observers have detected an 'anti-metropolitanism', although one that underpinned Liberal and then Liberal Democrat successes rather than triggered a breakthrough for an autonomist or nationalist party, as happened in Scotland and Wales.² For Garry Tregidga, discontent with central government combined with traditional cleavages to bolster the Liberal vote. In the inter-war period the latter benefited from a Methodist religious culture, weak trade unionism and the agricultural base of the economy. As a result, the 'age of alignment', when British politics more generally became a Tory/Labour battleground, did not occur in Cornwall.³

More recently, John Ault's study of the causes of Liberal Democrat strength in the 1997-2015 period re-assesses the role of local issues. Local issues seem more important to Lib Dem voters but the evidence is less consistent than is sometimes assumed. They remained more important than 'national values' when explaining Lib Dem support in some constituencies such as St Austell and Newquay in 2010, but they did not do so in South East Cornwall. It remains unclear whether Lib Dems tap into an existing concern with local as opposed to state-wide issues or whether they stimulate such concerns. Ault concludes that although campaigning is a much more salient factor in Lib Dem success than either culture or charismatic characters such as David Penhaligon, the level of campaigning required for success is still structured to an extent by the historical and cultural context.⁴

Ault, like those investigating Cornish electoral politics before him, concentrates on the outcomes of the voting process. Voting behaviour in turn is explained by factors exogenous to the voters themselves, such as tradition, policies on offer or campaigning. My intention here is less ambitious. I want to ask whether Cornish voters and voters in Cornwall in the 2010s are distinctly different from elsewhere in terms of what they bring to the process, in other words their socio-economic background. Do political parties in Cornwall obtain their support from the same social bases as in England/ Wales?

After briefly establishing whether the pattern of Cornish voting has remained distinctive since Lee wrote in the 1990s, I shall use polling data to compare the origins of party support in Cornwall and ask first whether it differs from England. I shall then correlate the 2015 voting pattern with various social variables drawn from the 2011 census at the parliamentary constituency level and establish the relationships in England and Wales, before returning to Cornwall. After that, I move on to compare the voting pattern at the Cornish local elections of 2009 with census data to test whether the relationships hinted at by the parliamentary elections can also be found at local elections, before finishing by assessing what the data might tell us. Unlike previous contributions, my method is resolutely quantitative, seeking to prove the presence of significant correlations between voting behaviour in Cornwall and social variables and comparing those correlations with relationships in England and Wales.

The data

First, a note on the data. Before 2014 it was not possible to obtain polling data that allowed an assessment of the behaviour of voters across Cornwall. However, between May 2014 and April 2015 Lord Ashcroft's polling company conducted 13 polls in five of the six Cornish constituencies.⁵ These polls can be weighted by constituency and added together to provide a picture of voting intentions in Cornwall in the year preceding the 2015 general election.

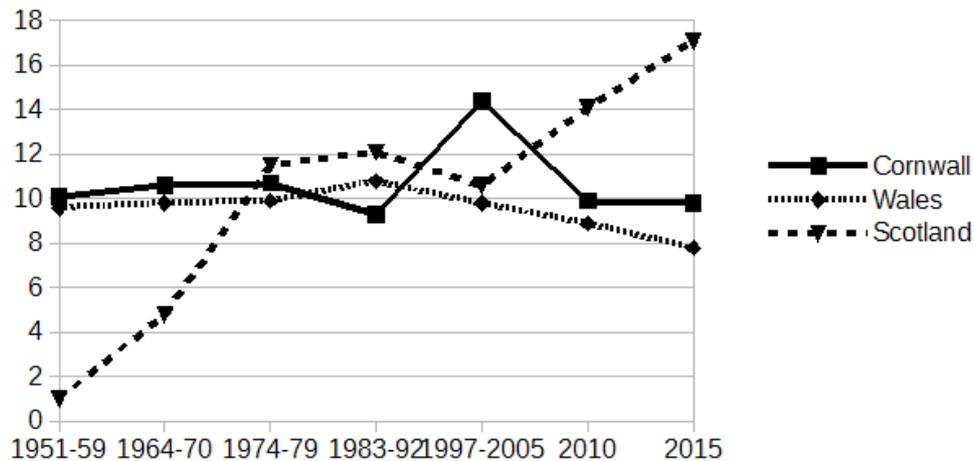
One specific question they may help us answer is who votes MK? Until now, the social background of MK voters has been something of a mystery. Because the party only polls around 1-2% at the parliamentary level, no single opinion poll (usually reaching 1,000 respondents) will provide a significant number of MK voters for conclusions to be drawn. Moreover, MK voters were lost among a variegated collection of 'others'. However, Ashcroft's polls distinguished those who intended to vote Ukip, Green and even BNP from 'others', (even though the BNP ran no candidate in Cornwall in 2015). While it is unfortunate, and telling, that those interviewed were not offered the explicit choice of MK, the 'others' in the Cornish polls must have overwhelmingly intended to vote MK. Thus, by aggregating up the 'other' category over the 13 polls we may detect, for the first time, a picture of the MK voter, albeit somewhat grainy and unfocused. Numbers will be still be low, so confidence levels will be much lower than for Conservatives or Liberal Democrats, or even Ukip, Labour and Greens in Cornwall.

