Poll Worker Motivations and the Public Administration of Elections[1]

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Abstract

Elections could not happen without the many thousands of people who give up their time to administer this crucial public service, staffing polling stations and ensuring votes are issued, cast & counted. Given these that these are potentially high stress, low pay temporary positions it is important to understand why people choose to give up their time to act as stipended volunteers to provide this fundamental public service to their fellow citizens. Using original data from a poll worker survey conducted in the 2015 British general election, this article investigates the motivations and incentives for poll workers volunteering to administer major elections in an important advanced democracy. Hypotheses are developed to test whether poll workers are motivated by a sense of civic culture, public service motivations or various incentives. The findings are significant, observing that poll workers are not typical of the general public and undertake much more frequent civic and political activities than other citizens. The presence of a civic culture and public service motivation therefore seems to be an important factor in shaping levels of volunteering. Material, solidary or purposive motivations remain influential too, however.

Introduction

Elections could not happen without the many thousands of people who give up their time to administer them. They provide a crucial public service, staffing polling stations and ensuring votes are issued, cast and counted on election day. In the USA, Burden and Milyo (2015) estimated a national median of 6.3 poll workers per every 100 electors to serve well over 200 million voters in the 2012 general election, while in 2016 there were approximately 185,000 polling places that needed to be staffed (OSCE/ODIHR, 2016). In Brazil, over 2.4 million people were employed at the 2014 elections (Toffoli 2016). Poll workers therefore provide a fundamental public service and are a crucial resource for democracies. Nonetheless, many countries experience problems recruiting sufficient numbers of poll workers. Given these are potentially high stress, often low pay temporary positions, this poses an important question for both public administration and electoral integrity scholars: why do people choose to give up their time to provide this vital public service to their fellow citizens and democracy more generally? Research into this question is extremely rare. Using data from an innovative and original poll worker survey conducted in the 2015 British general election, this article investigates the motivations and incentives for poll workers volunteering. Discussion proceeds as follows. The first section briefly outlines the general importance of poll workers to democracy. The second section discusses how ideas of public service motivation, civic culture, social capital, and various incentives may be usefully integrated to help approach this question. The third section outlines the data used in this study. The fourth part presents an analysis, highlighting a number of factors structuring poll worker motivations to work on polling day. Discussing the significance of these findings, the paper concludes by making a number of recommendations for analysts and policymakers, while highlighting the comparative utility of the British case.

The Importance of Poll Workers

The number of elections that are held around the world has increased substantially in recent decades (Hyde and Marinov 2012). Yet, elections are often undermined by concerns about electoral integrity and malpractice. The polling station is where many electoral malpractices are thought to occur (Birch, 2011; Lehoucq, 2003; Lehoucq and Molina, 2002; Norris, 2015a; Schedler 2002). 'First order' malpractices might include ballot stuffing, voter intimidation or electoral violence (Norris 2013). Established democracies are commonly thought to be free from these more serious problems, but still be riddled with forms of malpractice in electoral administration that the poll worker may experience (James 2014, forthcoming). For example, queues at polling places have been reported in many American presidential elections (Highton, 2006), at the 2010 UK general election (Electoral Commission 2010) and the 2010 Indian Assembly elections (Times of India 2012), amongst others. Other administrative problems might include citizens being issued with incorrect ballot papers, officials not asking for appropriate identification or administering technology correctly.

People are crucial to the effective implementation and administration of electoral law and policy. Poll workers set up polling stations, greet voters, hand out ballot papers, ensure voting secrecy and order in the polling station. At the end of the day they seal ballot boxes and begin the process of transferring ballot boxes to counting locations. Even in countries where electronic voting machines are used, such as India, they perform equivalent roles. Their importance in the electoral process is self-evident. Scholarship within public policy has taught that even the best-designed policies from above can go wrong at the implementation stage (Sabatier and Mazmanian 1983, Sabatier 1986). Street-level bureaucrats have considerable

discretion and opportunity to implement policies differently (Lipsky 1980, Lipsky 2000). This is also the case in electoral administration. The administrative service poll workers provide to electors can directly help shape public confidence in the electoral process (Hall et al., 2009).

Poll workers are sometimes state employees who are seconded to run elections in some countries such as India (James, forthcoming). In other instances such as Germany and Spain, they are citizens who are compelled to undertake the task as a civic duty.[2] In other polities, the task is voluntary. In the US they are volunteers who senior electoral officials have to spend considerable time and resource recruiting (US EAC, 2006). The vast majority of citizens choose not to put themselves forward. There is, then, a classic 'freerider' problem which makes it necessary to ask why do poll workers volunteer to provide this crucial public service? Given their importance to well-run elections and evidence that many electoral managers have problems with recruitment, this is a pressing public policy problem. Indeed, Burden and Milyo (2015) report that just under half of all US jurisdictions, between 2008 and 2012, had difficulty in finding sufficient numbers of poll workers. Recruitment problems were greater in urban areas and those with high registration rates. Such problems are not confined only to American experience but are also experienced elsewhere (Burden and Milyo, 2015: 40; Clark and James, 2016; Electoral Commission, 2011; OSCE/ODIHR, 2008: 11).

