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Chapter 8

Poll Workers[1]

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Many electoral malpractices are commonly thought to occur in polling stations (Birch 2011; Lehoucq 2003; Lehoucq and Molina 2002; Norris 2015a; Schedler 2002). Accusations of ballot stuffing, voter intimidation and impersonation are often made in electoral autocracies but also in established democracies. Similarly, it is often suggested that less deliberate problems occur in these places, such as long queues at polling stations, poor ballot design or restricted opening hours (James, 2014a). These claims are difficult to substantiate, however, as rival politicians make partisan claims to discredit their opponents or push for reforms that they perceive will maximise their votes (James 2012; Minnite 2000; Piven et al. 2009). Meanwhile, the media often focus on cases of maladministration such as lost ballot papers – giving a perception of widespread difficulties. High profile individual incidents, however, can overshadow the millions of other votes accurately cast and counted and give an unfair perception of the overall quality of electoral management.

This chapter argues that one way of trying to measure the frequency of any problems, and by implication identify the necessary policy fixes, is through the regular use of poll worker surveys. By asking those on the frontline of democracy, we are provided with new information about the extent of electoral integrity. Although there are commonly many blockages in the policy process which prevent evidence based policy, poll worker surveys can make evidence based policy more likely. Surveys increase the *transparency* of how EMBs function and the extent and nature of any frontline problems in electoral democracy. They also increase the accountability of governments and EMBs because the public dissemination of this information can help civil society contest claims made by these actors and dislodge any myths and claims about electoral integrity peddled by rival political elites. In short, poll worker surveys can contribute considerably towards the transparency/accountability/compliance nexus outlined by the introduction to this volume and enrich horizontal accountability but also downward accountability.

The chapter begins by explaining the types of problems that are often thought to occur in electoral administration and management. The concept and process of evidence based policy making and

policy blockages are introduced and the case made for poll worker surveys as an instrument to encourage evidence based policy. Hypotheses are derived about the expected performance of British electoral administration based on our existing knowledge. The methods and results are then described. The first-ever non-US poll worker survey was undertaken in Britain at the 2015 general election. The poll worker survey (n=1,321) reveals this aspect of British elections to be in generally good health and contradicts the existing literature in a number of ways. Our sample suggests that British poll workers, unlike their US counterparts, tend to be experienced at working in the electoral process and are drawn from a commonly re-used pool. They generally thought that their training was of appropriate length, interesting and of practical use for the day. Problems do occur, however. These include: suspicions about electoral fraud, doubts about the identity of the electors, inappropriate behaviour from party officials, electors being turned away and queues at polling stations. It is argued that the findings from this and other poll worker surveys can be used to 'feedback' into the recruitment of poll-workers, those concerned about the quality of oversight in a localised system of electoral management, and it has implications for the design of electoral laws in Britain.

Common Defects in Election Administration and Management

Studies that seek to assess the quality of elections in established democracies have usually focused on electoral systems, franchise legislation, and party finance. There has been a growth of studies, however, that seek to establish whether electoral integrity is compromised by problems in electoral administration and management. Electoral administration refers to the 'administrative systems through which the electoral register is compiled, and votes are cast and counted' (James 2010, 369). A primary focus, going back to Wolfinger and Rosenstone's study of *Who Votes* (1980) was how the voting and registration processes used for elections can shape turnout, confidence in elections and possibly who wins. Worldwide, there are variations in how citizens cast their vote, the deadline by which they need to register and how they register, for example (Massicotte et al. 2004). Procedures have since been categorised as either being *expansive* in so far as they commonly increase electoral participation or *restrictive* in so far as they commonly reduce levels of participation (James 2012, 25-61). Electoral management, meanwhile, focusses on the systems for managing staff and resources within electoral management boards. The use of performance standards, audits and sufficient funding, for example, have been demonstrated to improve the quality of elections (Clark 2014; 2015; 2016; James 2014a; Alvarez, Atkeson, Hall 2012a ;2012b).

Three forms of electoral malpractice are commonly claimed to be present in electoral administration and management in democracies. The first is that integrity of the polling and registration process is undermined by *cases of and opportunities for electoral fraud* by citizens or party agents. Using a legalistic definition of electoral integrity, scholars have focussed on how electoral laws have been

broken by, for example, stuffing ballot boxes, personation in the polling station or casting bogus postal votes. Some studies have sought to estimate or measure the number times electoral laws are broken (Ahlquist et al. 2014; Christensen and Schultz 2014), while others, noting the difficulty in measuring cases of electoral fraud, have argued that particular voting procedures, that are enshrined in national laws, undermine electoral integrity by having an insufficient security provisions (Lehoucq 2003). In response to this, some advocate increased security provisions, such as voter identification requirements, removing convenience voting provisions such as mail-in ballots or asking citizens or the use of election monitors (Fund 2008; Sobolewska et al. 2015; Kelley 2012). Critics, however, argue that actual cases of electoral fraud are few and far between and do not warrant the type of policies prescribed (Minnite 2010; Levitt 2014) and data from the perceptions of electoral integrity index suggest that this is not the most serious issue in most countries (Norris et al. 2015b). Restrictive procedures are therefore commonly thought to be unnecessary.