The other datasets I make use of are the constituency level results of the 2015 general election in England, Wales and Cornwall and the ward level results of the 2009 unitary authority election in Cornwall. These are combined with various social variables from the 2011 Census at constituency and ward levels.⁶ Because there was a boundary revision between the 2009 and 2013 local elections, and because the census data are only available for the wards as they stood in 2011, it is not possible to conduct a longitudinal comparison across the two election dates. Nonetheless, in the sad absence of comprehensive small area voting statistics in the UK, (in comparison with European neighbours such as France or Spain where such data exist down to commune or municipality level for all elections), this is the best we can do.

Distinctiveness

Before addressing voting patterns in Cornwall and asking whether these are similar to those in England, we should check the claimed existence of a distinctive pattern. One way to do this is to calculate a simple Index of Dissimilarity (ID) and compare the pattern of the vote in England with that in Cornwall, Wales and Scotland over time.⁷ Figure 1 shows that in the 1950s and 1960s Cornwall differed more from England than did Scotland or Wales. It may be difficult to credit nowadays, but election results in Scotland in the 1950s were very similar to those in England. However, while the Cornish ID has remained stable, the Scottish results increasingly diverged from those of England after the 1960s. Meanwhile, in Wales since the 1980s there has been a slight but unmistakable trend towards convergence with England.

Figure 1: Index of dissimilarity from English voting pattern



The reasons for the dissimilarity of course vary between Cornwall and Scotland/Wales. In Cornwall the difference resides in the very low Labour vote and the higher Lib Dem vote. In other words, it's contained within the structures of English party politics.⁸ In Scotland since the 1960s the differences stem from a rising SNP vote and a much lower Tory vote than in England. Wales has also featured a lower Conservative vote than in England, although that difference has diminished since the 1950s, which explains the gradual fall in the ID for Wales when compared with England.

Testing for Cornish exceptionalism

The different pattern of voting in Cornwall, specifically the high Liberal/Liberal Democrat vote and lower Labour vote, could be explained either by a different social structure in Cornwall, with smaller numbers of voters in those groups most likely to vote Labour, or by a different pattern of voting by social group. The pattern of Conservative/Labour party support is well known. The 2015 General Election showed no change in that basic structure. Tory voters were older, (slightly) more likely to be men and increasingly numerous in the higher socio-economic groups (SEG) with more support among AB voters than DE. In contrast Labour voters were younger, more likely to be women than men, or located in socio-economic group DE rather than AB.⁹ Perhaps this familiar pattern is different in Cornwall.

One way of testing whether the overall pattern of voting behaviour is different in Cornwall is to apply a chi square test. Basically, this tells us if two numerical distributions are the same or significantly different. If the Ashcroft poll data for Britain overall is compared with the aggregated Cornish constituencies we find that in terms of age and class, preferences in Cornwall in 2014/15 did differ significantly from those in Great Britain. In fact, we can be 95% confident that those differences in 2014/15 did not arise from chance alone. Gender differences were less marked, with the exception of MK (using the 'other' category as a proxy for the MK vote and comparing that with the SNP vote in Scotland), and Ukip, which were significantly less likely to receive support from women than they were beyond the Tamar.

