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# None of that Post-modern Stuff around Here: Grassroots Campaigning in the 2002 Irish General Election

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Election campaigns in Ireland provide some exceptions to the general trends in campaigning identified by prominent observers in recent years. Changes in the role of experts in marketing and PR, in the degree of central control and national focus, and the downgrading of labour intensive activities have given rise to an era of campaigning in liberal democracies variously, and somewhat fancifully, described as ‘post-modern’ (Norris, 2002), and even, ironically, as ‘post-Fordist’ (Denver and Hands, 2002). In particular there has been an increase in the central control of campaigning, making full use of the latest media and professional assistance and decreasing use – often through necessity – of local party workers. Campaigns are now seen as sophisticated PR operations, in which great effort is made to get professionally constructed messages straight to the voter with minimal opportunities for distortion by untrustworthy intermediaries such as journalists and party workers. This is not to say that everything takes place in the political capital. In fact, great attention is given to constructing a local element – not least through leaders’ appearances at carefully chosen sites – but this is centrally directed and centrally controlled. The campaign itself is not decentralized.

Irish election campaigns have changed in ways that illustrate the general truth of some elements of this framework. As late as 1970, Chubb observed that the ‘small and comparatively underdeveloped’ resources of central offices left candidates dependent on their own efforts (Chubb, 1970). Generous funding from the public purse, which some parties have been able to supplement with considerable private donations, has provided central organizations with far more resources. Campaigns have become much more professional, making widespread use of marketing and PR skills and information. Fianna Fail’s (FF) campaign in 2002 was a fine illustration of early planning using focus groups, as well as local and national polls, to develop an effective set of campaign themes and a well-staffed publicity operation to ensure that the media itself stayed ‘on message’ during the campaign. Fine Gael’s (FG) was not like this, and a late change of leadership contributed to a badly planned

and focussed effort that certainly did not help the party maximize its opportunities (see Collins, 2003). Yet the local element remains a significant part – many would say a critical part – of the operation. Parties may put much effort into deciding who should run in each constituency but they do so within severe constraints. Selection remains a local operation and central controls are largely indirect (Galligan, 1999, 2003). The candidates themselves still fund their own campaigns for the most part, and they decide how far they will run with the party, how far they will run without it and, in some cases, how far they will run despite it. And these local campaigns generally take the very old-fashioned form of the door-to-door canvass, supplemented by a presence at schools, supermarkets, train stations and shopping centres. Candidates also put up many posters and seek publicity in the local press and, increasingly as the broadcast media market becomes decentralized, on local radio.

Where more than one candidate is fielded in a constituency, the national party must manage the inevitable competition between those candidates so that each works to the advantage, and not to the disadvantage, of the party. This is typically done first by ‘bailiwicking’: i.e., dividing the constituency into territories and getting the candidates to make agreements about who campaigns in each area. There are some areas exclusive to each candidate – usually their ‘home’ areas – and others where there is a free for all. Second, there is some attempt at vote management, whereby party supporters in an area are asked to vote for one particular candidate so as to obtain a reasonably even distribution of the vote across the candidate slate. This maximizes the chances of winning seats (see e.g. Gallagher, 2003 for a full explanation). This occurs with different degrees of success. Every election gives rise to a few stories of fights between the workers for rival candidates from the *same* party, and many stories of complaints to party HQ about canvassing agreements being broken; and every set of results throws up illustrations of instances where seats were lost that would have been secured by more effective vote management.

There are thus at least two campaigns in Ireland, the national and the local, and at every election the comment is made that in reality there are many more – one for each constituency – as well as an interrelationship between the local and the national. As elsewhere, parties in Ireland produce manifestos, promote their leaders and, with varying degrees of success, seek to influence, if not control, the election agenda in the mass media (see Collins, 2003; Brandenburg and Hayden, 2003). The national campaign also impinges significantly on the local one, not least in the selection and promotion of candidates (Galligan, 2003). To date, most academic coverage has focussed on these aspects of campaigning. The focus here is on the local, and in particular on the old-style door-to-door style of constituency campaigning, which seems redundant in most other countries.

## What We Know

In contrast to the literature stressing the nationalization of campaigning, there has been a significant revival of academic interest in local campaigning and in particular in the importance of personal contact with voters. Experimental evidence has long suggested a role for personal appeals in boosting the vote (Bochel and Denver, 1971) and some recent US studies have served to underline the importance of this aspect of campaigning for turnout in what are usually seen as television dominated elections (Gerber and Green, 2000; Green et al., 2003; Gerber et al., 2003). In the UK, a succession of studies has demonstrated the importance of the local campaign for party vote shares. These have relied on a variety of methods. Surveys of party agents or candidates in constituencies provide measures of general campaign activity (e.g. Denver and Hands, 1997; Denver et al., 2002; Denver et al., forthcoming). Surveys of party members have provided measures of the incidence of grass roots contact (e.g. Whiteley and Seyd, 2003). Campaigning has also been measured more indirectly by the use of local campaign expenditure (e.g. Pattie et al., 1995). Finally, there has been a limited degree of individual-level analysis using election study data to explore the link between contact and voting (Butler and Stokes, 1970; Whiteley and Seyd, 2003; Johnston and Pattie, 2003; Pattie and Johnston, 2003). Denver et al. (forthcoming) report strong correlations between these several measures. In general, these analyses have reinforced the argument that local campaigns matter in terms of vote share, with the individual level analyses giving added weight to the aggregate data analyses by showing that local campaigning works by mobilizing or reinforcing the predispositions of those contacted directly.