In the USA, surveys of poll workers have become an established, if irregular, method of understanding their role in implementing elections. These surveys have been used to identify the demographic characteristics of poll workers and how are they recruited, whether poll workers have the appropriate skills with technology to work on election day, and how effective training schemes are for them (Alvarez et al. 2007; Burden and Milyo, 2015; Cobb, et al. 2012; Glaser et al. 2007; Mockabee et al. 2009). The study of poll workers is extremely rare outside of the USA (but see: Clark and James, 2017; Herron et al. 2006).

Only two studies appear to have examined why poll workers choose to work on election day. Glaser et al. (2007) undertook a survey of 15,000 poll workers in Florida in 2006. They found that the most commonly stated reason for becoming a poll worker was 'to help my community', 'to help out' or 'community service.' Material benefits were commonly highlighted as important (2007: 10). Meanwhile, on the basis of a survey in Leon County, also in Florida (n=845), McAuliffe (2008) tested the importance of theories of social capital, public service and volunteer motivation, coproduction, and principal-agent theory. She concluded that that poll workers are a 'singular hybrid of volunteer and public servant'.

Theories of Volunteering

Voluntary poll workers are a peculiar group to conceptually define because in most instances (including the UK, which this study focuses on) they are paid for their work and cannot be considered volunteers in the strictest sense. Although some do hold different but permanent jobs, they are not employees either. In many respects, they therefore fit the category of 'stipended volunteers' (Mesch et al. 1998; Tschirhart et al. 2001). This concept grew from a recognition that 'volunteers' were increasingly being used across a range of settings in public life, sometimes with pay, but sometimes without so that the distinction between volunteer and employee was blurring. Stipended volunteers, are those individuals who 'receive some financial compensation below fair market value and work in formal service activities to help others with whom they have no personal connection' (Tschirhart et al., 2001: 422). Poll workers appear to fit this category since they tend to be low paid and help other citizens with whom they also have no connection.

Given this low pay, theories still need to explain why poll workers might volunteer. Typically there are two main approaches towards explaining civic participation. The first of these is where characteristics of the individual taking part are central to explanation. The second relates to how individuals are mobilised in the first place (Norris, 2002; Whiteley, 2012). Taking individual characteristics first, Verba et al.'s (1995) civic voluntarism model suggests that those who are active need to have resources which will enable them to do so and they need to have a psychological interest in and engagement with government and politics. Those with more time, who are reasonably well educated and relatively well-off are more likely to have the civic skills needed to enable them to participate. With engagement, a psychological interest in politics means that individuals feel they can make a difference, have a commitment to certain principles, and group benefits that participation brings. Consequently, their interest in politics and government means that they get some gratification out of taking part in civic and political processes (Verba et al., 1995). Characteristics such as age, level of education and gender are often found to be significant predictors in the literature on stipended volunteers as well (Mesch et al. 1998: 3).

Individuals may be motivated by other factors, however. Broadly rational choice assumptions provide alternative explanations about mobilisation and work or public service motivations. Herzberg has proposed a distinction between factors related to the work itself – pay, working conditions – and more intrinsic factors related to the mission or goals of the work as key motivators (Herzberg, 1971, Lundberg et al., 2009). A more nuanced approach is provided by Clark and Wilson (1961) who argue that incentive systems are the main variable bridging the gap between individuals and organisations. They offer a threefold classification of material, purposive and solidary incentives (Clark and Wilson, 1961: 134-137). *Material* incentives are provided by some sort of material gain for the person participating, whether through payment or career advancement. While the temporary nature of poll worker employment means there is

unlikely to be any career advancement involved, the positions are paid. It is therefore quite conceivable that some people work on polling day to earn some extra money (e.g. Glaser et al., 2007). *Purposive* benefits are achieved by the organisations that the individual works for implementing or achieving its aims. In the examples provided, this might include, 'the elimination of corruption or inefficiency from public service or beautification of community, dissemination of information about politics or city life, and so forth' (Clark and Wilson, 1961: 135-6). Poll workers may therefore be motivated by helping electoral authorities achieve well run elections. Finally, *Solidaristic* or process benefits offer the chance to participate in social and political activities, thereby meeting like-minded individuals. The incentives are 'socializing, congeniality, the sense of group membership and identification, the status resulting from membership, fun and conviviality, the maintenance of social distinctions and so on' (Clark and Wilson, 1961, p.134-5). There are clear links between this tripartite schema and the altruistic, instrumental and social motivations highlighted by studies on stipended volunteers (Tschirhart et al, 2001). Yet, a tension may exist between these motivations. Economists have suggested that material or monetary rewards might 'crowd out' more intrinsic or altruistic notions of public service (e.g. Festre, 2010; Frey and Jegen, 2001).