We can pin down where the differences in voter preferences between Cornwall and Great Britain occur in relation to age and socio-economic group. Allowing for the different social structure in Cornwall (where there are fewer AB voters and more elderly voters), we find that the pattern of Tory, Labour and Ukip voters is similar. Labour pulls a somewhat higher proportion of its vote in

Cornwall from the youngest age group and from AB voters than it does elsewhere, while Ukip also does better among the youngest age cohort. But the major differences were concentrated on the pattern of Lib Dem support. Those intending to vote Lib Dem in Cornwall were less likely to be younger voters (those under 34) but more likely to be over 45. Meanwhile, DE voters in Cornwall were substantially more likely to intend to vote Lib Dem. The profile of Green Party support in Cornwall also differed somewhat from that in Britain, with a greater proportion of Green voters coming from middle-aged groups in Cornwall and less support from C1 voters.

Who was intending to vote MK in 2014-15? Using the 'other' category as a surrogate, we find a marked disparity between MK intenders and the structure of SNP/Plaid Cymru support in Scotland and Wales. Table 1 presents the relevant polling data.

Table 1: Ashcroft polling data 2014-15

	Total Cornwall (%)	MK (%)	SNP/PC (%)
men	48	66	53
women	52	34	47
age			
18-24	10	7	14
25-34	13	10	11
35-44	16	25	17
45-54	17	20	17
55-64	18	20	14
65+	27	19	27
SEG			
AB	18	19	24
C1	29	31	23
C2	28	30	27
DE	26	20	26

(Source: Ashcroft polling data; May 2014-April 2015)

Intending MK voters were even more likely to be men than were Ukip voters, interestingly reflecting the gender bias of MK activists. They were also more likely to be middle-aged, from 35-64, and less likely to be either the young or pensioners. In terms of SEG, these preliminary data also suggest that MK is drawing its support more from the middling social groups than those at either the top or the bottom of the social hierarchy. Yet care should be taken, given that the number of 'other' voters remains low (at 224 when weighted across the five constituencies). This means that the standard error of the sample is relatively high at +/-6%. (In other words, the apparent differences in the age and class structure of MK voters when compared with the overall vote in Cornwall or the SNP/Plaid vote may not be real. However, we can have confidence that the gender difference is real.)

Correlations at constituency level

Across English constituencies the already well-known characteristics of Conservative and Labour voters continued to produce clear correlations in 2015.¹⁰ As Table 2 below indicates, Tory success

was positively correlated with proportions of elderly voters and AB voters. The correlations also inform us that there was a strong association between the proportions of owner-occupiers and the Tory vote, while the expected correlation between Conservative voting and the highly qualified is also evident, but less visibly. Conversely, Labour's vote showed a negative correlation with these same groups.

Table 2: Correlations: English constituencies 2015

	Conservative	Labour	Lib Dem	Ukip	Green
Young voters	-0.4726***	+0.4215***	-0.0054	-0.2113**	+0.3696***
Old voters	+0.4894***	-0.6031***	+0.1573	+0.4002***	-0.1745*
AB	+0.5038***	-0.4364***	+0.3016***	-0.5713***	+0.2622***
DE	-0.6917***	+0.6598***	-0.2990***	+0.3520***	-0.2064**
Owner-occupiers	+0.6123***	-0.6325***	+0.0869	+0.3427***	-0.3090***
Social rent	-0.6842***	+0.6929***	-0.1857*	-0.0991	+0.1380
Accommodation/ food	-0.4049***	+0.3328***	+0.1044	-0.2505**	+0.2819***
Public sector	-0.2091**	+0.0896	+0.1315	+0.0046	+0.1337
No qualifications	-0.4493***	+0.3830***	-0.3056***	+0.6317***	-0.3464***
High qualifications	+0.2786***	-0.2060**	+0.2917***	-0.7172***	-0.3736***
English identity	+0.2629***	-0.3951***	+0.0014	+0.6230***	-0.2050**