There is also US evidence on the impact of personal contact on the vote choice (Kramer, 1970; Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1992; Weillhouwer and Lock-erbie, 1994; Krassa, 1988; Wielhouwer, 1999; Beck et al., 2002; Wielhouwer, 2003). These studies largely reject the argument that local campaigning is irrelevant but do not all agree on how much and in what ways campaigns matter.

The Irish evidence is much less extensive. Gallagher and Marsh (2002) examined the impact of FG member activity on the FG vote, and Benoit and Marsh (2003a, b, c) have assessed the impact of campaign expenditure in Ireland. However, there has been little work on the importance of individual contacts for the vote and no work on its importance for the party share of the vote. Using evidence from the 2002 Irish election study a start will be made here to redress that situation. Ireland is somewhere that we would expect to see local campaigning effects if we were going to find them anywhere. The institutional setting encourages candidate-centred voting (Swindle, 2002; Carey and Shugart, 1994; although see also Bowler et al., 1996), and hence,

perhaps, local considerations, and this is reinforced by the small size of constituencies, the nature of the party system and the political culture. Personal appeals provide a means of getting through the perceptual screen that many voters might put up to avoid political information from the media. Moreover, candidates themselves can make the most personal of appeals, asking not for a vote for their party but for a vote for them as an individual, an individual the voter will probably have met on other occasions prior to the campaign.

In what follows, we will first look at the extent of local campaigning and then examine the association between contact and voting preference. Then we will develop a multivariate model in order to provide a stronger test of the argument that ‘contact matters’. It will be seen that it does; contact between a voter and a party apparently makes support for that party by the voter more likely. Finally – and this is important where parties run more than one candidate – we will provide some preliminary evidence that the candidate who contacts is also likely to be the candidate who wins the vote.

### **Local Campaigning in 2002**

The experiences of the candidates have been well documented in the now well-established series of *How Ireland Voted* books dating back to 1987, each of which contains a number of accounts by candidates themselves of their experiences. In all cases they emphasize the importance of the canvass. Taking comments from the 2002 study we note that one candidate sees it as ‘by far the best method of making direct contact with the individual voters’; another explains that ‘every single house in the constituency had to be canvassed by a member of my campaign team, or myself’ (Fleming et al., 2003). Even so, ‘some [canvassers] found that, as has been the case in other recent elections, more often than not people were not at home, so a second canvass was required midway through the election campaign’. Another candidate, recognizing the problems of the door-to-door campaign when a higher proportion of voters are now in the labour force, explained the need for ‘a very early morning start at commuter railway stations, bus queues, traffic congestion points, school drop off points and early morning shopping or breakfast stop cafes’. She still found voters who complained that ‘they saw few candidates actually coming door to door looking for votes’. Not surprisingly, candidates realize they must make rational use of their scarce resources. A candidate from the Greens expressed regret that ‘as a small party, a full door to door canvass in a three-week election campaign period was not going to be possible’ and so his team ‘canvassed more intensively areas where we already polled well’. This sort of targeting must be expected, even in relatively small constituencies.

As part of their canvass, candidates will typically distribute leaflets extolling their achievements and, where it seems helpful, the achievements of their party; they ensure that their names are displayed prominently through the extensive use of posters hung on lampposts and telegraph poles. One independent candidate (Liam Twomey, Waterford) explained how his team postered the road that would be used by a television team coming to make an election programme on his constituency, in order to build the impression of himself as a 'credible candidate'. There will be party posters, some bearing the names of the local candidates, but these are usually supplemented by personal candidate posters, which may or may not carry the party name conspicuously, and may or may not mention any running mates. Advertisements in local papers were less widespread in the 2002 election as candidates had to confine their spending within legal limits. Most of the reported expenditure went on posters and leaflets.

### The Attentiveness of the Voters

Before we look at the effect the campaign may have had on the vote we must ask how much it was noticed by the voters: were they in fact contacted by a candidate or those working on behalf of a candidate, and did they see posters or read leaflets? Respondents were asked whether or not a candidate or party worker had called to their home during the campaign.<sup>1</sup> Table 1 shows that over half of the electorate who voted reported that a candidate did call to the house, and over half also reported being contacted by a party worker. This is a much higher figure than we find elsewhere. In Britain less than a quarter reported such contact in 2002 (Pattie and Johnston, 2003), and in the US it is also no more than about 25 per cent nationwide (Huckfeldt and Sprague,

TABLE 1  
THE EXTENT OF THE LOCAL CAMPAIGN – HOUSEHOLD CONTACT

<i>Number of candidates/ parties who called</i>	<i>By candidates</i>		<i>Party wrks phoned</i>		<i>Any</i>
	<i>Candidates</i>	<i>Parties</i>	<i>Parties</i>	<i>Parties</i>	<i>Parties</i>
0	45	46	46	95	23
1	26	28	21	5	24
2	15	17	15	*	26
3	8	7	9	*	15
4 or more	4	2	9	0	11

*Note:* Self-reported voters only. Independents treated as a single group here.

