

THE 1997 GENERAL ELECTION IN SCOTLAND: AN ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

David Denver

In recent years there have been marked differences between what happens in general elections in Scotland - in terms both of the campaign and the results - and what happens in the rest of the United Kingdom. There are three main reasons for this. Firstly, the pattern of party competition in Scotland is more complex and more varied than in England. This is mainly due to the presence and electoral impact of the Scottish National Party (SNP) but, in addition, there are several constituencies, especially in the Highlands and Borders, where the Liberal Democrats are serious contenders. Thus, in the 1992 election Labour and the SNP occupied the first two places in 33 constituencies, the Conservatives and Labour in 20, the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats in 10, the SNP and Conservatives in 6 and Labour and the Liberal Democrats in 2. Secondly, the mass media in Scotland are distinctive. The Scottish (as opposed to UK) press is read by the great majority of voters and coverage of news and current affairs focuses on specifically Scottish concerns, issues and personalities. The same applies to television and radio in Scotland. Thirdly, there is a distinctive Scottish issue - the question of Scotland's constitutional position within the UK - which has dominated coverage of recent campaigns, although it is not clear that it dominates the concerns of the electorate to the same extent. Nonetheless, general election campaigns in Scotland are conducted almost in isolation from what is going on in the rest of the country and the results usually deviate markedly from those elsewhere.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the results of recent general elections in Scotland has been the decline in support for the Conservatives, both in absolute terms and relative to their performance in England and Wales. This decline began in the 1959 election and continued through the 1960s and

David Denver is a Reader in Politics, Lancaster University.

The 1997 General Election in Scotland

1970s but it accelerated sharply in the 1980s. In the 1987 election the Conservative share of the Scottish vote reached an all-time low of 24.0%. In 1992, however, the Conservatives fought an aggressively unionist and anti-devolution campaign and were rewarded (although the causal connection is not clear) with a slight stemming of the tide against them, as their share of the vote increased to 25.7%.

Between 1992 and 1997, however, the unprecedented plunge in popularity which the Conservatives experienced over Britain as a whole was also evident in Scotland. In the European elections in June 1994 they received only 14.5% of the Scottish vote, and in the elections for new local authorities in April 1995 they plumbed new depths, with only 11.3% of the votes cast. Scottish opinion polls up to and during the election campaign told the same story of deep unpopularity. The Conservatives were clearly heading for a poor result in the election but it is doubtful if even the most pessimistic among them could have expected the disaster that occurred.

Table 1

The distribution of votes and seats in Scotland, 1992 and 1997

	Share of Votes (%)		Seats Won	
	1992	1997	1992	1997
Conservative	25.7	17.5	11	0
Labour	39.0	45.6	49	56
Lib Dem	13.1	13.0	9	10
SNP	21.5	22.1	3	6
Others	0.8	1.9	0	0

Table 1 shows the results of the general election in Scotland as compared with the 1992 election. The Conservative share of the vote fell by 8.2 percentage points while Labour's rose by 6.6 points. Although swing is not a very useful measure where more than two parties are in contention, these figures indicate a swing of 7.4% from Conservative to Labour - significantly smaller than the British swing of 10.3%. Voting support for the Liberal

Scottish Affairs

Democrats was very similar to the level obtained in 1992 but it was more effectively distributed across constituencies so that the number of Liberal Democrat seats increased from 9 to 10. SNP support rose only slightly but the collapse in the Conservative vote resulted in the number of SNP seats doubling from 3 to 6. Despite receiving almost half a million Scottish votes, the Conservatives won no seats at all - a devastating outcome for what is supposed to be a major political party and a grim irony, it might be said, given that the Conservatives remain resolutely opposed to electoral reform. As has been the case for many years now, Labour completely dominates political representation in Scotland.

The smaller Conservative to Labour swing in Scotland - largely explained by the fact that there were many fewer Conservatives available for the other parties to recruit - resulted in a diminution of the difference between Scotland and England and Wales in terms of support for the major parties. In 1992 the Conservatives in Scotland were 18.8 percentage points lower than in England whereas the difference in 1997 was 15.4 points. Similarly, Labour had 4.2 points more of the vote in Scotland in 1992 than they did in England and Wales while in 1997 their share was only 1.3 points greater. To this extent, then, there was a narrowing of the electoral divide between Scotland and the rest of the UK. It is worth noting, however, that the Referendum party made less of an impact in Scotland in 1997, gaining only 27,000 votes (0.96%) as compared with 2.8% in England and Wales. The best performance by an 'other' candidate in Scotland was by Tommy Sheridan, who garnered 3,639 votes (11.1%) representing the Scottish Socialist Alliance in Glasgow Pollok, pushing the Conservative into fourth place and the Liberal Democrat into fifth.