*** significant at 99% confidence level

** significant at 95% confidence level

* significant at 90% confidence level

The Liberal Democrat vote showed weaker correlations across the board, with only social class and qualifications returning significant correlations, both being similar to those of the Conservative Party but less strong. While this might imply the Lib Dem vote was fairly evenly spread after its meltdown in 2015, the same was not the case for Ukip or Green Party support. Ukip's vote was correlated strongly with elderly voters and owner-occupiers, like the Tories. But it differed markedly from them in terms of class, with AB voters less keen on voting Ukip than Labour, and in relation to qualifications. This latter variable provides the clearest correlation for the Ukip vote. Those constituencies with the highest numbers of voters lacking qualifications were likely to be good prospects for the party, while those with greater numbers of the most highly qualified voters were conversely poor prospects. This supports the contention of Ford and Goodwin that Ukip appeals to the 'left behind', older, working class men with few qualifications, pushed to the margins by generational value shifts and the rise of more socially liberal cultural and political elites.¹¹ Green Party support meanwhile, provides a mirror image of Ukip's pattern. While not having the strength of correlations of Ukip. Green voters are more likely to be concentrated in constituencies with larger proportions of young voters, of a higher social grade and highly qualified.

One of the strongest correlations in relation to the Ukip vote was unsurprising, that between the strength of English identity in a constituency and the Ukip vote. This correlation was almost as strong as the qualifications variable. English identity is also associated, but at a much lower level, with Tory voting in England and negatively correlated with the Green and Labour vote.

The one variable where a 'common sense' expectation fails to materialise is that for public sector workers, here using those employed in health, education and local government as a surrogate. The expected correlation with Labour voting does not appear, although constituencies with larger numbers of public sector workers, bearing the brunt of austerity politics, are less likely to correlate with the Tory vote. The proportion of those employed in accommodation and food preparation was adopted as a measure of the influence of the tourist industry. In England, this results in significant positive correlations between such constituencies and the Labour/Green vote and a negative correlation with Tory/Ukip strength. This finding is perhaps contrary to expectation, but the Basil Fawty element of the tourist sector is greatly outnumbered by part-time workers on low wages, the 'precariat' of neo-liberalism who, if and when they do vote, tend not to vote Conservative.

Table 3: Correlations: Welsh constituencies 2015

	Conservative	Labour	Lib Dem	Ukip	Green	Plaid Cymru
Young voters	-0.3298**	+0.0603	+0.4606***	-0.3386**	+0.7229***	+0.0170
Old voters	+0.4338***	-0.6465***	+0.0294	-0.2510	-0.1208	+0.2784*
AB	+0.5792***	-0.4023**	+0.2034	-0.6309***	+0.3999**	-0.1934
DE	-0.5975***	+0.6640***	-0.4015**	+0.7503***	-0.4896***	+0.0452
Owner-occupiers	+0.3147*	-0.2039	-0.2320	-0.0205	-0.5713***	+0.0736
Social rent	-0.3591**	+0.5248***	-0.2880*	+0.6015***	-0.1444	+0.1410
Accommodation /food	+0.1735	-0.4714***	+0.3141*	-0.5278***	+0.6025***	+0.1959
Public sector	-0.0650	+0.0515	-0.1375	-0.3903**	+0.0888	+0.2900*
No qualifications	-0.5160***	+0.5613***	-0.3912**	+0.6903***	-0.6026***	+0.0911
High qualifications	+0.5519***	-0.5235***	+0.3062*	-0.7586***	+0.5528***	-0.0840
English identity	+0.5680***	-0.6864***	+0.3276**	-0.3226*	+0.2609	-0.0167
Welsh identity	-0.6369	+0.6265***	-0.4187***	+0.4385***	-0.4849***	+0.2197

*** significant at 99% confidence level

** significant at 95% confidence level

* significant at 90% confidence level

The same pattern of constituency level correlations is reproduced in Wales, especially in terms of social class and qualifications, where correlations are, if anything, even stronger. In a few variables some interesting variations emerge when compared with the English pattern. In Wales, there was no significant correlation between young voters and the Labour vote, while the correlation between elderly voters and the strength of the Ukip vote was reversed, although this was not significant at the 90% confidence level. Yet there was a very significant link between Ukip voting in Wales and constituencies with higher proportions of social rented housing. Taken together with the strong correlation with DE voters, this might suggest that Ukip in Wales in 2015 was actually doing better than in England in attracting working class 'left-behind' voters. In Wales too, the negative correlation between proportions engaged in accommodation/food preparation and the Tory vote disappears, while the positive correlation of this sector with Labour voting observed in England is also replaced with a negative correlation. Similarly, in Wales a significant negative correlation

appears between public sector workers and the Ukip vote, although, as in England, correlations between this variable and party vote remain weak.