A second problem is that voting and registration procedures can provide *bureaucratic hurdles for participation*. The classic rational choice institutionalist claim is that voter participation will be higher when the logistical costs of balloting are lower. Researchers therefore often prescribe more convenient or expansive voting procedures to maximise electoral participation. These might include postal voting, election-day registration, public holidays on Election Day or remote electronic voting. Restrictive procedures such as voter identification, biometric voter identification or early registration deadlines should be discouraged because they will lead to a reduction in democratic participation (Hall 2013; James 2010; 2012; Wang 2012).

A third group of problems commonly identified are concerns about *failures of electoral management and poor organisational performance* (James 2014a) – such as errors made by returning officers and by election officials in the management of the polling process. These are not necessarily the consequence of deliberate partisan efforts to alter the result of the election. Instead, they might result from human error, under–resourcing or poor performance management systems and/or leadership (James 2013; 2014a; 2016; forthcoming; Clark 2014; 2015; 2016). Although there are many *examples* of maladministration it is often unclear how systematic these problems are.

The Promise of Evidence-Based Policy

How can problems with electoral administration be diagnosed and addressed? One approach is through the comprehensive collection, public availability and assessment of evidence. This can lead to greater knowledge about the extent and nature of the problems which can inform the appropriate selection of policies. This optimistic view of evidence based policy-making has been long desired. It is informed by the enlightenment and a rationalist approach to policy making (Howlett 2009;

Sanderson 2002; Turnpenny et al. 2009).   Politicians have also expressed a concern for policies to be more evidence based – with the Blair governments in the UK, for example, expressing the view that 'what matters is what works' (Parsons 2002).

The prospects of evidence based policy have been well-criticised.   Post-positivists have widely questioned the modernist assumptions of making scientific progress. Evidence based policy, critics argue, is also politically naïve.   Furthermore, human agency means that we actors are reflective, strategic and may change their behaviour in the light of 'evidence'. However, researchers from the realist tradition argue that although the world is partially socially constructed, social constructions have real causes and these causal processes can be the subject of study (Coles 2004; Pawson 2005). The prospects of evidence-based policy can also be considered if the multiple factors that affect policy outcomes are identified (as we do below). A form of evidence-based policy is therefore possible (Pawson 2005) and it can therefore improve both the accountability of government effectiveness and the substance of policy outcomes (Sanderson 2002, 3).

Deploying a simple five stage approach to the policy process, it is argued here that the use of poll worker surveys can contribute towards change in electoral policy and better electoral integrity outcomes (figure 1). Governments, electoral management boards and multinational agencies often claim to deal with the problems with elections identified above based on evidence and 'best practice' yet it is often less clear how 'best practice' has been identified and whether it has really been adopted (Norris 2015b). Poll worker surveys act as a useful policy instrument for helping to achieve evidence-based policy.

What is a poll worker survey?

A poll worker survey involves asking those electoral officials working in polling stations on the day of the election about their experiences. Following the 2000 US Presidential election the focus of research switched from voting technologies to the humans involved in implementing elections (Hall et al. 2007, 647). A small but growing number of US research projects have therefore undertaken poll worker surveys to identify who poll workers are, what motivates them to serve and affects their enjoyment, whether they have the appropriate skills with technology to work on election day and how effective training schemes are for poll workers are (Alvarez, Atkeson, and Hall 2007a; Alvarez, Atkeson, and Hall 2007b; Glaser et al. 2007; Mac Donald and Glaser 2007; Mockabee, Monson, and Patterson 2009; Senecal 2007).   Yet a review of the literature on poll workers concluded that more research was needed (Burden and Milyo 2015). Moreover, this literature remains American in orientation. This method or these empirical questions have not been explored outside of the US and certainly not in

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the UK. Nor do electoral management boards routinely publish data on the demographic profiles or views of their poll workers.

A focus on poll workers' experience is especially important because research has highlighted how this has been a problematic point in the implementation of elections (for example, see: Atkeson et al. 2010). There are also good theoretical reasons for undertaking poll worker surveys. Recent work on electoral management has drawn from public management theorists who have long argued that such front-line workers are an important focus of study. James (2014b) has argued that scholars should mine the knowledge and experience of electoral officials as a useful way of establishing the integrity of the electoral process and the suitability of the voting technologies. This follows theories of bottom-up implementation which argue that governmental projects, such as elections, can appear to be well designed from above, but can be flawed on the ground if policy-makers do not consider the unique perspectives that front-line workers have (Sabatier 1986; Pressman and Wildavsky 1973). According to Lipsky they constitute 'street-level bureaucrats' who have the opportunity to make and remake policy (Lipsky 1980). Meanwhile, Durose (2009) argues that such workers have 'local knowledge' which, citing Yanow, consists of: 'a kind of non-verbal knowing that evolves from seeing, interacting with someone (or some place or something) over time' (Yanow 2004, 12). This makes them uniquely positioned to understand the effects of different voting processes and problems with the functioning of elections.

