

“Some factors affecting voting behaviour are more important than others. Discuss.”

It is clear that some factors influencing voting behaviour are more important than others. There are many complex and changing factors influencing UK voters. It is important to note that they are also interrelated, not separate. Traditionally social class has been the most influential factor in terms of how someone decides to vote and some will argue that it is still the most dominant factor in how people vote as those of a lower social class are more likely to vote Labour and those of a higher social class are more likely to vote Conservative. However other factors also have an influence on how people vote in modern politics such as long term factors including: age, ethnicity and gender as well as short term factors such as the power of the media and current issues.

Some argue that social class is the most influential factor in how a person votes. This can be claimed as up until the 1970's there was a clear two party system, with Labour seen to be the championing party of the working class and the Conservatives being the party of the middle and upper classes. This can still be seen in modern day British politics as in the 2010 general election 40% of Class DE, the lowest social class, voted for Labour, a clear simple majority. In contrast 39% of class AB, the highest social class, voted Conservative, yet another simple majority. Areas with a high concentration of upper classes in turn are more likely to vote Conservative such as Richmond, Yorkshire where the Conservatives won 63% of the vote while poorer areas such as Glasgow vote Labour again highlighting that social class plays a vital role in how people vote, as those of a lower social class tend to live in poorer areas. However it can also be argued that since the 1970's social class has been becoming an increasingly irrelevant factor in how a person votes due to class dealignment. Class dealignment occurs when voters do not vote according to their social class such as Class DE voters voting Conservative opposed to voting Labour. Class dealignment has occurred largely due to the fact the middle class has grown significantly in size since the 1970's therefore both Labour and the Conservatives have been competing for the middle ground rather than being polar opposites. Class dealignment can clearly be seen in modern politics as since 1997 Labour's percentage of lower class vote has been decreasing while the percentage of lower class voters voting Conservative has increased. Conservative voting has increased among younger voters who are more likely to be of a lower social class due to their income again clearly showing the social class is becoming an increasingly irrelevant factor.

The media is a very powerful factor influencing voting behaviour in the UK, especially newspapers. While TV broadcasters must remain politically neutral, the printed press has the right to publish what it chooses often leading to bias that in turn influences how people decide to vote. The printed press can portray politicians or political parties in different lights, display constant negative or positive stories about a subject all in the aim of persuading their readers to

vote the way they want. The most common example in The Sun newspaper, when The Sun backs a political party the party usually wins the election such as in the between 1997 and 2005 The Sun consistently backed the Labour party who won each respective election however in 2010 the Sun backed the Conservatives who won the election going on to form a coalition government. Newspapers can also back issues such as the Scottish Independence referendum in 2014 where the Sunday Herald came out in favour of Independence, no other mainstream paper came out in favour of independence, in turn Scotland voted No. However it can also be argued that the underlying reason people vote the way they do is down to their social class as people who purchase The Sun tend to be of a lower social class and are not purchasing it for their political view, they just happen to purchase the paper that the majority of their class purchase suggesting that the Sun influenced them when they were going to go that way anyway due to their social class. It can also be argued that the printed press is becoming less relevant with younger voters as they are less likely to buy newspapers and are more likely to consume information online via reactive social media.

Ethnicity also plays a role in how the public vote as the Conservatives struggle to pick up the minority vote. This is unusual as their policies are not unpopular among ethnic minorities (ethnic minorities tend to be less liberal on social issues than whites) but feel that voting for the Conservatives is a step too far. The Conservatives particularly struggle with the Black Caribbean ethnic group who feel the party is hostile towards them. In contrast Labour does well among ethnic minorities especially among Black and Asian voters. This divide can clearly be seen as only 16% of those from an ethnic minority voted conservative in 2010. However this also links in with social class as due to race inequality, ethnic minorities are more likely to be of a lower social class than whites and those of a lower social class are more likely to vote Labour than conservative.

Age is another key factor that plays a role in how people decide to vote. Traditionally, younger voters are more likely to support parties promising social change, young voters tend to be more left wing. In contrast the Conservatives core vote are traditionally older, more affluent voters. Therefore it can be argued that traditionally the older you are the more conservative you are and this can still be seen today as 44% of over 65's voted Conservative in the 2010 General Election. However the influence of age is changing. It can be argued that in the 2010 General Election age played less of an influence as the Conservatives did much better among younger voters than previously while maintaining its core elderly vote. 30% of those aged 18-24 voted conservative only 1 point behind Labour at 31%, they also performed better than Labour in the 25-34 age group by 5%. This clearly shows that age played a less influential role in the last election.

Gender is another factor that plays a role in how people decide to vote. Women used to have a strong attachment to the Conservatives while men were more attracted towards Labour. In fact, if it wasn't for the female vote Labour would have won every post-war general election up until 1979. In modern day British politics the majority of Labour voters are female, while the majority of conservative voters are male showing gender still plays a role in how people vote. However it could also be argued that social class is the underlying factor in how a person votes as women of a lower social class have always traditionally voted Labour. It could be argued that the female Labour vote is down to the gender pay gap and the fact that women are more likely to be paid in lower paid sectors therefore leading to a lower social class.

To conclude it is clear that there are various interrelated factors influencing voting behaviour are more important than others. It can be argued that Social class is the most influential factor in how a person votes though the influence of Social Class has been on the decline since the 1970's due to class dealignment. Social class while becoming less of a direct influence still relates with various of the other long term factors such as age, gender and ethnicity while also playing a role in how the influence of the media is perceived. This clearly highlights that while the direct influence of social class it is still the most important underlying factor to why people vote the way they do.