1992). In Scandinavia, less than 5 per cent of voters report a personal contact (Esaïsson, 1992), while in Japan such campaigning is prohibited by law. A comparative study of general elections in eight countries emphasizes how untypical is the Irish case: 23 per cent reported contact in New Zealand, 18 per cent in Portugal, 13 per cent in Germany and less than 10 per cent in Bulgaria, France, Hungary, and Poland.<sup>2</sup> Karp et al. (2003: Figure 1) show that the Irish experience was at least equally remarkable in the context of a European Parliament election campaign.

The personal contact is face-to-face. Very few voters were telephoned. This medium seems to be used much more extensively in Britain and the US, particularly to identify party supporters: so-called 'voter identification' (e.g. Denver and Hands, 2002). Its lack of use in Ireland may indicate that parties already have this information, but it may also underline the importance placed, by parties and by voters, on face-to-face contact. A few voters were visited by several candidates, but contact by one candidate is the norm. The figures for each particular type of contact are individually quite high, but even more striking is the total proportion of people who are contacted (or rather whose home is contacted) in at least one of these several ways: by the candidates or party workers in person or by phone. This formulation increases the extent of contact to almost 80 per cent with the typical household contacted in one way or another by at least two separate parties. When the fact that not all respondents would have necessarily known of the contact made (or would have recalled correctly) is taken into account, the real level of contact may well be even higher (see Bochel and Denver, 1971).

Which parties were most active? As we might expect, Table 2 shows that the larger parties were able to make a more extensive effort. Of course they fielded more candidates, although with 138 nominees independents were the largest group. Candidates are supported by people from their party as well as by personal supporters (Gallagher and Marsh, 2002). FF's potential advantage in terms of members (it claims around 40,000 members to 20,000 in FG, 4,000 in Labour and less than 1,000 in the smaller parties) did not translate into the same sort of dominance in terms of door-to-door coverage that we might have expected. Its activity was not much greater than that on behalf of FG. The smaller parties did not run candidates everywhere, so the extent to which they cover their potential electorate is greater than these figures suggest. If we limit analysis to the voters from the target constituencies of the smaller parties, we might expect their activity to come quite close to that of the larger parties. Sinn Féin (SF) ran candidates in almost three quarters of all constituencies but activity would have been low in most of them. In the ten or so where it had a serious chance, it reached the homes of 35 per cent of voters. In contrast, using the same criterion, the Greens and the Progressive Democrats (PDs) only reached 18 per cent – a confirmation of the relative scale of SF's machine.<sup>3</sup>

TABLE 2  
THE EXTENT OF THE LOCAL CAMPAIGN – HOUSEHOLD CONTACT BY PARTIES

	<i>Share of candidates</i>	<i>Visit by candidates</i>	<i>Visit by party workers</i>	<i>Visit or phone by workers or candidates</i>
Contacting Party				
FF	23	33	35	55
FG	18	24	28	43
Greens	4	2	5	5
Labour	10	12	15	24
PD	7	4	5	7
SF	8	6	12	16
Ind	30	10	13	19
Total	100	91	113	169
N	463			

*Notes:* Self-reported voters only. Totals in columns 2, 3 and 4 do not sum to 100 because not all respondents were contacted but some of those contacted were contacted by several parties.

A majority of voters were contacted by several parties. Table 3 shows, for each group of voters (by first preference), the extent of contact from each of the seven parties (treating independents/others as a single group). Each party's efforts were far from being concentrated merely on its own voters. In fact, FF and FG voters were contacted by 2.6 and 2.8 candidates (on average) respectively and other voters by more than 3. This makes good sense from the perspective of the parties because of the operation of the single

TABLE 3  
CONTACT WITH EACH PARTY'S VOTERS

<i>Vote</i>	<i>Percentage of each party's voters with a contact from</i>						
	<i>FF</i>	<i>FG</i>	<i>Green</i>	<i>Lab</i>	<i>PD</i>	<i>SF</i>	<i>Ind/other</i>
FF	65	42	4	24	6	15	19
FG	52	63	4	18	7	11	17
Green	39	32	29	12	6	9	22
Lab	42	30	5	51	7	12	17
PD	47	36	11	16	35	4	7
SF	39	34	5	21	4	57	20
Ind	53	37	4	20	6	19	50

*Notes:* Self-reported voters only. Multiple contacts mean that rows do not sum to 100.

transferable vote. A lower preference can make the difference between success and failure. Certainly candidates who won no second or third preferences would find it hard to get elected as few make the quota on the first count. All parties contacted more than 50 per cent of their eventual voters with the exception of Greens and PDs who each fall well short of that figure.

In addition to considerations of political strategy we might expect overall levels of canvassing to vary locally with resources. The two largest parties report relatively low levels of membership in Dublin so activity should be lower there. However, we might also expect levels to vary with the costs of such canvassing, and these are higher where housing density is lower. In fact, over the country as a whole there is relatively little variation, but the proportion of voters in Dublin City and County reporting contact (68 and 71 per cent respectively) is about 10 percentage points lower than elsewhere, despite the fact that there are generally more parties running in Dublin.

Voters were also asked what sort of attention they paid to the campaign: what sorts of communication they noticed. What is clear is that, in addition to the direct contacts already mentioned, voters read leaflets, noticed posters and saw election advertisements in the press, but very few of them attended meetings or used the Internet (Table 4).<sup>4</sup> The number seeing press advertisements may be lower than it might have been in previous elections since there were fewer such advertisements this time, but posters are clearly visible to almost all voters, and leaflets also seem to be looked at by most people.