As already indicated, patterns of party competition vary markedly across Scotland. This is illustrated in table 2 which shows the shares of votes obtained by the parties in the four cities and in 12 different 'regions' of the country. (See Appendix for definitions.) There is little to cheer the Conservatives in these figures. Only in Perthshire and Angus did their vote share reach 30%. Across the populous central belt, from Fife in the east to Ayrshire in the west, they exceeded 20% only in Edinburgh and gained a derisory 8.4% in Glasgow. Labour, on the other hand had more than 50% of votes cast in eight of the sixteen areas identified. Nonetheless there remain a few areas - in rural constituencies to the north and east of Perth and in the Borders - in which Labour support is very weak. The geographical distribution of Liberal Democrat support is close to ideal for a minor party under the first-past-the-post electoral system. As can be seen, they are very

The 1997 General Election in Scotland

weak in Dundee and Glasgow and across much of the central belt. On the other hand, they have concentrations of support in some areas and it was this that enabled them to win seats - 4 in the Highlands and Islands, 2 in North East Scotland, 2 in the Borders and one each in Fife and Edinburgh. The contrast with the SNP is clear. The SNP had more votes than the Liberal Democrats but table 2 shows that their support is relatively evenly spread across the country. As a consequence they received a poor reward for their overall performance, winning only six seats when strict proportionality would have given them 16.

Table 2

Party shares of votes in cities/regions 1997 (%)

	Con	Lab	Lib Dem	SNP	No of Constits
Aberdeen	20.6	43.8	18.9	15.6	3
Dundee	14.5	52.4	5.9	24.9	2
Edinburgh	22.9	42.2	18.4	14.8	6
Glasgow	8.4	60.6	6.4	19.9	9
Highlands & Isles	13.9	28.6	31.6	23.6	6
North East Scot	28.2	12.6	25.2	32.1	4
Perth & Angus	30.0	17.2	8.5	43.1	3
Fife	14.6	47.6	17.9	18.6	5
Central Scotland	18.5	51.7	5.4	23.8	4
Lothians	13.3	53.8	8.1	23.7	4
Lanarkshire	10.4	60.0	6.7	20.9	9
Renfrewshire	17.9	50.7	10.0	20.2	5
Dunbartonshire	17.0	52.5	9.3	20.0	3
Ayrshire	19.2	54.0	4.8	20.7	5
Borders	22.9	21.5	38.4	14.4	2
Dumfries & Galloway	29.2	33.2	8.9	26.7	2

Scottish Affairs

Notes: see footnote 1 for details of the constituency composition of these 'regions'
Rows do not total 100 because votes for 'others' are not shown.

Changes in support for the parties between 1992 and 1997 in the different parts of Scotland are shown in table 3. The Conservative share declined everywhere, but the data suggest that the decline was greatest where they had most votes to lose - in Aberdeen and Edinburgh rather than in the Labour strongholds of Dundee and Glasgow; in North East Scotland, Perth and Angus, and Dumfries and Galloway where they previously held seats. Labour's advance was of broadly similar magnitude across most of the country but there is evidence of voters appreciating the tactical situation in North East Scotland, where the increase in Labour's vote share was relatively small and support for the Liberal Democrats improved very sharply. Labour's biggest increases were in Aberdeen and Dumfries. There was also little variation in the changes in SNP support, although it is striking that they lost ground in all four cities while at least holding their vote share in all other areas. The best SNP performance in terms of changes in share of votes was in Perth and Angus where they won all three seats.

Table 3
Changes in party shares of votes in cities/regions 1992-97

	Con	Lab	Lib Dem	SNP	No of Constits
Aberdeen	-8.2	10.3	-1.8	-1.5	3
Dundee	-4.1	6.5	0.0	-3.6	2
Edinburgh	-8.8	8.1	2.3	-0.9	6
Glasgow	-5.1	5.5	-1.6	-0.8	9
Highlands & Isles	-8.4	7.6	-2.2	1.6	6
North East Scot	-13.2	4.3	6.7	0.6	4
Perth & Angus	-11.7	6.2	-1.0	5.7	3
Fife	-9.0	6.8	0.7	0.5	5
Central Scotland	-7.1	7.5	-1.3	0.7	4
Lothians	-7.0	6.7	-1.2	0.9	4
Lanarkshire	-6.4	5.3	-0.7	0.0	9
Renfrewshire	-8.9	8.6	-1.4	1.0	5
Dunbartonshire	-11.3	6.0	0.8	3.6	3