Poll Worker Surveys as Triggers for Change

Having collected the information (stage 1 in figure 1) it needs to be disseminated (stage 2). Both the survey findings and the data can be disseminated informally or formally (such as to structured committees) within EMBs, the government, other government agencies, political parties, pressure groups and academics. They can also be made available to the public via the media or deposited online.

Yet, providing information is not enough. There is no guarantee that survey information will influence the decision-making process because of a number of well-known policy blockages (stage 3). The government and political parties may consider that the survey findings or the policy proposals that may follow from them will adversely affect their electoral prospects (James 2012). There might be resistance to change from within the civil service because of disinterest (Wright et al. 2013) or budget maximisation (Dunleavy 1991), cultural resistance or limits on the availability of resources (Clark 2014; 2016). However, in spite of this, the provision of poll worker information can influence policy by acting as a resource for civil society to hold governments to account (Gerken 2009; James 2015; forthcoming)

A poll worker survey may influence the decision making of a number of actors (stage 4). It should provide an EMB with greater performance information which will allow it to address problems of adverse selection in the recruitment process. Derived from principal-agent theory, this is the problem whereby the principal (EMB) is unsure whether they have appointed agents (poll workers) of sufficient quality (Alvarez and Hall 2006). It also provides important information about the quality of elections on the ground. This information about the quality of elections is also of use for government, who may use it to introduce measures to offset difficulties. It also provides them with important information about the performance of the EMB. For civil society, opposition parties and the public then the key findings of poll worker surveys can help them to hold EMBs and governments to account. Key information about the performance of the electoral institutions and the implementation systems for running elections can be used to propose alternative policies, champion change and criticise government policy (Gerken 2009; James 2015) (stage 4). Electoral integrity outcomes are then at least partially a product of these institutions and practices (stage 5), which can then be subject of evaluation again (stage 1).

In short, the policy blockages may therefore prevent poll worker surveys having a direct outcome on electoral policy. However, they can indirectly lead to changes in electoral laws and management practices to improve the quality of the electoral process (stage 5).

[Insert Figure 1 around here]

Hypotheses

On the basis of the comparative literature discussed so far, and the specific literature on Britain discussed next, it is possible to develop five hypotheses about the type and extent of the of the problems likely to be experienced in the polling process in Britain. These hypotheses collectively embody a critical view that electoral integrity is commonly undermined at the polling place in older advanced democracies such as Britain.

H1: Electoral fraud and intimidation at the polling station is widespread. Britain has a relatively relaxed system of voter verification at the poll which only requires voters to state their name and address (Alvarez, Bailey and Katz 2008). It also (at the time at which this research was conducted) had a system of household registration in which one person can add names to the electoral register. Both of these have been criticised. A judge presiding over high profile cases of electoral fraud in Birmingham an elections judge declared that the levels of fraud would 'disgrace a banana republic' (Mawrey 2005).

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The voter registration system was previously described by international observers as 'childishly simple to defraud' (Council of Europe 2008). One further form of electoral malpractice is the intimidation of voters by party officials. There are tight requirements on where party officials can stand and behave at the polling station (Law Commission, Scottish Law Commission, and Northern Ireland Law Commission 2014) but the intimidation of voters during the polling process was a key issue raised by the judge presiding over the 2014 Tower Hamlets case (Mawrey 2015). We might therefore expect there to be problems such as attempts at personation and voter intimidation.

H2: Bureaucratic hurdles prevent voting. Although there are no ID requirements and registration was done on a household basis, other voting and registration procedures are restrictive. Citizens are required to vote in person at a specific polling station close to their home, unless they request a postal or proxy vote in advance. They cannot therefore vote at an alternative location close to their work or somewhere else more convenient. In the run-up to the 2015 general election concerns were also raised about the implementation of individual electoral registration (James 2014b). This was the first contest at which newly registering citizens would have to do individually and provide a national insurance number before their name was added to the electoral register. Existing registrants would not be removed from the register until 2015 or 2016 (subject to a government decision) but it was thought that young and mobile citizens could be affected (James 2014b). This was in the context of an electoral register that has seen a long term decline in levels of completeness to as low as 82% in 2011 (Rosenblatt, Thompson, and Tiberti 2012). This raised the prospect of unregistered voters turning up on election-day. Our second hypothesis is therefore that restrictive practices will lead to voters being unable to vote at the poll.

H3: Failures of electoral management are widespread. Advanced democracies are increasingly described as being ridden with electoral mismanagement. Problems became apparent in the UK during the 2010 general election and reported in the international media at the 2010 general election because of queues at polling stations which prevented voters from casting their ballot and some polling stations running short of ballot papers. An Electoral Commission review estimated that 1,200 people were affected at 27 polling places in 16 constituencies (Electoral Commission 2010). We might expect four core problems to be found:

- *H3a: Poll workers are inexperienced.* One criticism of US election administration on polling day is that many poll workers are inexperienced, employed only for the short term of the election (e.g. Hall et al. 2007; White et al. 2015). Since British staff are employed for the day only, we might expect the same to be true there.

- *H3b: Training is of low quality.* The literature on poll workers has generally argued that their training may not be adequate for the pressures that they are likely to face on polling day (e.g.