### Effects of the Campaign

Campaigns can have three main objectives. First, campaigners may set out to firm up their potential support, to try to ensure that they will realize all of that potential on election day. Second, campaigners may seek to convert those leaning towards another party. Finally, they will seek to mobilize all supporters to

TABLE 4  
VOTERS' ATTENTIVENESS TO THE CAMPAIGN

	%
Looked at candidate's campaign posters	83
Read election leaflets put in letter box, given in street etc.	68
Looked at advertisements for parties and candidates in the newspapers	52
Saw information about parties and candidates on the Internet	5
Attended public meetings related to the election	4

*Note:* Self-reported voters only.

ensure that they actually vote on election day. The last of these may be very significant but we will not examine such effects here, as the validated voting records of respondents are not yet available. This leaves confirmation and conversion. This is perhaps a continuum rather than a dichotomy: all voters have some likelihood of voting for a party and, particularly in the STV system, campaigners will seek to increase that likelihood. Even if they cannot secure a first preference they will ask for a vote of some kind. Hence, in examining the apparent effects of campaigning we should consider effects on both first preferences and on lower preferences.

At the aggregate level, there is little sign that the campaign changed many minds when it came to party choice. If we simply look at the change between the first and last poll carried out by each of the main organizations, the picture is one of considerable stability. In the MRBI polls, FG dropped 2 per cent and Independents rose by a similar margin; IMS polls showed rising FF and SF support, with FG falling to a similar degree. However, FF support was overestimated and FG underestimated in these polls by a rather larger margin (McElroy and Marsh, 2003). Even so the average change over the couple of weeks between first and last polls was less than two percentage points, and required that no more than 3 per cent (MRBI) and 5 per cent (IMS) of voters actually changed their minds. This should not be surprising. The election came at the end of a five-year term of office and was flagged well in advance, so we would not have expected to see a lot of movement. MRBI's adjusted poll figures, taking into account the error between poll findings and likely outcomes, had FF on 42 per cent well before the campaign started and this was the eventual result. This, it is worth emphasizing, does not mean the campaign did not matter. It may well have mattered a great deal at the level of the individual making up their mind, and it may have mattered a lot for particular candidates, but there is no evidence that the campaign had a big impact on the party share of seats. Party efforts either cancelled out one another, or served only to cement the loyalties of those already leaning in their direction.

It could well be that many made their final decision during the campaign, but that these final decisions did not alter the result signalled in earlier opinion polls. The Election Study survey indicates that 70 per cent of those who voted made up their mind before the campaign, with only 30 per cent reporting that they made their decision after that point. This is a slightly smaller number than is typical in Britain, but more than do so in Australia and the US (where of course the campaign is much longer) (McAllister, 2002: 28). We may be sceptical about whether people really know when they decided but this at least suggests that there is nothing odd about Ireland in this respect.<sup>5</sup>

The ideal tool for exploring the impact of campaigning on individuals is information on each respondent's voting intention before and after contact

was made. In the absence of this, as here, we cannot provide any definitive evidence on the impact of the canvass on the vote. We can measure the association between local contact and vote, but if we find a link this will not tell us whether contact actually persuades voters to support a particular party, or whether parties are simply being efficient at keeping in touch with their most likely supporters. In other words, is a correlation between contact and vote evidence that a party is good at convincing voters, or simply evidence that it has been efficient in concentrating its resources on those most likely to support it anyway?

We will turn to the latter consideration shortly. To begin with we will look at the association between contact and vote from the viewpoint that the contact makes a difference. To assess how much difference we will compare the voting behaviour of those contacted by a party with the behaviour of those not contacted. It should be remembered that several parties might have called. Hence we will distinguish those who were contacted by one particular party from those who were not, and those contacted by another party from those who were not. This gives us a fourfold distinction for each party-voter association. If we take FF as illustrative, there are (1) voters not contacted by FF who were contacted by another party, (2) voters not contacted by any party, (3) voters contacted by FF and at least one other, and finally (4) voters contacted only by FF. When we are considering the effectiveness of campaigning in convincing voters we need to compare the proportions within each of these four groups of voters who voted FF. Table 5 does this using, first, contact with a candidate from the party and second, contact with party workers. It should be recalled that the unit for calling is in every case the house, not the individual. This can be expected to weaken any relationship we might find.

There are several important features of this table. We may take 'no contact' as the benchmark and indeed the distribution of party support in that column comes very close to the distribution in our sample.<sup>6</sup> First, we can see that contact is associated with higher levels of voting for the contacting party; and contact only with some other party is associated with lower levels of support. Moreover, monopoly contact is particularly effective. For FF, contact increases support by 8 per cent when it is competitive and 23 per cent when it has sole contact; when it is only some other party who contacts a voter, support is depressed by 15 percentage points. A second point is that while this pattern appears to hold for all parties it would seem to have a stronger 'impact' in the case of the smaller ones. Contact increases SF support by a factor of four, and a monopoly of contact by a factor of 11. A third point is that in almost all cases the 'impact' of *workers* calling is less than that of a *candidate*, either negatively or positively. We can surely conclude that contact is quite strongly associated with vote, that a monopoly of contact is associated