The 1997 General Election in Scotland

Ayrshire	-7.6	6.9	-1.3	0.9	5
Borders	-9.4	8.8	-2.0	0.3	2
Dumfries & Galloway	-13.4	11.3	-1.3	1.9	2
Scotland	-8.2	6.6	-0.1	0.6	72

Analysing electoral change at constituency level between 1992 and 1997 is inhibited by the fact that new constituency boundaries came into effect in 1997. Only 10 Scottish constituencies were unchanged, while 33 had major changes, which involved gaining or losing more than 20% of their original electorate (Denver 1995). We can measure changes in party support in individual constituencies, however, by using a set of 'notional' 1992 results which were calculated for the new constituencies. These were widely used in the media and by the parties in the run-up to the election and will also be the basis for most subsequent analyses of the results. (The calculations for the Scottish constituencies were produced by me and are published in Rallings and Thrasher (1995).) It has to be remembered, however, that the notional 1992 results are estimates of how the 1992 votes would have been distributed under the new boundaries and this is bound to make the measures of change in individual constituencies more problematical than usual. In addition, the estimates necessarily assume that all voters would have voted in the new constituencies exactly as they did in the old ones (since all actual 1992 votes have to be accounted for). But since many voters, especially in Scotland, now found themselves in seats in which the tactical situation differed from that obtaining in their old seat in 1992, this would lead us to expect significant deviations from the overall pattern of change in constituencies.

In fact, the estimates of notional vote shares in 1992 proved robust. A simple regression analysis predicting the 1997 vote share for each of the parties in each of the constituencies on the basis of estimated vote shares in 1992 produces R^2 figures (proportion of variation explained) of 0.922 for the Conservatives, 0.954 for Labour, 0.912 for the Liberal Democrats and 0.875 for the SNP. These are as good as would be expected even if the boundary changes had not necessitated the use of notional results. The comparable statistics for constituency shares of vote in 1987 and 1992 were: Conservative 0.962, Labour 0.954, Liberal Democrats 0.910 and SNP 0.796.

Scottish Affairs

We have already seen that changes in party support between 1992 and 1997 varied from area to area across Scotland. At constituency level the variations were, of course, even greater. The Conservatives, for example did not increase their share in any seat but their losses ranged from a modest 1.2 points in Linlithgow to a massive 22.0 points in Gordon. Labour, on the other hand saw its vote-share fall in only two constituencies - by 1.5 points in the somewhat atypical Orkney and Shetland (which was unaffected by boundary changes) and by 0.7 points in Airdrie and Shotts (which was probably a continuing effect of the bitterly-fought 1994 by-election, when the SNP came close to defeating Labour). Labour's share increased everywhere else, with a 17.9 points increase in Dumfries being the largest of all. Both the Liberal Democrats and the SNP had a mixture of increases and decreases in support across constituencies. The Liberal Democrats did best in Gordon (+15.4) and worst in the adjacent Aberdeen North (-9.7) - the latter probably reflecting defections from erstwhile tactical voters who were transferred from the old Gordon seat - while the SNP's biggest gain was in Angus (+9.1) and biggest loss in Glasgow Pollok (-7.1).

Changes in vote shares in individual constituencies were related to the tactical situation, as indicated by the estimated 1992 constituency results. Table 4 shows that, in constituencies in which the notional 1992 results put Labour and the Conservatives in the first two places, support for the Liberal Democrats and the SNP hardly changed while the Conservative share of votes dropped sharply and Labour's share increased more than in other cases. Where it was Labour and the SNP which were in contention the Conservatives dropped much less and the SNP declined a little. Only in cases where the Liberal Democrats were in contention with the Conservatives did the former party's vote increase - and these were, in the main, the only seats which the Liberal Democrats stood a chance of winning. As can be seen, the Conservative share of the vote dropped very sharply (-11.3) in these cases while the SNP's share was relatively unchanged. Similarly, the SNP benefited significantly from heavy Conservative losses (again -11.3) in Conservative/SNP seats while in these cases the Labour advance was at its weakest and the Liberal Democrats declined slightly. Given the changes in constituency boundaries, which made calculation of the tactical situation difficult in many cases, the data in this table - while confirming the major move towards Labour across all types of constituency - provide impressive evidence of sophisticated voting by the Scottish electorate. Moreover, this sophistication appears to have been mainly directed towards defeating the Conservatives.