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Hall et al. 2007). A decentralised delivery system is thought to contribute towards this (Gerken 2009). The UK also has a decentralised delivery system with local government officials responsible for implementing training. However, Clark (2015) shows variation in the extent that returning officers meet centrally defined standards. We might therefore expect variation in training, with some perceiving their training was of poor quality.

- *H3c: Other frontline problems are common.* As noted above the 2010 UK general election exposed many problems with the quality of electoral management. In the run-up to the 2015 general election local authorities had to undertake major cuts and evidence shows that funding can influence election quality (Clark 2014; 2016). We might therefore expect a range of other problems to become apparent.

- *H3d: Satisfaction with the democratic process is likely to be low.* As a result of the above three problems, the confidence that those on the frontline have of the health of the democratic system would be low.

Research Design

The British 2015 General Election Poll Worker Survey was designed and implemented to establish the demographic characteristics of British poll workers, the training they undertake, the extent to which they find the training satisfactory, the problems they face implementing elections and how widespread these problems are.

There are three different types of 'poll workers' in the UK. *Presiding Officers*' duties include responsibility for liaising with the key-holder of the building, organising the layout of the polling station, maintaining order in the polling station, monitoring tellers outside of the poll and supervising polling clerks. *Polling clerks* are responsible for checking the eligibility of electors against the register, marking the register and issuing ballots to the elector (Electoral Commission 2015a, 2-3). *Counting Assistants* sort and count the ballot papers at a central location, after the ballot boxes have been securely transported from the various polling stations (Electoral Commission 2015c). All three 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 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. With the co-operation of electoral services departments in eight English local authorities, hard copies of the questionnaires were

distributed to poll workers on election day along with pre-paid envelopes, asking them to complete the survey after the election and return it by post.

The participating local authorities were based on a convenience sample. Of the fourteen local authorities approached, eight agreed to participate. Four local authorities were located in the North East of England, and four in Norfolk.[2] These local authorities, between them, administered 21 of the 650 parliamentary constituencies at the general election. Convenience sampling is often criticised for not guaranteeing a representative sample (Bryman 2008, 183-4). Notably, the local authorities did not include those where the most prominent cases of electoral fraud have been found, such as Birmingham or Tower Hamlets. While acknowledging these criticisms, there is unfortunately no way to 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 polling station workers exists, nor were the authors able to obtain an estimate of the numbers of polling station 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'.[3]

This notwithstanding, such a convenience sampling 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.[4] It therefore provides greater data than has hitherto been collected, and in different parts of England. Gaining agreement from local authorities 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, Monson, and Patterson 2009; Claassen et al. 2008).

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) index of performance in the 2010 general election.[5] 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.

(Insert table 1 about here)

In total, 3,350 questionnaires were distributed to poll workers by their local authorities on the day of the election. Poll workers were asked to complete and return them by mail in a pre-paid envelope to the researchers. The response rate was 39.4 per cent. The analysis is therefore based on responses from 1,321 polling station workers in a mix of rural, urban and mixed local authorities and constituencies. This is an acceptable response rate for a postal survey. All responses detailed below are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Results

Electoral fraud

It should be stressed at the outset that most poll workers appear to have had a trouble-free polling day. This nothwithstanding, we found a small number of problems. The key findings are summarised in Table 2. Across the eight authorities, 11 poll workers (just under 1 per cent) suspected one case of electoral fraud. This figure may overstate the actual number of cases because two poll workers in the same polling station may have reported the same case. However, the cases were spread over five different local authorities, meaning that there were at least five such cases. A related problem of integrity was poll workers encountering people asking to vote whose identity they were unsure of. With no requirement for voter ID, electors simply have to state their name and residence to the poll worker before being given a ballot. Poll workers' perceptions of the integrity of this process gives a unique first-hand reflection on this act through their 'local knowledge'. A small but significant propotion of poll workers, 6 per cent, encountered at least one such individual. Cases were found in all eight authorities. The survey also asked poll workers whether they had 'no problems maintaining the secrecy of the vote at the polling station.' Again, a small but significant proportion, 5 per cent, 'strongly disagreed' or 'disagreed.' Based on this sample, suspicions of 'bogus voters' among poll workers and problems with voter secrecy are are few in number, but do exist.

Table 2 also illustrates that cases of voter intimidation were again limited to a few in number, but the inappropriate behaviour of party officials can pose a problem. Over 5 per cent of poll workers reported some problems, although these were mostly limited to individual indiscretions by one individual party official. Qualitative comments by poll workers suggested that 'Tellers' were acting within the rules, but were intimidating electors, by for example, 'causing obstruction at the entrance'. Younger voters in particular, not aware that they did not have to give them their poll card number, were described as being intimidated.[6]

Highlighting the tension between transparency and ballot security, a less serious problem, which, depending on how it is practised, could be categorised as electoral fraud, is citizens taking photos (or 'selfies') in polling stations. This is legal in many countries, such as the Netherlands, and encouraged as a means of increasing turnout but taking pictures of ballot papers is illegal under UK law and many polling stations now display signs forbidding the taking of photos in and around the polling station. Experience of observation at British elections by one of the researchers has suggested there are some difficulties in this area. While some of this appears innoccuous, pictures can potentially be used to identify people who have voted, while pictures of completed ballot papers may be used in fraudulent schemes. Polling station workers were not always as aware of the difficulty as might be expected in previous elections. There was therfore a high profile public awareness campaign before the election by the Electoral Commission to discourage it (Rudgard 2015). Cases of this were low but also still present, with 5 per cent of poll workers coming across at least one case.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