TABLE 5  
ASSOCIATION BETWEEN TYPE OF CONTACT AND FIRST PREFERENCE VOTE

		<i>Contact only by a party other than the row party</i>	<i>No contact at all</i>	<i>Contact by row party and at least one other</i>	<i>Contact only by row party</i>
FF	cand	28	45	53	67
	wkrs	37	46	48	59
FG	cand	9	21	29	43
	wkrs	12	21	24	33
Green	cand	3	5	29	+
	wkrs	2	4	19	+
Labour	cand	5	10	26	47
	wkrs	7	12	14	20
PD	cand	2	3	19	+
	wkrs	2	3	11	+
SF	cand	2	5	25	66
	wkrs	4	5	11	29
Ind/O/	cand	5	11	23	50
	wkrs	8	8	26	21

*Notes:* Self-reported voters only. Cell entries show % of each cell voting for row party. Smallest cell n is 26. + cells have too few cases for sensible analysis.

even more strongly, and that a visit by candidates of a party is associated more strongly with a vote for that party than a visit by party workers.

Before exploring further the meaning of this association in terms of the likely impact of the canvass on the vote, we should also look at the picture with respect to lower preferences. By using a simulated ballot we were able to measure second and lower preference votes, and so we can see whether contact is associated with getting not simply first preference votes but second and third ones too. Of course some preferences may not indicate support. Being ranked 10/10 is hardly an endorsement. However, very few voters express such a complete preference order. Most indicate no more than a few preference votes. Table 6 replicates Table 5 but defines support not as a first preference vote but as a lower preference for a party, other than that of the first preference candidate. In effect it is a second *party* preference. The sample for each row of Table 6 thus excludes those who have already cast a first preference for that party. We have shown the analysis in this way to emphasize the association of contact with lower preferences.

The main result here is the existence of clear differences between the second and third columns. These are much smaller than in Table 5, but for

TABLE 6  
ASSOCIATION BETWEEN TYPE OF CONTACT AND SECOND PARTY VOTED FOR

		<i>Contact only by a party other than the row party</i>	<i>No contact at all</i>	<i>Contact by row party and at least one other</i>	<i>Contact only by row party</i>
FF	cand	19	31	46	36
	wkrs	26	30	36	26
FG	cand	15	21	31	41
	wkrs	19	19	27	42
Green	cand	6	8	11	+
	wkrs	6	8	13	+
Labour	cand	14	17	37	58
	wkrs	16	17	27	16
PD	cand	13	14	39	+
	wkrs	11	17	26	+
SF	cand	6	7	26	66
	wkrs	4	8	17	20
Ind/O/	cand	14	16	38	29
	wkrs	15	19	27	44

*Notes:* Self-reported voters only. Cell entries in each row show % of each group voting for row party as second or third choice party. Smallest cell n is 18. + cells have too few cases for sensible analysis. In each row, those who gave a first preference to a candidate from that party are excluded.

most parties there is a stronger association with support when contact is made, whether it is contact by candidates or by party workers. The low numbers in column 4 are surprising at first glance but what these indicate is probably a ceiling effect. For instance, 67 per cent of those who are contacted only by FF give that party a first preference. If only 36 per cent of those who do not give FF their first preference make the party their second choice, this is still a relatively high figure. Those in this contact group who intend to support FF clearly tend to do so with a first preference. The greater 'impact' of contact with party workers may be due in part to the fact that first preferences were lower within this group, so there is less of a ceiling effect. We can conclude that contacts by either workers or candidates are both linked to support, but that candidate contact is associated with higher preferences than contact by party workers.

It would be unwise to infer from this that all candidates and parties need to do is contact more voters directly in order to be guaranteed a seat in the Dáil. As we have pointed out, the data may say simply that parties are quite efficient

at targeting likely supporters, something parties may not do so well elsewhere (Kramer, 1970; Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1992). And of course to the extent that they are efficient, it may *appear* that contact has an effect which in fact quite misleading. Some targeting certainly goes on, as the quotation from a Green party candidate above demonstrates. We might be somewhat sceptical about the precision of such activity. The nature of personal campaigning on the streets, as opposed to by phone, is that it lends itself easily to canvassing by areas but not to targeting individuals. Candidates also know the areas in which they should do well even if they are not so sure about the individuals who support them. They can work on unofficial ballot box tallies at local elections and previous general elections as well as information from previous door-to-door canvassing. Ballot boxes will contain at most only a few hundred votes, in many cases fewer than that. This tells parties where they are strong and where they are weak, and so they are in a position to place particular emphasis where they feel it is most required. They also know what sorts of people support them, at least in the smaller, more socially homogenous parties. All this information suggests that parties who have limited resources should target areas, not that they should target individual voters for an initial contact. Hence there is a chance that parties are more likely to contact supporters than not, particularly if they are less well-resourced parties that have to limit their canvass to the areas most likely to reward them. For the smaller parties, activity is much greater in constituencies where they have a chance to win a seat and this will also tend to strengthen the link between contact and support without necessarily implying that contacts bring additional votes.<sup>7</sup>