In contrast, correlations between national identity and voting behaviour were much stronger in Wales, with the intriguing exception of Ukip. Those constituencies with higher percentages of voters with a self-professed English identity were significantly more likely to correlate with the Conservative vote, while for Labour it was the reverse. The relationship between Welsh identity and Tory/Labour voting was the exact reverse. In Wales both the Lib Dem and Green vote was associated with English identity and negatively correlated with Welsh identity, although at lower levels than the Tories. Rather counter-intuitively, the Ukip vote in Wales was positively correlated with English identity and also positively with Welsh. This may suggest that it is competing with Welsh Labour for the votes of the older Welsh working class, especially in 'British Wales'.

Even more counter-intuitively, while there were hints of a weak positive correlation between Welsh identity and the Plaid Cymru vote, this was not significant. This is presumably explained by the fact that constituencies with higher numbers of Welsh speakers are also among the most attractive to English immigrants. Such a geography may also help to explain the apparent pattern of correlations between the Lib Dem/Green vote and identity in Wales, as these parties also do best in rural Wales. More generally across the board there few significant associations between the Plaid vote and the variables assessed here, with only seats with higher numbers of elderly voters and public sector workers displaying any level of significant relationship with the Plaid vote. This might imply that, despite its leftist ideological stance, Plaid operates as a 'catch-all' party, appealing to groups across the social spectrum.

The lower number of constituencies in Wales makes any conclusions much more tentative than for England. This is even more the case in Cornwall. With only six constituencies we should not expect to find many clear correlations between social variables and voting patterns, while local factors such as personal votes for candidates become more important. Table 4 focuses on the stronger correlations, those of +/-0.5000 or higher.

Table 4: Correlations of more than +/-0.5000: Cornish constituencies 2015

	Positive correlations	Negative correlations
Young voters	Green, Labour	Lib Dem
Old voters	Lib Dem	Labour, Ukip
AB	Green	Ukip, MK
DE	Ukip, MK	Green, Conservative
Owner-occupiers	Ukip, Conservative	Lib Dem
Social rent		MK, Ukip
Accommodation/food	Lib Dem	Labour, Conservative
Public sector	Green, Labour	Lib Dem
No qualifications	Ukip, MK	Green
High qualifications	Green	Ukip, MK
English identity	Conservative/Labour	Green
Cornish identity	Labour	Conservative

Even though the number of cases is very small, the direction of the constituency-level correlations in Cornwall is the same as in England in the majority of cases, positive in Cornwall when positive in England, negative in Cornwall when negative in England. Indeed, there are just two exceptions. A significant positive correlation is found between the accommodation/food preparation sector and the Labour vote in England but the Cornish pattern mirrors the Welsh, with a strong negative correlation with Labour voting. It may be significant in this respect that, while there is no significant correlation between the Lib Dem vote and this sector in England, in Cornwall they are strongly associated. In reverse fashion, while there is a weak positive correlation between the Lib Dem vote and the proportion of public sector workers in England there is a stronger negative relationship in Cornwall, although one we cannot be statistically confident about.

The other anomaly between England and Cornwall crops up in relation to national identity. While there is a significant negative correlation between constituencies with higher numbers of English identifiers and the Labour vote in England, this is reversed in Cornwall. But if this implies that those with an English identity only are more likely to vote Labour in Cornwall, then it is also the case that those who only profess a Cornish identity were even more likely to vote Labour. On the other hand, this could just be an artefact of the concentration of the Labour vote in Cornwall in the Camborne-Redruth constituency, the constituency which also has the highest proportion of Cornish identifiers.

This same phenomenon might explain the very strong negative correlation between the MK vote and the proportion of voters living in social rented housing. All in all, the very low number of constituencies and the minute vote for MK mean that it's hazardous in the extreme to draw any conclusions from this level about the MK vote. Suffice to say that there is a hint of a correlation between the MK voter and DE voters and those with no qualifications. This could suggest a direct competition between MK and Ukip for 'left-behind' voters. On the other hand, the apparent relationship between DE voters was not borne out by the earlier opinion poll data. So we need to turn to another dataset and see what light that might or might not shed on the MK vote.