Solidaristic explanations overlap with social capital explanations. These have been argued to be a foundation of civic life and closely related to public service motivations (Brewer, 2003). In the USA, social capital was argued to be in decline by Putnam (2000) who saw Americans increasingly not joining social groups and civic associations. Hall (1999) argued otherwise in Britain, suggesting that social capital was broadly stable. More recently, others suggest that social capital is also now declining in Britain, measured by levels of interpersonal trust and voluntary activity (Halpern, 2005; Whiteley 2012). A common theme amongst the literature on stipended volunteers is that satisfaction is crucial for retention. When an individual's

expectations are not met, perhaps because any of the above are not achieved, they lose motivation and cease volunteering in the future (Mesch et al. 1998).

These approaches provide six hypotheses that can be tested amongst those who acted as poll workers in the 2015 general election.

H1: Poll workers have resources and skills which permit them to volunteer to work on polling day

H2: Political participation amongst poll workers will be at a higher level than for the general population

H3: Poll workers have a high level of psychological interest and engagement with politics

H4: Poll workers have a high level of engagement in the associational networks crucial to social capital explanations of participation.

H5: Poll workers' motivations revolve around solidary, material and purposive incentives.

H6: Poll workers who did not enjoy their experience will be less likely to serve again.

Data

Britain is an excellent case for examining this question and developing insights to guide future research. Like several advanced democracies, British elections are administered by local governments who have discretion, within statutory requirements, in determining how elections are implemented. This is the case also in both the United States and Canada, as well as smaller democracies such as Ireland (Clark, 2017; James, 2012; International IDEA, 2014; OSCE/ODIHR, 2015). As Norris (2015: 23-24) observes, even in nationally organised systems

of electoral governance, there is a sizeable role for local government in organising election administration, and therefore employing poll workers, on the ground.

Two different types of 'poll workers' work at UK elections. *Presiding Officers* have responsibility for opening and closing the polls, organising the layout and maintaining order in the polling station, monitoring campaigners outside polling places and supervising polling clerks. *Polling clerks* are responsible for checking the eligibility of electors against the register, marking the register and issuing ballots to voters (Electoral Commission 2015a, 2-3). Both categories of poll worker are appointed only for the temporary purpose of the election alone.

The survey was developed from a previous questionnaire, the Ohio Poll Worker Survey, which was used in Ohio's 2008 Primary election (Mockabee, Monson, and Patterson 2009). The 2015 questionnaire was developed further and adapted for British circumstances. It contained questions on recruitment, training, motivations for working at the election, election day experiences, views of the democratic process and more general demographic information.

Of the fourteen local authorities approached to participate in this study, eight agreed to do so. Four local authorities were located in the North East of England, and four in Norfolk in East England.[3] These local authorities, between them, administered 21 of the 632 British parliamentary constituencies at the general election. Such an approach can be criticised for not providing a representative sample (Bryman 2008, 183-4). Notably, the local authorities did not include those where prominent cases of electoral fraud have been found in Britain, such as Birmingham or Tower Hamlets in London. While acknowledging these criticisms, there is unfortunately no way to directly sample or survey polling station workers in Britain without gaining access through electoral services departments at close to 400 separate local authorities. No national database of poll workers exists, nor were the authors able to obtain an official estimate of the numbers of poll workers nationwide. A representative sample would therefore

be extremely difficult to achieve. Selecting authorities where problems had knowingly taken place would further risk the difficulty of 'selecting on the dependent variable'.[4] Indeed, evidence suggests that difficulties with electoral fraud across Britain is extremely rare (Electoral Commission, 2016).

This notwithstanding, such a research strategy is common in organisation and administration studies (Bryman 2008, 183). The study covers eight local authorities, who administer the electoral process in twenty one parliamentary constituencies.[5] It provides greater data than has hitherto been collected, and in different parts of England (see appendix). Gaining agreement from local governments to participate meant that it was possible to distribute a questionnaire to every polling station worker which was employed by those local authorities. In other words, this was a full population survey of the poll workers within the eight local authorities who agreed to take part. Most studies of poll workers have studied specific locations rather than deploy a nationwide random sample (Hall, Quin Monson, and Patterson 2009; Claassen et al. 2008), while such an approach has also successfully been deployed to examine questions of public service motivation in local government elsewhere (e.g. Weske and Schott, 2016). Participating local authorities appear broadly representative of wider levels of electoral administrative performance. The average performance of the participating local authorities is close to the nationwide mean for British election administration in Clark's (2015; 2017) index of performance in the 2010 general election.[6]