We need to make some allowance for this if we are to estimate more precisely the true impact of contact. Essentially, it may be that rather than contact determining the likelihood of support, it is the likelihood of support that determines contact. Contact is possibly endogenous, not exogenous, to the relationship between contact and vote. Furthermore, it might also be possible that there is some memory bias, with respondents tending to remember contact with parties to which they feel favourable and forget the rest. The conventional solution to this problem is to use a separate set of variables to predict contact, and then to use predicted contact as the independent variable in the relationship. This has not proved to be possible in as much as we have not been able to predict contact with any reasonable degree of accuracy.<sup>8</sup> In such a situation the cure can be worse than the disease (Bartels, 1991). Instead, we have simply chosen to include in a multivariate analysis those variables that can be expected to be associated with contact and with vote. This is similar to a recent study by Pattie and Johnston (2003). We then assess the degree of relationship between contact and vote that remains after these other factors have been controlled. There are several controls:

- attachment to the party in contact (1, 0);
- voting for that party in the previous general election (1, 0);
- thermometer rating of party leader (0–100);
- thermometer ratings of FF and FG party leaders [as main prime ministerial alternatives] (0–100);
- euro spent by the party in the campaign, divided by constituency size;
- euro spent by all parties together, divided by constituency size;
- evaluation of last government (1–5).

This is a fairly standard set of variables for a party choice model, with the addition of the spending variables. We have included these to control for the indirect effects of the local campaign as opposed to those related to personal contact (see Pattie and Johnston, 2003).

We then estimated a number of logit models for candidate and for worker contact, taking each of the parties in turn. Dependent variables were first preference and then second party preference as in Tables 5 and 6. These 28 sets of estimates are not displayed in full because most of the coefficients are not of primary interest here. We display only the coefficients for the contact variables and their significance, as well as summary statistics for each of the models. This is done in Table 7. In most instances links between contact and support remains significant even with the several controls. This is particularly so for candidate contact and for first preference vote, but contact is also highly significant as a predictor of a lower preference vote for most parties, at least when contact is by a candidate. Contact by the party is generally significant; contact by another is less often so. In all, 20/28 coefficients for contact by the row party are statistically significant at the .05 level and only 9/28 coefficients indicating contact by another party are significant. For candidate contacts, 19/28 coefficients are significant; for contacts by party workers the figure is only 10/28.

These controls obviously leave an association in many instances, but is this association attenuated? Does it appear to be the case that those contacted are people who might in any case be expected to vote for the party which contacts them? We can see this best by reproducing Tables 5 and 6 (as Tables 8 and 9) using the predicted probabilities of party support based on the multivariate models. In each case we have set all other independent variables to their mean values.<sup>9</sup>

Taking Table 8 first, we can see that the differences between the columns are smaller than in Table 5. Uncontrolled, candidate contact appeared to be worth 8 per cent of the vote to FF and monopoly contact worth 22 per cent. In Table 8 the figures are 1 per cent and 13 per cent. For FG, differences also of 8 per cent and 22 per cent have dropped to 4 per cent and 17 per cent. The attenuation of the effects is more marked for SF. Differences of 20 and 61 per

TABLE 7  
LOGIT ESTIMATES OF VOTE

	<i>Contact by row party</i>		<i>Contact by another party</i>		<i>Pseudo R<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>N</i>
	<i>Coef</i>	<i>P</i> ≤	<i>Coef</i>	<i>P</i> ≤		
First preference:						
Contact by candidate						
FF	.53	.001	-.47	.003	.36	1775
FG	1.01	.000	-.73	.000	.41	1775
Greens	1.89	.007	.20	.589	.41	1300
Labour	2.03	.000	-.71	.009	.41	1605
PD	1.41	.001	-.41	.232	.28	843
SF	1.62	.001	-1.20	.005	.58	1412
Ind/othr	1.96	.000	-1.10	.000	.18	1485
First preference:						
Contact by party workers						
FF	.36	.048	-.56	.001	.36	1775
FG	.33	.161	-.60	.005	.40	1775
Greens	1.62	.007	.01	.978	.41	1300
Labour	.54	.140	-.28	.339	.35	1605
PD	.62	.284	-.41	.233	.26	843
SF	.42	.471	-.41	.373	.55	1412
Ind/othr	1.29	.000	-.06	.796	.13	1485
Second party pref:						
Contact by candidate						
FF	.76	.000	-.22	.234	.16	983
FG	.86	.000	-.46	.005	.09	1398
Greens	.02	.981	-.16	.580	.19	1238
Labour	1.31	.000	-.17	.392	.11	1465
PD	1.16	.003	.23	.391	.13	779
SF	.98	.037	-.06	.858	.29	1340
Ind/othr	1.08	.000	-.32	.073	.07	1346
Second party pref:						
Contact by party workers						
FF	.18	.384	-.10	.606	.14	983
FG	.41	.030	-.16	.369	.07	1398
Greens	.82	.087	-.01	.963	.19	1238
Labour	.49	.028	.29	.150	.09	1465
PD	.43	.283	-.61	.015	.12	779
SF	.98	.004	-.32	.270	.29	1340
Ind/othr	.71	.002	-.19	.299	.06	1346

*Notes:* Self-reported voters only. Models also contain row party attachment, past vote, thermometer ratings of row and major party leaders, euros spent by row party, euros spent by all parties and evaluations of the last government.