Correlations at ward level

Table 5 below displays the correlations at ward level in 2009 between party vote and the social variables already discussed (with the exception of the employment sectors where no significant correlations were discovered). This table perfectly reinforces the relationships already identified between the Tory/Labour vote and social variables at a parliamentary level. Conservative support in Cornwall in 2009 was associated with wards with higher numbers of elderly voters, AB socio-economic group, owner-occupiers, those with high qualifications and a sense of English identity. Labour support was the reverse of this in all respects. This implies that both these parties obtain their support in Cornwall from similar sources as they do in England. There is no difference in the social structure of their support.

Table 5: Correlations: Cornish wards, 2009

	Conservative	Labour	Lib Dem	Ind	Ukip	Green	MK
Young voters	-0.2569***	+0.2469*	+0.0291	-0.0482	+0.3038	-0.2814	+0.0108
Old voters	+0.3094***	-0.2545*	-0.1148	-0.0718	-0.5079***	+0.0871	-0.2517
AB	+0.2949***	-0.4716***	-0.1731*	-0.0507	+0.0141	+0.1853	-0.4566***
DE	-0.3230***	+0.5694***	+0.2262**	-0.0468	-0.1424	-0.3002	+0.3659**
Owner-occupiers	+0.2081**	-0.5135***	-0.1694*	+0.0185	+0.0678	+0.1171	-0.0241
Social rent	-0.2260**	+0.5441***	+0.1723*	+0.501	-0.0564	-0.1755	-0.0110
No qualifications	-0.1599	+0.3274**	+0.0926	+0.0366	-0.3557*	-0.1633	+0.3489*
High qualifications	+0.2343**	-0.3897***	-0.2095**	-0.0199	-0.0088	+0.2255	-0.4763***
English identity	+0.2775***	-0.1428	+0.4356***	-0.1389	+0.3912**	+0.1588	+0.1911
Cornish identity	-0.3551***	+0.4287***	-0.3304***	+0.2346**	-0.4368**	-0.2543	+0.1701

*** significant at 99% confidence level

** significant at 95% confidence level

* significant at 90% confidence level

However, the same is not the case for the Liberal Democrats. Focusing just on the correlations where we can be at least 90% confident that they are significant and not just the result of random variation, we find that in four of the five dimensions Lib Dem support in Cornwall in 2009 was the opposite of Lib Dem support at the 2015 general election in English constituencies. Unlike at the general election, wards with higher numbers of young voters were more likely to vote Lib Dem. This difference is however probably explained by the difference in time, the local elections taking place before the Lib Dems' u-turn on student fees had destroyed their youth vote.

Wards with the lowest SEG in Cornwall were more likely to be associated with a Lib Dem vote at the Cornish local elections and less likely in the English constituencies in 2015; people paying social rent were also more likely to vote Lib Dem rather than less, as were those with no qualifications. Meanwhile, those wards with larger numbers of voters with high qualifications were less likely to be associated with a Lib Dem vote in Cornish local elections than the English parliamentary elections. Only along the identity dimension does the same pattern emerge, with a stronger correlation between English identity and Lib Dem voting in Cornwall than in England. Indeed, the negative correlation between the Lib Dem vote and wards with higher Cornish identity that was revealed in the Cornish general election results of 2015 was echoed in the earlier 2009 elections. This seems strange, given the oft-repeated link made between Lib Dem voting, local issues and anti-metropolitanism in the literature. It may be a function of the contestation pattern in the local elections, where Lib Dem candidates in the eastern, less Cornish, parts of Cornwall were not opposed by Labour, which did not contest those elections east of St Austell, and not so frequently by other parties for that matter. In consequence their vote was higher in the east than in west Cornwall partly for that reason.

Nevertheless, the apparently more fluid and less predictable correlations surrounding the Lib Dems may well suggest that the sources of Lib Dem support in Cornwall vary significantly from those in England. In Cornwall the party is traditionally able to appeal to lower socio-economic groups and working people more effectively than in England. This points to a need for further comparative research on the nature of that Lib Dem support. Why does it differ? Is it just traditional cultural inertia? Or are there other factors at work, such as the intensity of campaigning proposed by John Ault?