The 1997 General Election in Scotland

No other constituency variables were systematically associated with changes in the shares of votes gained by Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the SNP. In the case of the Conservatives, however, it is clear that the stronger their previous position the greater were their losses. The correlation coefficient measuring the association between notional Conservative share of the vote in 1992 and change in share between 1992 and 1997 is -0.743. This is a very strong and significant relationship. The negative sign indicates that the larger the previous share of the vote, the smaller (i.e. more strongly negative) was their increase in vote share. In many constituencies in Scotland the Conservatives were already very weak before 1997 and had little to lose. In this election, however, they lost support most heavily in the relatively few remaining constituencies in which they still had a substantial vote.

Table 4

Changes in Party Shares of Votes According to Tactical Situation in Constituency

	Con/Lab	Lab/SNP	Con/Lib Dem	Con/SNP
<i>Change in:</i>				
% Con	-9.3	-5.7	-11.3	-11.3
% Lab	8.4	6.2	5.8	5.5
% Lib Dem	-0.2	-1.2	3.6	-0.4
% SNP	0.8	-0.6	0.5	4.4
N of seats	23	30	11	6

Notes: Figures shown are means. Constituencies are divided according to the parties which were in first and second places according to the notional 1992 results. Only two constituencies, in which Labour and the Liberal Democrats were in the first two places, are excluded.

The question of how the parties' vote shares changed relative to one another is addressed by the data in table 5. This shows correlations between changes in vote share for each pair of parties and it is striking that (for the second consecutive election) there is no significant relationship between changes in Labour and Conservative support. Where Labour had larger increases this was not accompanied by larger decreases for the Conservatives; smaller Labour gains did not produce smaller Conservative losses. Changes in Conservative vote share were more closely associated with changes in the

Scottish Affairs

share won by the Liberal Democrats while changes in Labour's share varied inversely with changes in support for both the Liberal Democrats and the SNP. The changes for the latter two parties were almost independent of one another.

The varied pattern of party competition makes it difficult to generalise, but what these figures suggest is that, despite some spectacular Labour (Eastwood, Dumfries) and SNP (Perth, Tayside North) gains of seats from the Conservatives, the overall Scottish pattern was one in which increases in Labour's vote share were mainly at the expense of the SNP and Liberal Democrats while the flow of votes from the Conservatives disproportionately benefited the Liberal Democrats. In addition, however, although the Referendum party won relatively few votes these appear to have been mainly at the expense of the Conservatives - the Referendum vote share correlated significantly with change in Conservative share (-0.287) but was unrelated to the changing levels of support for the other parties.

Table 5

Correlations between changes in the parties' shares of the vote 1992-97

Con and Lab	Con and Lib Dem	Con and SNP	Lab and SNP	Lab and Lib Dem	Lib Dem and SNP
-0.073	-0.361*	+0.119	-0.349*	-0.469*	+0.083

*Note: N=72; * = statistically significant $p < .01$.*

CONSTITUENCY SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND PARTY SUPPORT IN 1997

One does not need to be an expert to know that variations in how constituencies vote is strongly related to differences in their social and economic structure. It is obvious that Labour is weaker in rural and more affluent areas and stronger in inner cities, council estates and old industrial areas, for example. The social underpinnings of the SNP and Liberal Democrat votes are less obvious, however, and given the collapse of the Conservatives in 1997 it is pertinent to consider whether variations in their support continue to be structured in the traditional way.

The 1997 General Election in Scotland

Table 6 show correlations between various aspects of the social and economic structure of Scottish constituencies and the shares of the vote gained by the four parties. Despite the fact that Conservative support is, overall, at a significantly lower level than before, variations across constituencies are related to the social characteristics of constituencies much as would be anticipated. The more middle class a constituency (% professional and managerial) the bigger the Conservative vote and the more working class a constituency (% manual workers) the smaller their vote. Housing patterns - the percentage of owner occupiers and of council tenants - are even more strongly related to Conservative support, although the percentage of private tenants has no effect. Conservative support is also stronger where there are more older people and weakens the more young people there are. A simple perusal of election results shows that the Conservatives are generally stronger in rural areas and weaker in more urban areas - and especially weak in inner cities. This is reflected in the coefficients for % employed in agriculture and persons per hectare, the latter being a good measure of the position of constituencies on a rural-urban dimension. The percentage of households with no car is an indicator of the general level of prosperity or poverty in a constituency and, as can be seen, has a strongly negative association with the size of the Conservative vote. The proportion of the population belonging to ethnic minorities does not correlate significantly with Conservative vote - or, indeed with the level of support for any of the parties. This is because in Scotland ethnic minority voters are concentrated in a small number of seats: in a great many seats their numbers are insignificant.