Bureaucratic hurdles

The data suggest that electors being turned away from the polling station because their name was not on the register was a more widespread difficulty. As table 2 demonstrates, just under a third of poll workers (31 per cent) reported no problems, but the remaining respondents turned away at least one person. The modal response at 39 per cent was 2-5 people who asked to vote but were not on the register. Given that polling stations can be as large as 2,500 electors (Electoral Commission 2015b, 7), this figure is low. However, it does identify a problem for some citizens wishing to cast their vote, as under different rules, they may have been able to vote. Qualitative responses to the survey suggested that many of these may have been people who had gone to the wrong polling station. In some cases this was because their polling station was different to last time, others seemed to have not read their poll cards. Some polling stations were able to contact their central team to identify where citizens should be voting. But other teams did not know where to redirect voters, either out of a lack of

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knowledge of what to do or because they could not contact their main office because the telephone number provided was often engaged. Citizens seemed to have not voted as a result of these problems. One clerk said that: 'a number of people turned round after we redirected them to correct station, saying they could not be bothered going thus losing approximately 20 plus voters'. Another complained that they should have had a list of other polling stations.   Better poll card design or allowing citizens to vote at different polling stations may have prevented this problem.

Poll worker quality

The survey asked a range of questions of poll workers to establish their socio-economic characteristics. In both regions, the ranks of poll workers are predominantly female. Women account for 63 per cent of the sample of poll workers. This gender split holds, and is statistically significant at the p<.01 level, when considering the different positions held by the respective genders. Around 57 per cent of presiding officers were women, and 42 per cent men. Similarly, around two-thirds of polling clerks were women. In terms of their ethnic background, 97 per cent of poll workers were White British. According to the 2011 Census, 96.8 per cent of the combined populations of the local authorities included in the study were 'White British'. This, of course, may well be different in some of the major, and considerably more multicultural, British cities such as Birmingham or London

Understanding who participates is an important indicator in political science. The average age of polling station workers in 2015 was 53 years of age, with age ranging from between 20 to 82 years old. Just over three fifths were employees with a further 31 per cent indicating that they had retired. Slightly over half (52 per cent) indicated that they had to take time off to work on polling day. Just under a third (32 per cent) of poll workers claimed an annual income of between £10,000 to £19,999, with a further 32 per cent claiming an income of between £20,000 to £29,999. In terms of occupation, 43 per cent of poll workers were either managers or administrators, with a further 18 per cent from clerical backgrounds and 17 per cent from a profession or technical occupation.

Poll workers typically have to follow complex guidelines on polling day while dealing with electors, sometimes under pressure. This means that there is a premium on staff that are either well educated, or experienced in complex administrative tasks performed accurately and swiftly. Certainly, poll workers appear to be relatively well educated. Approximately the same proportion of respondents claimed to have undertaken higher education below degree level as reported holding a university degree (just under 24 per cent respectively). A further 21 per cent reported having the equivalent of 'O' level education, with, at the other end of the educational spectrum, 10 per cent being educated to postgraduate level. This compares with 2011 national census figures for England and Wales of 27 per

cent educated to degree level or above, 28 per cent educated to the equivalent of 'O' level/GCSE and 12 per cent holding 'A' level higher school qualifications.

British poll workers were experienced at their jobs. While just under a third (32 per cent) had worked at four elections or less, the average number of elections which British poll workers had worked at was 9.6. This will include local and European elections, by-elections and so on, not only general elections. Remarkably, a small proportion of respondents claimed to have worked at more than 30 elections. On average, as might be expected from the responsibility of the position, Presiding Officers had worked at around 15 previous elections. By comparison, polling clerks had less experience, having only worked at between 5-6 elections on average.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

Experience at previous elections impacts upon how poll workers are recruited to work on election day. Table 3 sets out the methods through which poll workers were recruited to work in the 2015 general election in both regions. The predominant method of recruiting poll workers was through the pool of people who have previously had experience of staffing polling stations. The dominance of those who have worked previously at elections means that a relatively experienced workforce is available to draw upon. While this might suggest a limited pool of poll workers, the fact that a sizeable proportion are also recruited through other routes indicates a workforce which is nevertheless open to those with less or no experience.

Poll workers were commonly described positively in the qualitative comments by their co-workers. However, in some instances poll workers claimed that their colleagues 'muddled through' and that their superiors 'lacked leadership'. Some poll workers suggested that elderly polling clerks were not up to the job. As one put it:

'[We] need younger staff. Had one old lady who coughed the whole day and needed to go for frequent breaks and the other old lady couldn't lift anything either.'