Turning to other parties, significant correlations at ward level in Cornwall in 2009 were rather scarce. The Ukip vote appears to have been associated with higher levels of professed English identity, as we would expect, but negatively associated with Cornish identity. This might suggest that, unlike the Welsh in Wales, Ukip is less able to appeal to self-consciously Cornish folk. Moreover, given the more complicated process of registering a Cornish identity in Cornwall at the 2011 Census, Cornish identifiers were likely to be more self-aware than Welsh identifiers. More curiously, in the local elections, the usual association between the Ukip vote and wards with high numbers of pensioners and those with no qualifications was reversed. Too much should not be read into this as Ukip contested less than a quarter of the Cornish wards in 2009 and it may be an artefact of the partial contestation pattern.

Who voted MK? Again, the only significant correlations show up on two dimensions, class and qualifications. In both of these, there was a strong correlation between the MK vote and the lowest social groups and those with no qualifications. As this reinforces the tentative findings at a parliamentary level it looks as if MK is failing to appeal to the highest social group or, more surprisingly, the local intelligentsia. Even more surprising is the lack of any significant correlation between the MK vote and the proportion of those expressing an explicit Cornish identity. Is this just a statistical quirk, or is MK failing to reach out to what ought to be its natural constituency? We have to turn to the Independent vote to find a statistically significant association between their support and wards with higher numbers of Cornish identifiers. Indeed, this was the only significant correlation for the Independent vote in 2009, despite relatively large numbers of candidates. (Independents contested 61% of the seats.) The implication is that Independents gain their support from across the social spectrum.

Conclusions

What does this survey of the quantitative relationship between the vote and social variables lead us to conclude? First, the same influences structuring the Conservative and Labour vote at a British level are at work in Cornwall too. Broadly, both parties obtain their support from the same groups as elsewhere. To a slightly lesser extent this also applies to Ukip and the Greens, whose attractiveness varies by social group in much the same way as it does across the Tamar. Differences in their voting strength may therefore be in part explained by differences in the proportions of social groups in Cornwall. For example, a higher proportion of pensioners should mean a higher Conservative and lower Labour vote.

However, the second conclusion we should draw is that the constituency of support for Liberal Democrats appears to be significantly different in Cornwall than in England. This is particularly the case at the local level, but the pattern is more varied even at a parliamentary level. A strong suggestion exists that in Cornwall the Lib Dem vote correlates more with the less advantaged, being closer to Labour's profile than the Tories, whereas what correlations existed at an English parliamentary level in 2015 imply a pattern resembling the Conservatives. Although care must be exercised when generalising after the collapse of Lib Dem support across the UK following its participation in government, given the Lib Dems' traditional role in Cornwall as an alternative to the

Tories, these findings are hardly unexpected. It will be interesting to see if the pre-coalition correlations of 2009 will be replicated in the 2017 local elections.¹² Political memories among the electorate are notoriously short in the UK and it is likely that the swing of the pendulum will allow the Lib Dems to recover from the nadir of the 2015 general election but nonetheless struggle to hold on to the proportion of seats they won in 2013.

Moving on rapidly from the hostage to fortune just provided by that over-hasty prediction, we can return to the question posed by the title of this article – 'who is the Cornish voter?' If the Cornish voter is defined as those who are sufficiently aware of their identity to declare it as a national identity in the 2011 Census, then it seems that the Cornish voter is less likely to vote Green, Lib Dem, Tory or Ukip. The clearest association between national identity and voting behaviour in 2009 was displayed by the Ukip vote, least associated with Cornish identity and most associated with Englishness (along with the Lib Dems it might be noted). While no significant correlation between MK voters and Cornish national identity was discovered, there was a positive correlation between Cornish identity and the Independent vote. This might indicate a predilection for the more traditional, pre-party local politics of twentieth century Cornwall on the part of those expressing a Cornish identity.

Moreover, the strongest correlation was between Cornish identity and the Labour vote. It has been suggested that those going to the lengths of writing in their Cornish identity in the 2001 Census displayed a bi-modal pattern, concentrated among the intelligentsia at one end and the poor at the other.¹³ Does this reflect the twin elements of contemporary Cornishness, revivalist Cornishness and 'proper', residual Cornishness? As the latter is more likely to be found in the older industrial areas, especially Camborne-Redruth, this might explain an association with the Labour vote. It also helps make sense of the finding of the Survation poll of November 2014 that discovered Labour voters were among the strongest supporters of a Cornish Assembly (along with those intending to vote Ukip), even though the official position of both parties was firmly set against such an assembly.¹⁴