In total, 3,350 questionnaires were distributed to poll workers by their local authority on the day of the election. Poll workers were asked to complete and return them by mail in a pre-paid envelope. The response rate was 39.4 per cent. The analysis is therefore based on responses from 1,321 poll workers in a mix of rural, urban and mixed local authorities and constituencies. This is a very good response rate for a postal survey. The survey provides both quantitative and qualitative insights into poll workers. Perry (2000: 486) in particular highlights the need for

qualitative evidence to complement quantitative responses in investigating PSM. Both are drawn upon in the analysis below.

Analysis

Analysis begins with a brief outline of poll workers' socio-economic status and examination of, in the terminology of the civic voluntarism model, the resources which they can draw upon that enable them to participate. The mean age of poll workers in 2015 was 53.3, with a range of between 20-82 years of age. This is a workforce where the direction of any 'gender gap' in favour of men is reversed. In line with evidence from the USA (Burden and Milyo, 2015), 63.2 per cent of all poll workers surveyed were women, with men only 36.8 per cent.

Several proxies are typically used to measure resources that individuals have available to them. Having time and money enable interested individuals to participate, while education and occupation both provide the opportunity for people to exercise and enhance their civic skills (Verba et al., 1995: Chs. 10 & 11). Poll workers are clustered either side of the average income in Britain before taxes albeit with a slight bias under the average, with 32.1 per cent earning between £10,000-£19,999 ($15,220-$30,430) and 31.6 per cent earning between £20,000-£29,999 ($30,440-$45,660).[7] Just over half (52.3 per cent) had to take time off to work on polling day. While 30.5 per cent were retired, almost double the 16-17 per cent of people of retirement age in the 2011 UK census, most respondents were employees (61.3 per cent). In terms of occupation, 42.6 per cent were in administrative or managerial roles, with a further 18 per cent in clerical posts and 17.6 per cent in professional or technical occupations. Poll workers appear to be generally well-educated; 34 per cent had degree level or postgraduate qualifications, slightly less than the 38 per cent found in the broader population, while a further

23.5 per cent had some higher or further education below degree level and 12.6 per cent were educated to 'A' level standard or equivalent by comparison with 21 per cent educated to A level standard in the population.[8] Combined their education levels and administrative experience suggest that poll workers had the resources necessary to enable them to undertake what are complex administrative tasks on polling day. Hypothesis 1 can therefore be broadly confirmed.

To address patterns of civic and political participation, the survey asked a range of questions about participation that respondents had undertaken in the past 2-3 years. For comparability with an important annual survey of participation in Britain which has been conducted for over a decade, these questions were modelled on those asked by the Hansard Society's annual *Audit of Political Engagement*. This is often identified by official bodies as an important national benchmark for civic and political participation, and has also been the basis of studies of engagement carried out by representative institutions in the UK (Apostolova et al., 2017; Clark and Wilford, 2012).[9]

(Table 1 about here)

Responses are outlined in table 1. Participation can be ordered by the level of costs in terms of time and effort involved in undertaking various activities. This is evident in respondents' answers. A large number vote in elections, while much smaller numbers indicate that they have participated in a more high-cost way by taking part in a march or demonstration or attending a political meeting. Other activities fall somewhere between these two extremes.

In some countries, poll workers are selected because of party allegiance or membership.[10] The party politicisation of electoral administration is a difficulty when considering whether contests are 'free or fair'. In Britain, this has been much less of a problem. Local government returning officers and their staff have statutory independence from any party and are not appointed by

elected officials. Nonetheless, what is interesting to note in table 1 is that poll workers are more likely to have party allegiances, donate to parties, stand for office or take part in a political campaign, than the general public, even if it is a very small proportion who do so.

Hypothesis 2 can be broadly confirmed. Poll workers' political participation is higher than for the broader population, sometimes strikingly so. 90 per cent of poll workers claim to have voted in local elections. This is higher than the 63.8 per cent of those in the Hansard Audit who also claimed to have done so.[11] Actual turnout in English local elections however is much lower, anywhere between 30-40 per cent normally, although this can be higher in a general election year. The same applies to European and general elections; poll worker turnout is much higher than that of the electorate as a whole. In other activities, poll workers have more than double the level of civic participation. While 46 per cent of poll workers have done some voluntary work, only 15 per cent of Hansard respondents had done so. Similarly there are large gaps with boycotting, petition signing, expressing opinions online, contacting local representatives and being an officer of a club or organisation. Poll workers are therefore clearly civicly-minded individuals, more likely to participate than fellow citizens.