Poll worker training

Of all respondents, 92 per cent attended one training session prior to polling day. Such training can take a range of forms. Typically it consists of training by electoral services managers using presentations adapted from templates developed by the UK Electoral Commission. More occasionally, training might involve role play of possible scenarios, and additional material such as DVDs or literature to read through. Table 4 outlines various potential types of training and the views of poll workers as to its quality and effectiveness. The main form of training experienced by respondents was

a talk or presentation from a senior electoral official, which 82 per cent rated either good or excellent. Other methods were less regularly utilised. Nonetheless, literature to read on the polling process was widely thought either good or excellent, while approaches such as running through possible scenarios, or, where appropriate, on-the-day training from the Presiding Officer, were also well regarded.

What of the content of training sessions? Most poll workers reported finding that the training was of appropriate length and interesting. Only 6 per cent thought the training too long, while 9 per cent thought it was boring. Most also appear to have felt that the content was useful; 71 per cent agreed that enough time had been spent covering election law and procedures, while 90 agreed the sessions had been easy to understand. More specific instructions also received similar agreement as to how useful they had been. For example, in relation to opening and closing the polling station, 93 per cent agreed that instructions for opening the polls had been clear, while 91 per cent agreed that instructions for closing the polls had also been clear. This is important given difficulties with queues as polls closed in 2010 which saw considerable variation in practice in affected polling stations (Clark 2015). Finally, while 88 per cent agreed that instructions around voter identification were clear, only two thirds agreed that instructions regarding the casting of provisional ballots were clear.

Overall, the poll workers appear to have thought that their training stood them in good stead for polling day. Four-fifths of respondents agreed that the training had prepared them well for election day, while 83 per cent indicated agreement with the statement that 'after training I was confident in my ability to do my job on election day'. In total, 86 per cent rated their training either good or excellent. Some were clearly unprepared, however. As one poll worker put it:

> 'I felt very underprepared for role as only training was a talk through a leaflet. I had never done this job before and would have been very helpful if I had actually seen the register of electors and the corresponding number list. Although it was simple to pick up, still felt I should have been shown beforehand.'

[Insert Table 4 about here]

Other frontline problems on polling day

A third category of possible problems relate to *the maladminstration of the poll.* The 2015 Poll Worker Survey suggested that the frequency of problems are low, but again not uncommon. Table 5 details the different types of problems and their frequencies, with poll workers being offered a Likert scale to respond to. More problems were experienced setting up the polling station (5 per cent either 'agree' or 'strongly agree') than closing down the poll (2 per cent). In most cases poll workers worked well together on the day. As with 2010, problems with queues were experienced, but this time they were more likely to be during (6 per cent either 'agree' or 'strongly agree') than at the end of the day (3 per

cent either 'agree' or 'strongly agree'). Queues during the day were found across all 8 local authorities and 16 of the 21 constituencies covered. One poll worker, highlighting difficulties when elections for different institutions are held concurrently, complained:

> 'The polling station needed extra staff and booths. There were constant queues as people had to wait to vote. The poll clerks were constantly explaining procedure as there were so many different papers holding up the system. We also needed someone to assist with posting the votes in box and explaining the hold up to outside queues.'

Another complained of being ''ridiculously busy' with 'queues out of the doors for 90% of the time':

> 'I managed to get 5 minutes for lunch but there was no time for anything else. We were all exhausted by the end of the day. More staff needed, even if just to give us better breaks.'

There were complaints by a few poll workers about the quality of the venue for the polling station. Some disabled voters reported problems to them accessing the building, others complained about the distance they had had to travel. The building was sometimes described as being inapprorpiate. One polling station was in a school while children were being taught. Another described their polling station as 'wobbly and unsafe'.

Ballot secrecy was also undermined in some circumstances. Qualitative comments from poll workers revealed how 'husband and wife' might confer across polling booths and in one polling station:

> 'Quite a few people did not use the voting booths - they simply completed the voting slip on our desk in front of us so we could clearly see who they were voting for, despite us informing them otherwise.'

Duplicates and errors in the electoral register were also reported by poll workers. A further problem was that citizens would ask to vote but would find that they had previously registered for a postal vote.

[Insert Table 5 about here]

Satisfaction with the Democratic Process

To what extent are poll workers satisfied with the electoral and democratic process? Since poll workers have unique knowledge on how elections work on the ground, and where the difficulties are, their evaluations are important. If they exhibit large degrees of dissatisfaction, then it may be surmised that additional difficulties exist which have not yet been identified. The survey therefore asked a

number of questions regarding poll workers' satisfaction with British democracy, and their satisfaction with their own role in the democratic process.