TABLE 8  
ASSOCIATION BETWEEN TYPE OF CONTACT AND FIRST PREFERENCE PARTY:  
PREDICTED PERCENTAGES FROM MODELS IN TABLE 7

		<i>Contact only by a party other than the row party</i>	<i>No contact at all</i>	<i>Contact by row party and at least one other</i>	<i>Contact only by row party</i>
FF	cand	31	43	44	56
	wkrs	32	46	41	55
FG	cand	7	15	19	32
	wkrs	10	17	13	22
Green	cand	1	0	6	5
	wkrs	1	1	4	4
Labour	cand	1	3	11	20
	wkrs	*	*	*	*
PD	cand	2	4	9	14
	wkrs	*	*	*	*
SF	cand	0	1	2	6
	wkts	*	*	*	*
Ind/Other	cand	3	9	19	41
	wkrs	6	6	18	19

*Notes:* Self-reported voters only. Cell entries show % of each cell voting for row party. \* neither coefficient significant.

cent fall to 1 per cent and 5 per cent. What this suggests is that the people who got such a visit were very likely to vote for SF anyway, not because of contact but because of a combination of other factors. The impact of party worker contact is also attenuated, and that was weaker to begin with. Even so it is evident that support amongst those contacted is generally higher than amongst those not contacted.

Turning to the importance of contact for lower preferences, illustrated in Table 9, the effects of contact are generally weaker but it still appears that contact matters. The entries in the cells in columns 3 and 4 are in almost all cases higher than those in columns 1 and 2. In FF, FG and Labour in particular, as well as amongst Independents, those contacted are generally more likely to vote for the party making contact than those who are not contacted. Again, this is less pronounced when contact is by party workers than when it is by candidates.

Overall then, even with controls there remains a clear association between contact and vote. This is still not conclusive evidence of causation, but the inference that there is a causal link is much more plausible when these

TABLE 9  
ASSOCIATION BETWEEN TYPE OF CONTACT AND SECOND PARTY VOTED FOR:  
PREDICTED PERCENTAGES FROM MODELS IN TABLE 7

		<i>Contact only by a party other than the row party</i>	<i>No contact at all</i>	<i>Contact by row party and at least one other</i>	<i>Contact only by row party</i>
FF	cand	20	24	35	40
	wkrs	24	26	27	29
FG	cand	14	21	28	39
	wkrs	18	20	24	27
Green	cand	*	*	*	*
	wkrs	*	*	*	*
Labour	cand	11	12	32	35
	wkrs	14	11	22	17
PD	cand	10	9	28	24
	wkrs	7	14	12	20
SF	cand	2	3	6	6
	wkrs	2	3	5	7
Ind/Other	cand	12	16	29	36
	wkrs	13	15	23	27

*Notes:* Self-reported voters only. Cell entries show % of each cell voting for row party.  
\* neither coefficient significant.

controls are in place. The degree of attenuation we see in the relationships suggests that there is some targeting, that all parties, even the largest ones, do tend to contact their potential supporters more than they do other voters. The attenuations are most marked in the case of the smaller parties who have more incentive to target, having fewer campaigners and more socially homogenous support bases. It is also worth underlining the fact that candidate contact seems to matter more than general party worker contact, and that this holds for both first and lower references. Visits by candidates asking for a second, third or even fourth preferences appear to pay dividends.

### Local Campaigns and Candidate Choice

Most voters make decisions about candidates as well as parties, either because they are voting for a candidate rather than a party, or because they have chosen a party that runs more than one candidate. Campaigns are focussed on candidates as well as parties. We have seen that there is a strong link between party contact and party support. What is the situation as regards candidates?

Of respondents who voted, 64 per cent said they had decided on their first preference candidate in advance of the start of the official campaign as opposed to 70 per cent who had decided their party. Perhaps there is just a little more uncertainty about candidate than there is about party. However, the distinction between picking a party and picking a candidate may be problematic for some respondents. Given that the smaller parties did not run two candidates in many instances, and the questions followed one on another very closely, someone who decided on party before the campaign must logically have decided on candidate (and vice-versa) but this is not the case; early deciders for SF, Greens and PDs had also decided on which candidate they would vote for in only 87, 77 and 85 per cent of cases respectively,<sup>10</sup> very similar proportions to those found in the larger parties where about 90 per cent of those who have decided party have also decided on candidate. However, the total number of cases this involves is very small and it is possible that respondents simply meant they did not know who the candidates were.

What is the connection between candidate contact and votes for those particular candidates? We confine ourselves here to those who were contacted by a candidate in situations where a party ran more than one candidate. In such cases over 80 per cent of those contacted and who voted for a party contacting them, voted for a candidate who contacted them: 81 per cent in the case of Labour and 86 per cent in the cases of FF and FG. In other words, only 14 per cent of the FF voters who were contacted by a FF candidate gave their first preference to a FF candidate who did not contact them ahead of one who did. The same is true for FG. Much of this might be attributed to a combination of *bailiwicking* and vote management, as contact will be made typically by only one FF candidate who would also be the most local one.<sup>11</sup>

## Discussion

This article has examined the campaign in the 2002 Irish general election, paying particular attention to the extent and pattern of personal campaign links. While Irish campaigns do show many signs that parties have observed and learned from the style and tactics of parties elsewhere in the world, Irish elections are certainly not prime examples of the post-modern, post-fordist era of campaigning which some have claimed to see elsewhere. Personal contact is felt to matter by politicians, and all parties make considerable efforts to knock on as many doors as possible during the weeks of the official campaign. Despite the glossy posters of party leaders, the extensive use of opinion poll and focus group research, central management, and sometimes extensive teams of media watchers and controllers all seeking to shape the agenda, the essential style of campaigns remains personal, with individual candidates seeking to make an impact and doing so for the most part by the traditional

method of meeting the folks. Almost 80 per cent of voters report that a party worker or candidate called to their home.