Previous studies of participation in Britain have shown that individuals can be grouped around various different types of participation. Parry et al. (1992: Ch. 11) identified seven types of participation. These were: just voters (42.6 per cent); almost inactives (16.6 per cent); collective activists (16.7 per cent); contacting activists (11.5 per cent); direct activists (5.1 per cent); party campaign activists (4.1 per cent); and complete activists (3.4 per cent).

(Table 2 about here)

Table 2 presents the results of an exploratory factor analysis of questions on poll workers' repertoires of participation. Factor analysis is a data reduction technique allowing the underlying structures or groupings of answers to be discovered in a set of questions. The

analysis was a principal components analysis, with varimax rotation. Five factors, or different groups of participation among poll workers, were found. Together these explain 53.8 per cent of variance in the activities included. Factor loadings were selected at .4 and above.

The first, and largest, group are labelled 'voters', because the factor loadings group the three types of voting together. The second group are labelled 'traditional' activists. If we accept that the nature of political participation is changing towards a more consumerist, online version of activism (e.g. Norris, 2002: Ch. 10), then this group reflects previous types of political participation involving taking part in marches or demonstrations, attending political meetings, donating money or joining, and participating in an active campaign. 'New' activists by contrast concentrate on signing petitions or e-petitions, boycotting products and expressing opinions online. The fourth group of 'volunteers' participate through being active in voluntary work, holding positions as officers of clubs or organisations, and standing for office. The fifth group concentrate on contacting local councillors or MPs, or writing letters to newspaper editors. This is broadly consistent with what studies such as Parry et al. (1992) found.

What of psychological engagement with politics and public affairs? The survey established levels of interest in politics among respondents at four levels, politics generally, local, national and international issues. The highest levels of interest were 88.8 per cent being either fairly or very interested in national issues and 90.8 either fairly or very interested in local issues. This demonstrates more interest than the broader population; 79.6 were either fairly or very interested in local issues and 75.7 in national issues in the first decade of the Hansard Audit of political engagement. Poll workers appear a little less interested when asked about politics generally or international issues, with only 72.1 per cent for both questions indicating they were either fairly or very interested. This is again higher than the broader population, of whom the Hansard Audit found only 45.6 per cent interested in politics generally, and 66.9 per cent interested in international issues. Poll workers therefore clearly have the levels of engagement

and psychological interest that the civic voluntarism model suggests are an important precursor to explaining participation (Verba, et al., 1995). Hypothesis 3 can be confirmed.

Associational activity has been a crucial indicator of social capital. Putnam (2000) used this to set the scene in his famous *Bowling Alone* study. Poll workers were therefore asked how many civic organisations they belonged to, and given British examples of such groups to guide them. At 46.5 per cent, just under half of respondents did not belong to any civic association, while 38.3 per cent belonged to either one or two associations, 11.6 per cent belonged to three or four and the remainder to five or more. Since this was a cross-sectional survey, it is not possible to get any sense of how this may have developed over time. Given generally higher levels of participation among poll workers, it might be expected that levels of associational membership are also higher. Halpern (2005: 212-217) suggests that, on average, associational membership in Britain rose from 0.73 to 1.43 between 1959-1999, but that such memberships have only limited strength of loyalty and that many traditional associations, and indicators of social capital, are in decline. More recently, the 2011-12 *Understanding Society* longitudinal panel survey found that 47 per cent were members of some form of association, lower than the results found in the poll workers survey but not notably higher as hypothesis 4 suggested.[12]

(Table 3 about here)

Results so far have confirmed the civic-mindedness of poll workers, yet are essentially proxies for individual motivations. What of more specific poll worker motivations for working on election day? The survey directly asked respondents about their reasons for working on polling day. Table 3 ranks their responses in relation to how many said the reason was either somewhat or very important in explaining why they worked at the election.

The reason highlighted by most poll workers as important was to make some extra money, somewhat or very important to 89.5 per cent. As might be expected from the stipended

volunteers concept, poll workers are not necessarily making a lot of money when providing this crucial civic duty. In two local authorities in the North East, the most responsible position of Presiding Officer in the 2015 general election was paid a fee of £195 with travel expenses and a small training allowance covered. Those local governments paid their polling clerks a fee of £115, again with travel covered. One local authority paid a little more; £285 for presiding officers, and £185 for polling clerks, which included a training payment. In this local government, the fee is reduced by £35 if a standalone election is held. Given that this is roughly a sixteen hour day at work with few breaks, this equated to between £12.18-£17.80 per hour for Presiding Officers and £7.19-£11.56 for polling clerks.[13] The amount paid to polling clerks was close to the legal minimum wage in some local authorities when the whole day at work is taken into consideration. Yet, it still seems to be a very important factor.