[Insert Table 6 about here]

Table 6 sets out responses to these questions on democratic satisfaction. On the whole, poll workers appear more satisfied than dissatisifed, even if more than a fifth show some level of dissatisfaction. Poll workers certainly appear more satisfied with the democratic process than the broader electorate they serve. For instance, the 2015 British Election Study shows that 49.9 per cent were either very or a little dissatisfied with UK democracy (N=30,027), while the equivalent finding on dissatisfaction with English democracy was 50.2 per cent (N=21,841).[7] Importantly, there is broad satisfaction with how the electoral process works on polling day among poll workers. More than four fifths indicate some level of satisfaction with polling day operations, while only 5 per cent express any dissatisfaction. The highest level of dissatisfaction (18 per cent) exists when asked about levels of information people have on the electoral process. This is interesting because it confirms another similar finding, and suggests it remained relevant in 2015. This is that the accessibility of information to electors had the highest levels of non-compliance in the Electoral Commission's performance standards for returning officers in the 2009 European and 2010 general elections (Clark 2015). Finally, respondents appear most uncertain or neutral about changes to the electoral process; just over two-fifths indcate neither satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

While these questions adressed poll workers' satisfaction with the electoral process generally, this can be separated from their own satisfaction, or otherwise, regarding their work on polling day. This is a very long day at work for them, beginning well before polls open at 7am, and going on beyond polls closing at 10pm as polling stations are packed up. There can be long periods of tedium with few voters turning out, and periods which are extremely busy. What level of job satisfaction do poll workers have? In short, they are highly satisfied; 99 per cent of respondents were either very or somewhat satisfied with their work on election day. Given that a sizeable number return to work regularly at elections, it might also be expected that high proprtions were planning to do so after 2015. Indeed, responses to a question asking whether respondents were likely to work at the next election suggested a higher proportion than probably will in actuality do so; 98 per cent indicated they were either very or somewhat likely to work at the next election. Whatever the reservations among poll workers about the electoral process, it does not appear to put them off working at it. As one put it:

> 'I have been a poll worker many times and I enjoy the work. Other people should try this and get a greater understanding of the democratic process.'

Discussion

16

To what extent were the hypotheses confirmed or disconfirmed? The suspected levels of electoral fraud by poll workers was low; lower than expected by H1. It should be noted that the local authorities chosen were not among those cited by the Electoral Commission as being 'at risk' of electoral fraud. But the study seems to demonstrate that electoral fraud was not widespread and not taking place on 'an industrial scale' as has often been implied. It should be noted, however, that the study focussed on electoral fraud in the polling place and not postal voting fraud. Yet the study does suggest that more liberal voting procedures such as the absence of voter ID does not necessarily go hand in hand with low levels of confidence and trust in the electoral process.

In contrast, the study did reveal poll workers having to turn away a number of people from polling stations, confirming H2. This was a regular difficulty, experienced more often by poll workers than other problems, and suggests that although the focus of recent governments has been on increased security arrangements and proposals for voter identification requirements (Electoral Commission 2014; Golds 2015), the quality of the electoral register is a more significant problem.

Contrary to expectations (H3), the survey revealed that the administration of elections was generally good. Poll workers were largely experienced, enjoyed their training and problems were rare. The contrast with the US experience suggests that other democracies may be able to learn 'best practice' from the UK. This is not to say that they were absent. Queues were a problem at pinch points in the day and this illustrates the importance of resources for well-run elections (Clark 2014; 2016; James 2014a).

Conclusion

The polling station is a place where electoral malpractices are commonly thought to occur. This chapter has made the case for the wide-spread use of poll worker surveys of learn more about the actual frequency of these problems and incentivise actors across the electoral process to maximise performance. Through an original poll worker survey the chapter has revealed new findings about the integrity of the electoral process in Britain. The findings partially contradict previous work on electoral malpractices in electoral administration which suggested that electoral fraud was the biggest problem plaguing British elections (Mawrey 2015; Sobolewska et al. 2015; Wilks-Heeg 2008). Unlike their US counterparts, British poll workers tend to be experienced at working in the electoral process and are drawn from a commonly reused pool. They generally found the training of appropriate length, interesting and of practical use for the day. They appear to have experienced few problems on the day in 2015. The difficulties they did face, although small in number and likely quite localised, remain significant. There is therefore a strong case for poll worker surveys becoming standard practice

amongst electoral administrators worldwide with the data being publicly available. Although this would not always lead to policy change because of the many blockages to evidence based policy, this would significantly increase the transparency of elections, provide electoral managers with key performance information, enrich the scholarship on electoral integrity and help civil society to hold governments and electoral agencies to account.