The big parties, with more candidates and more party workers – members and personal candidate supporters – naturally achieve a wider coverage. Given its much larger organization it might be expected that FF would do even better than it does, but in fact FG runs it quite close. There is a strong connection between these direct contacts (at least to the home) and the vote, whether we are looking at parties or at individual candidates. What is less clear is the process by which this correlation is achieved: is it that contact produces electoral support, or is it that (likely) electoral support attracts contact. Are parties ‘chasing’ new voters or ‘mobilizing’ existing ones? (Rorschneider, 2002). Our evidence addressing this question is necessarily indirect, as the Irish election study lacks a campaign panel element. The fact that so many contactees report making up their mind *before* the contact was made also suggests mobilization, or reinforcement, may be dominant. FF and FG, and to a lesser extent Labour, do make contact with a much higher proportion of voters who do not support them and so, at least in theory, may be seen to spend more resources chasing new voters. This difference could stem simply from differences in size but it could also reflect the fact that SF, the PDs and the Greens do have a more focussed appeal. They are ‘niche’ parties, who will have a much clearer ideological message and a more homogenous pattern of social support. Arguably it is this fact, as well as differences in resources, that explains the different pattern of contacts.

The analysis here has tried to describe the extent of grassroots campaigning and explore its possible impact on each party’s share of the vote. It is very clear that there is extensive grassroots campaigning, by candidates and by party workers. Most voters are contacted, and a majority of voters are contacted by more than one party. Elections take place on the airwaves, but they also take place on the doorsteps. We did not see much aggregate change in the 2002 campaign, but many voters say they decided late and it seems possible that the doorstep campaign was a factor for some of those voters. It is very clear that contact is strongly associated with vote: those contacted by FF or by SF, for example, are more likely to vote for those parties than are those not contacted. This association could be an artefact of the strategy all parties use of concentrating resources in areas where they are more popular. When we controlled the relationship, using a number of possible predictors of contact (following this logic) and of vote the relationships are weaker. However, they remain very apparent, and are generally substantively and statistically significant. It could be argued that more controls are possible. We have controlled for party related factors, but candidates too have their natural supporters, typically drawn from their own hinterland. That too could be controlled. If the relationship between contact and vote then disappeared

would that mean the association between contact and support was spurious? That conclusion would be unwarranted, and a dangerous one for any would-be politician to draw. Contact could be the mechanism that transforms potential support into votes. That contact may not simply be at election time. Candidates will typically be known around their districts and maintain an active presence there, although they will seek to make that final visit in the last few weeks before an election.

The links between support and contact are most pronounced when it comes to candidates. Arguably, individual candidates are more careful of their own resources and so give their personal time where it will be of most use, but it may also be that such personal contacts are especially effective, and effective at winning a vote if not a first preference vote (No. 1). Even if this is not the case, the conviction amongst politicians that the personal door-to-door style is necessary ensures it will be some time yet before the only link between the campaign and the voter's home is merely an electronic one.

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#### NOTES

1. 'Called to' means personally, not by phone. This was the topic of a separate question: see below.
2. Author's analysis of CSES Wave 2, Summer 2003 release: [www.umich.edu/cses](http://www.umich.edu/cses).
3. 'Serious' is defined here as where it won at least 10 per cent of the vote.
4. Of course this last channel may come to be more important in future years. Many candidates did put up attractive websites. The parties have made some efforts to develop their own websites and party TDs all have standard ones but many challenging candidates also conveyed useful election information in this way.
5. Data from an IMS pre-/post-election panel survey also indicates that the question does provide a guide to the stability of vote intention. Of those who had 'definitely' decided how to vote the week before the election (and who did vote), 14 per cent did not follow their pre-election party choice, while of those who were not certain, 33 per cent apparently changed their mind. These late changes had a negligible impact on the result (McElroy and Marsh, 2003).
6. These are as follows: FF 46%, FG 20%, Greens 4%, Labour 10%, PDs 3%, SF 6% and independents and others 11%. While the sample is weighted to make it match the electorate in demographic terms we have not weighted it to correspond to the election outcomes. Consequently, there is a small overrepresentation of FF voters at the expense of FG in particular.

7. We also looked to see whether or not those who decided before the campaign were more or less likely to receive callers, and more or less likely to vote for a party which called. We find only a very small link between the time when respondents made their decision and whether contact has been made. Those contacted are marginally more likely to have decided prior to the campaign. Those giving their first preference to a calling party are also slightly more likely to be voters who decided prior to the campaign, not those who decided late.
8. It is possible that each voter's geographical proximity to a candidate might predict contact quite well and be exogenous but data on this is not available at present.
9. This means predicted probabilities for smaller parties, but not independents, are relatively low as, by definition, their supporters are not typical.
10. Moreover, none of these cases are in constituencies where SF and PDs ran multiple candidates.
11. In all only 4 per cent of candidates who call are covering territory already covered by a running mate.

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