Other explanations are clearly important, however. To two thirds, it was different from the usual day at work. Civic motivation was clearly also important to two thirds, since they were the kind of person who does their share. Similarly, 62 per cent wanted to experience the democratic process. Some social explanations appear to have been of mid-range importance, such as it being a civic duty, or being with friends and like-minded people. The lowest ranking in terms of importance were wanting to be with people who share their ideals and, at 11.7 per cent, being asked by someone in a local group they attend suggests that a small number may well be motivated by social capital or civic voluntarism social network explanations.

(Table 4 about here)

A clearer sense of the cluster of reasons which may motivate participation as a poll worker is, as with discussion of patterns of participation above, provided by factor analysis. Table 4 presents a principal components analysis with varimax rotation of reasons for working on polling day. Three main factors were identified, which together identify 60.9 per cent of

variance in the data. Broadly, they rotate around the solidary, purposive and material incentives that Clark and Wilson (1961) set out in their influential framework. This confirms hypothesis 5. The most important set of motivations or incentives are social or solidary, and include being asked by someone in a local group to work on polling day, being with people who share ideals, it being a civic duty and wanting to do their share, receiving recognition and being with friends and like-minded people. On its own, this was the most important factor loading accounting for 35.9 per cent of variation. The second group of motivations related to purposive issues, experiencing the democratic process, learning more about politics and government, and, in an overlap with solidary motivations, being a civic duty and wanting to do their share. This accounted for 14.9 per cent of variance. Finally, a smaller group, accounting for 10 per cent of variance, albeit with a strong factor loading on the question about payment, remained motivated by earning additional money, and it being different to a normal day at work.

Saving these results as factor scores means that a little more can be done with this data to understand the motivations of polling station workers. Factor scores can take either positive or negative form, are standardised around zero and provide an indication of the extent to which respondents most emphasise material, purposive or solidary incentives. Thus a negative value indicates a respondent is below the average on that particular incentive scale, while a positive value indicates that they are stronger than average on a particular scale. This permits an assessment of how respondents' placement on each of these factors correlates with a number of other features, such as age, experience and the level of resources they have available to them.

Poll workers in this study are relatively experienced. On average, poll workers had worked at 9.5 elections, with the average for presiding officers being 15.4 and for polling clerks being 5.6. Might experience relate to the incentives for working on polling day? There are however no statistically significant correlations between the number of elections worked at and the types of incentives for participation outlined above. The age of poll workers has an interesting effect.

There is a weakly positive Pearson correlation of .138 which is statistically significant (p<.05) between poll worker age and the solidary incentive scale. In other words, older workers seem more likely to participate because of solidary motivations. Yet, a statistically significant (p<.05) negative bivariate Pearson correlation of -.293 exists between age and the material scale, suggesting that for older poll workers money is less of a motivation than for younger poll workers. Education only had one statistically significant (p<.05) but relatively weak negative correlation (-.141) with the solidary scale, suggesting that those with higher educational levels were less likely to be motivated by solidary incentives.

For a lower income earner, the pay rate is proportionately higher and more important than for a higher income earner. Those who wanted to earn extra money were analysed by income and occupation. There was some evidence that material motivations vary by income. Those who thought that money was 'not at all important' or 'not very important' increased as income increased from 5.8 per cent in the lowest income category to 11.1 per cent in the highest category but money seemed to be important to all groups. There was no clear pattern in relation to employment status, perhaps because only a handful were either in full time education or unemployed. Perhaps contrary to expectations, 83 per cent of retired respondents indicated that earning extra money was important to some degree, by comparison with 92 per cent of those who were employees.

(Table 5 about here)

Poll workers were asked to provide qualitative information about their experience in a free text format at the end of the survey. This provides additional information about motivations since it identifies the aspects of the job that they enjoyed. 64 comments explained how poll workers

enjoyed the experience. Those which provided sufficient information to judge whether it was for solidary, purposive or material reasons are summarised in table 5. Solidary themes were most cited in qualitative responses. It was notable, however, that it was engaging with the public as much as with fellow co-workers that was as often stated as being important. As one put it: 'We got on really well as a team and the electors were very pleasant and friendly. It made for an enjoyable if very tiring day!' Underlining the factor analysis, purposive themes were the second most frequent and material themes were hardly stated at all.

(Table 6 about here)

Material themes featured more commonly as reasons for not enjoying the day in qualitative responses. Table 6 summarises these negative comments of poll workers with poor working conditions being the most common problem, closely followed by low levels of payment. Regardless of these rare few dissatisfied poll workers, this appears to be a satisfied workforce. Even if there may be problems with recruitment more generally, in the immediate aftermath of the elections 97.9 per cent said they were likely to work as a poll worker at the next election. This suggests little support for H6. To tap into this satisfaction, it may suggest to elections services departments the importance of attempting to recruit for the next round of elections in the immediate aftermath of those the individual poll worker has volunteered for.