Figure 1: A stagist approach to the impact of poll worker surveys on electoral integrity
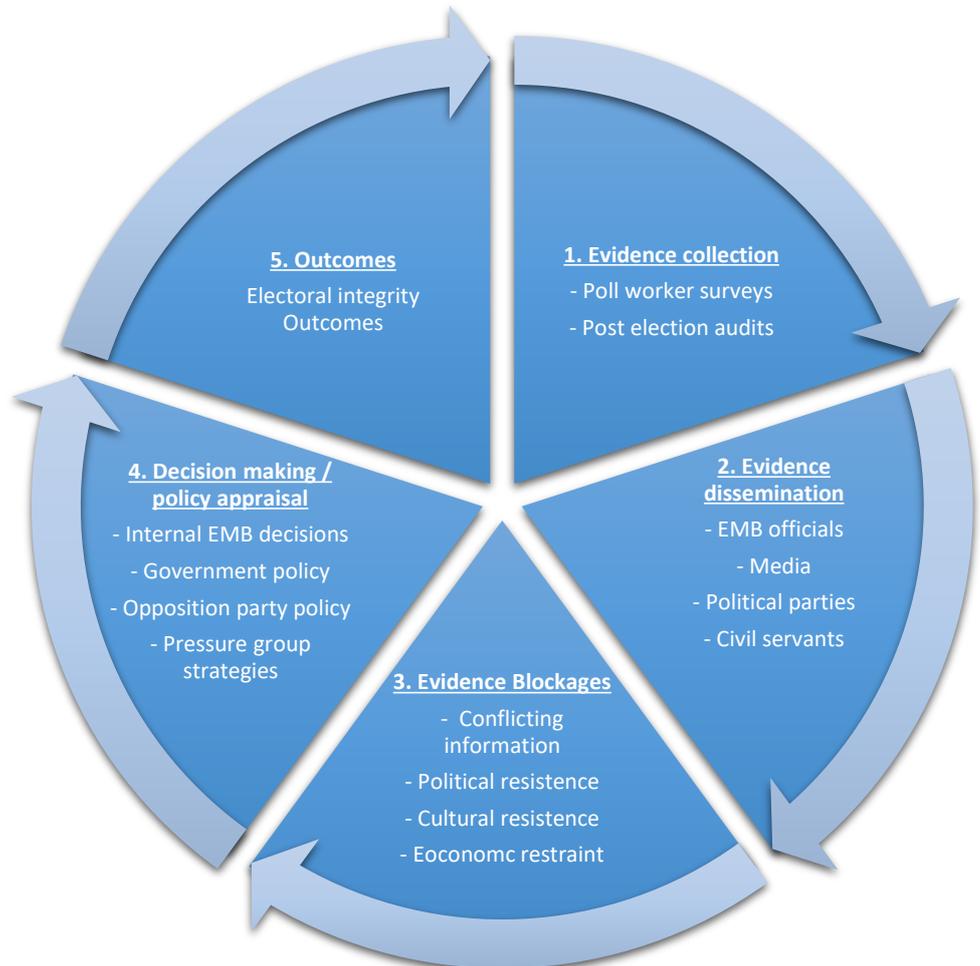

5. Outcomes
Electoral integrity
Outcomes

1. Evidence collection
- Poll worker surveys
- Post election audits

2. Evidence dissemination
- EMB officials
- Media
- Political parties
- Civil servants

3. Evidence Blockages
- Conflicting information
- Political resistence
- Cultural resistence
- Eoconomc restraint

4. Decision making / policy appraisal
- Internal EMB decisions
- Government policy
- Opposition party policy
- Pressure group strategies

Table 1: 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.

Table 2: Problems Experienced by Poll Workers (%)

	None	1	2-5	6-10	10+	N
Suspected cases of electoral fraud	99	1	0	0	0	1273
People ask to vote whose identity I was unsure of	94	5	1	0	0	1264
People taking photos of ballot/polling stations	95	5	1	0	0	1274
Members of parties being where they shouldn't be	95	4	1	0	0	1273
Members of parties intimidating public	95	2	2	1	0	1274
People asking to vote but not on register	31	16	39	10	3	1271

Source: 2015 British General Election Poll Workers Survey

Table 3: Recruitment methods %

Worked at previous elections	55
By a local council official	15
By volunteering	12
By another poll worker	7
Official job posting by council	6
Other	5
N	1298

Source: 2015 British General Election Poll Workers Survey

Table 4: Forms of Poll Worker Training Methods %

	Did not receive	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	N
Talk/presentation from senior election official	3	3	12	52	30	1227
Video/DVD	81	1	3	11	3	1144
Role-playing of scenarios	85	1	4	7	3	1129
Q & A of possible scenarios	29	2	17	38	14	1166
On the day training by the Presiding Officer	49	1	5	26	20	1019
Informal telephone conversation with election official	78	1	3	11	7	1116
Booklets to read through	0	1	10	53	36	1215

Source: 2015 British General Election Poll Workers Survey

Table 5: Electoral maladministration at the polls (%)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	N
Problems setting up polling station	64	28	3	4	1	1306
Problems closing polling station	64	31	3	1	1	1256
Poll workers worked well together	3	1	1	26	70	1303
Voting process went smoothly at my polling station	3	1	2	37	57	1291
Problems with queues during the day	48	38	8	4.0	2	1295
Problems with queues towards end of the day	56	36	5	1	2	1276

Source: 2015 British General Election Poll Workers Survey

Table 6: Satisfaction with democractic process (%)

	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither	Satisfied	Very satisfied	N
How British democracy works generally	4	20	28	44	5	1286
How electoral process works on polling day	1	4	12	61	22	1286
Level of information about electoral process	3	15	27	48	7	1285
Changes to how electoral process works	2	12	41	41	5	1275

Source: 2015 British General Election Poll Workers Survey

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[2] Local authorities in the UK do not 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.

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

[4] 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.

[5] This was 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 (2015) for more detail.

[6] Party campaigners may however see this as a legitimate campaign activity. Constituency campaigning surveys in British general elections have regularly asked about party activists taking numbers outside polling stations (Denver and Hands 1997).

[7] Data from Wave 6. The British Election Study data is available at: http://www.britishelectionstudy.com/data-objects/panel-study-data/ [23/7/2015].