Finally, who votes MK? This quantitative survey has presented some preliminary clues and an initial answer to that question. The MK vote is predominantly male, as male in fact as Ukip. It tends to be middle-aged, showing no correlation with either the youngest or eldest cohorts of voters. It's more likely to be unqualified than highly qualified and is also stronger among the DE socio-economic group than the higher groups. At present, the evidence presented here suggests it is particularly poorly supported by women and appears under-supported by self-professed Cornish voters, who should comprise the natural constituency for its identity politics. Such a pattern implies that MK is competing with Ukip for a similar 'left-behind' demographic. This suggests a paradox. Unlike Ukip, MK does not share many of the values of the 'left-behind' group that Ford and Goodwin identify. Its social democratic, socially liberal ideological stance in fact hints at a disjunction between ideology and support. If the party wishes to maximise its appeal and achieve the 'potential for growth' it has been credited with, it might need to ponder how to reach out to other groups and become more of a 'catch-all' party without jettisoning long-held values.¹⁵

- 1 Adrian Lee, 'Political parties and elections', in Philip Payton (ed.), *Cornwall Since the War: The Contemporary History of a European Region*, Institute of Cornish Studies, Redruth, 1993, pp.253-270.
- 2 Philip Payton, *Cornwall: A History*, Cornwall Editions, Fowey, 2004, pp.289ff.
- 3 Garry Tregidga, *The Liberal Party in South West Britain Since 1918*, University of Exeter Press, Exeter, 2000, p.22.
- 4 John Ault, "'Culture, Character or Campaigns?'" Assessing the electoral performance of the Liberals and Liberal Democrats in Cornwall 1945-2010', doctoral thesis, University of Exeter, 2014, pp.206-13, 270-71 and 330.
- 5 These are available at 'Lord Ashcroft Polls' (<http://lordashcroftpolls.com/constituency-polls/>). The missing constituency is South East Cornwall.
- 6 The Census tables used were KS102EW (Age structure), KS202EW (National identity), KS402EW (Tenure), KS501EW (Qualifications and students), KS605EW to KS607EW (Industry by sex), QS611EW (Approximated social grade).
- 7 The Index of Dissimilarity is calculated by the formula $ID = \sum(X_i - Y_i)/2$ where X_i is the percentage of voters in place X voting for each party (in this instance Con/Lab/Lib and Other) and Y_i is the percentage of voters in place Y voting for each party. The focus here is at the parliamentary level. For comparative evidence of continuing distinctiveness at a local level see Richard Harris, 'The survival of political difference amid organisational change: voting behaviour in County Council and Unitary elections in Cornwall since 1945', *Cornish Studies* 1 (2015), pp.146-173.
- 8 For further comparisons between Cornish politics and those of the other Celtic nations see Bernard Deacon, 'Are Cornish politics Celtic?', paper given to Politics of the Celtic fringe symposium, Tremough, 2013. (Available at <https://bernarddeacon.wordpress.com/publications/>)
- 9 Ipsos MORI, 'How Britain voted in 2015' (<https://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/3575/How-Britain-voted-in-2015.aspx?view=wide>). For 2010 see Dennis Kavanagh and Philip Cowley, *The British General Election of 2010*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2010, p.341.
- 10 A positive correlation of +1.000 indicates two distributions are identical. A negative correlation of -1.000 indicates they are completely different. The stronger the correlation, the more confident we can be that there is a significant association (either positive or negative) between the two variables. In this article I use Pearson product moment correlations.
- 11 Robert Ford and Matthew Goodwin, 'Understanding UKIP: Identity, Social Change and the Left Behind', *The Political Quarterly* 85 (2014), pp.277-284.
- 12 Unfortunately, direct comparison with previous local elections will again be prevented by the forthcoming boundary review, which will result in a reduced number of wards. This is the third boundary review Cornwall has had over the course of three local elections. *Update: This will not now occur until after the 2013 elections.*
- 13 Kerryn Husk, 'Ethnicity and Social Exclusion: Research and Policy Implications in a Cornish Case Study', *Social and Public Policy Review* 5 (2011), pp.7-25.
- 14 'How the West was won' (<http://htwww.org/2014/11/26/our-survation-poll-says-camborneredruth-too-close-to-call-and-good-news-for-pro-devolutionists/>)
- 15 Simon Henig and Lewis Baston, *The Political Map of Britain*, Politico's Publishing, London, 2002, p.50.