Conclusion

The focus of election studies is usually on the behaviour of parties, candidates and voters. The public administration of elections is however regularly overlooked. Elections could not function without poll workers setting up polling stations early in the morning, managing the

polling process smoothly during the day, and transferring the votes that citizens have cast to be counted. Using an original dataset, this study is amongst the first to consider why poll workers volunteer, a highly significant public administration question given that electoral officials, in many different settings, struggle to recruit them in sufficient quantity and quality. Britain's decentralised system of election administration is excellent for beginning to develop insights for application in other decentralised systems. The poll workers who served at the 2015 general election were not typical of the broader public. They undertake much more frequent civic and political activities than other citizens. The presence of civic culture and public service motivation explanations therefore seems to be an important factor in shaping levels of volunteering. Put in terms of incentives, poll workers are keen to help electoral officials achieve their goals of well-run elections. Poll workers, however, are also motivated by other factors, and mixed motivations clearly exist among the same group of poll workers. Working on polling day is also a social act which allows poll workers to collaborate with members of their community and engage with members of their community. Finally, material rewards remain important for a sizeable section of the poll worker community. These are important findings for both advanced democracies where there is evidence that civic mindedness is in decline, and transitional democracies where a civic culture may not yet be established and poll worker recruitment could become a key challenge for electoral integrity. Further research is of course necessary in different settings. Yet, by trying to exploit these different motivations, electoral administrators now have some research-based insights to help with recruitment to these roles which are crucial to delivering electoral democracy.

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Table 1: Poll workers and civic participation

	Poll Workers %	Hansard Audit %	Participation Gap %
Voted in last local elections	90.6	63.8	26.8
Voted in last general election	86.6	57.4	29.2
Voted in last European election	78.7	-	-
Done voluntary work	46.3	15.3	31.0
Signed petition / e-petition	41.5	26.7	14.8
Expressed opinions online	29.8	4.3	25.5
Boycotted certain products for political, ethical, environmental reasons	26.6	10.0	16.6
Been officer of club or organisation	24.6	3.7	20.9
Contacted local councillor or MP	23.3	14.3	9.0
Been to any political meeting	5.1	2.4	2.7
Written letter to newspaper editor	4.9	3.5	1.4
Taken part in march or demonstration	3.7	3.2	0.5
None	3.5	-	-
Donated or paid membership to a political party	2.8	0.5	2.3
Taken part in active political campaign	2.1	0.4	1.7
Stood for public office	1.4	0.1	1.3

Table 2: Factor analysis of poll workers' civic participation

	Voters	'Traditional' Activists	'New' Activists	Volunteers	Contacters
Voted in last local elections	.843				
Voted in last European election	.766				
Voted in last general election	.755				
Signed petition / e-petition			.787		
Done voluntary work				.698	
Boycotted certain products for political, ethical, environmental reasons			.557		
Expressed opinions online			.757		
Taken part in march or demonstration		.646			
Been to any political meeting		.680			
Donated or paid membership to a political party		.497			
Contacted local councillor or MP					.634
Been officer of club or organisation				.699	
Written letter to newspaper editor					.825
Taken part in active political campaign		.705			
Stood for public office				.585	

Table 3: Reasons for Working on Polling Day

	% somewhat / very important	N
I wanted to make some extra money	89.5	1289
I am the kind of person who does my share	66.1	1256
It was different to the usual day at work	66.1	1261
I wanted to experience the democratic process	62.0	1275
I think it is my duty as a citizen	52.5	1255
I can be with friends and like-minded people	38.6	1246
I wanted to learn more about politics and government	37.5	1263
I received recognition from people I respect	29.5	1243
I like to be with people who share my ideals	20.4	1228
I was asked by someone in a local group I attend	11.7	1206

Table 4: Principal components analysis of reasons for working on polling day

	Solidary	Purposive	Material
I wanted to experience the democratic process		.858	
I wanted to learn more about politics and government		.805	
I was asked by someone in a local group I attend	.734		
I like to be with people who share my ideals	.733		
I think it is my duty as a citizen	.445	.606	
I am the kind of person who does my share	.512	.561	
I wanted to make some extra money			.794
I received recognition from people I respect	.611		
I can be with friends and like-minded people	.667		
It was different to the usual day at work			.629

Table 5: Free-text comments relating to satisfaction

Theme	Number of comments	Example quote
Solidary	28	My husband and I work at our local polling station in the village hall, we know most of the attendees. Comments from voters 'It is nice to see people we know in charge.' I obey my husband implicitly on that day! 'All part of life's rich pageant - only 170 voters in this area so quite a long day - but worth it'
Purposive	16	Excellent experience and I was happy to assist many first time voters.
Material	2	Enjoyed the day very much. The polling station was busy so always something to do. Made a real change from my day job and the extra cash can go towards my holiday!

Table 6: Free-text comments relating to dissatisfaction

Theme	Number of comments	Example quote
Long hours	8	Long and boring day. I don't think it was worth taking a day off work to do it.
Low payment	18	'A very demanding day of work - length of time, complexity, problem solving, knowledge required. This is not acknowledged in the pay or recognition /respect for the post. 'Considering the hours inc. travelling were 6:00 am 10:30 pm (16.5) I feel that the fee paid is poor!'
Poor working conditions	21	'Arriving at 6:15 am and leaving at 10:15 was too long to sit - 'meals' missed /delayed - toilet breaks not regular - cold church hall - too busy at times to cope'

Appendix

The partisan make-up of these constituencies was: two marginal seats (1 Liberal Democrat/Conservative, 1 Liberal Democrat/Labour); Four comfortable Conservative seats and two safe Conservative seats; Two Labour comfortable seats and 11 Labour safe seats. The average electorate across the 21 constituencies was 66,829, with a mean turnout of 63 per cent. Excluding Scotland and Northern Ireland, which have slightly different electoral arrangements, the average constituency electorate in 2015 was just under 65,000, while the mean turnout across the two regions was 64.6 per cent, and across England and Wales 65.8. Based on census 2011 data, the broader representativeness of the eight local authority areas on a range of socio-economic occupational variables is detailed in table 1. Surveyed local authorities have an occupational structure slightly less concentrated at the higher ends of the occupational spectrum than in England and Wales, and slightly more at the lower ends, but appear broadly representative. The methodology is therefore appropriate and accepted in this field of study.

Table A1: Socio-economic/occupational representativeness of participating local authorities, 2011 census (%)

	Surveyed local authorities	England & Wales
Higher managerial, administration & professional	7.4	10.3
Lower managerial, administration & professional	18.6	20.8
Intermediate	13.0	12.7
Semi-routine	17.2	14.1
Routine	14.0	11.1
Never worked & long-term unemployed	5.4	5.6
Full time students	7.6	9.0

Source: 2011 census, table KS611EW.

[2] In both Germany and Spain, it is an obligation or duty of citizenship to work at the polls if requested, in a manner something equivalent to jury duty in Britain. We are grateful to XXX (Blinded for peer review) for highlighting Spanish experience.

[3] Local authorities in the UK do not always routinely hold an email list of poll workers requiring the survey to be conducted by post rather than online. The local authorities were: Broadland, Co. Durham; Great Yarmouth; Kings Lynn and West Norfolk; Northumberland; Norwich; South Tyneside, Sunderland.

[4] See also Hall et al's (2007) account of the difficulties of sampling and surveying poll workers in the US context.

[5] The constituencies, ordered by local authority, are as follows. North East: Bishop Auckland; Durham City; Easington; North Durham; North West Durham; Sedgefield; Berwick; Blyth; Hexham; Wansbeck; Jarrow; South Shields; Houghton & Sunderland South; Sunderland Central; Washington & Sunderland West. Norfolk: Broadland; Norwich North; Norwich South; Great Yarmouth; North West Norfolk; South West Norfolk.

[6] Measured on a scale of performance ranging from scores of 7 to 21. The mean for the eight local authorities in this study was 15.13; the nationwide mean was 15.75. See Clark (2015a; 2016) for more detail.

[7] The median income in Britain was roughly around £20,100 ($30,592) before tax in 2012-13, with median income for the North East £19,400 ($29,527) and for Norfolk £18,100 ($27,548) (HMRC, 2015: 15).

[8] See: Office for National Statistics (2013) Full Report - Graduates in the UK Labour Market 2013, http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160105160709/http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_337841.pdf [16/12/2016].

[9] Data available at: https://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/research/audit-of-political-engagement [6/7/2017]. Data are taken from the dataset which combines data from the first decade of the Audit.

[10] For example, Austria has such a system (OSCE/ODIHR, 2016).

[11] This is likely to be due to self-selection bias, where those who are interested in a particular issue, volunteer to respond to social surveys.

[12] The successor to the longitudinal British Household Panel Survey (BHPS). The question was: Are you currently a member of any of the kinds of organisations on this card? The organisations offered were around 16 organisations ranging from political parties and trades unions to religious groups, voluntary services groups and pensioners groups. The frequencies are available at: https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/documentation/mainstage/dataset-documentation/wave/3/datafile/c_indresp/variable/c_org [8/3/2016].

[13] Low pay for poll workers is not confined to the UK. In the 2016 American Presidential election, poll workers in Oklahoma were paid a stipend of $87 for their day's work https://twitter.com/OKelections/status/796021005940572161 [18/11/16].