Table 6

The structure of party support in 1997

	Con	Lab	Lib Dem	SNP
% Professional and Managerial	0.479*	-0.280*	0.240*	-0.221
% Manual workers	-0.414*	0.157	-0.166	0.298*
% owner occupiers	0.645*	-0.546*	0.376*	-0.281
% private tenants	0.225	-0.457*	0.391*	0.074
% local authority tenants	-0.671*	0.687*	-0.507*	-0.009

Scottish Affairs

% young people aged 18-29	-0.356*	0.373*	-0.244*	-0.074
% old people aged 75 +	0.289*	-0.272*	0.196	-0.042
% employed in agriculture	0.430*	-0.765*	0.523*	0.325*
persons per hectare	-0.360*	0.426*	-0.239*	-0.216
% households with no car	-0.626*	0.670*	-0.450*	-0.146
% ethnic minority	-0.165	0.151	-0.113	-0.040

Note: Coefficients which are asterisked are statistically significant, $p < .05$.

The pattern of support for Labour is almost a mirror image of that for the Conservatives but two differences are worth noting. First, Labour's vote is relatively weakly related to the class composition of constituencies - and, indeed, is not significantly related to the percentage of manual workers. This is because in constituencies with large proportions of manual workers Labour are frequently in contention not with the Conservatives but with the SNP. Secondly, Labour does worse the more private tenants there are. Here, while the coefficient for Conservative vote is not significant, that for the Liberal Democrats is. This means that while Labour does worse the more private tenants there are it is the Liberal Democrats, not the Conservatives who do better. In general, however, Liberal Democrats and Conservatives tend to do better or worse in the same sorts of constituencies. The coefficients for the two parties are all in the same direction, although those for the Liberal Democrats are mostly weaker. The two exceptions are percentage privately renting and percentage employed in agriculture. The distinction between rural and urban areas makes an even bigger difference to the level of Liberal Democrat support than it does to the Conservatives.

What is striking about SNP support is the fact that it is not structured very strongly by the 'usual' social and economic characteristics of constituencies. Only three coefficients are statistically significant. There are relatively weak relationships between the size of the SNP vote and percentage manual workers and percentage employed in agriculture. The latter reflects SNP strength in rural North-East Scotland but, in general, the party draws similar support in all types of constituencies. Therein lies one of its problems

The 1997 General Election in Scotland

because under the electoral system it is geographical concentrations of votes (which are linked to social concentrations) which win seats.

Three cautionary points need to be made about the interpretation of these correlations. First, the coefficients are derived from aggregate data and refer to the characteristics of constituencies, not individuals. We cannot infer from these data that people with no car don't vote Conservative or that agricultural workers vote Liberal Democrat. Rather, the figures tell us that the greater the proportion of households with no car in a constituency the lower, usually, is the Conservative vote and the more agricultural workers there are in a constituency the better the Liberal Democrat vote. Secondly, the social composition variables are based on the 1991 census so that, although the data would have given an accurate picture of the social make-up of constituencies at the time of the 1992 election, they were six years out of date by the 1997 election. Thirdly, the various measures of social composition are themselves highly inter-correlated. Thus constituencies in which a large proportion of households have no car tend also to have larger proportions of ethnic minority voters, council tenants, manual workers and young people than average, as well as higher population density.

Sorting out which variables are the most important influences on levels of party support requires multivariate analysis, which indicates whether a particular variable still exerts a significant influence when all others are held constant. Such an analysis reveals that in the case of the Conservative vote five variables remain (or become) significant (% professional and managerial, % ethnic minority, % young people, % council tenants and % private renters) but together they explain only 60% of the variation in the Conservative vote across constituencies. For Labour there are just two significant variables (% in agriculture and % council tenants) but together they account for 74% of the variation in the Labour vote. As the simple correlation coefficients indicated, both the Liberal Democrat and SNP vote are more weakly related to the make-up of the constituencies. Only 36% of the variation in Liberal Democrat support is accounted for by the two remaining significant variables in the multivariate analysis (% in agriculture and % manual workers) while for the SNP only % in agriculture is significant and the proportion of variation explained is only 9%.

Apart from Labour, then, variations in the shares of votes obtained by the parties in Scotland are not very closely related to variations in the nature of constituencies (even the variation explained in Labour's case is not very great). This is partly a consequence of the diffuse nature of Liberal Democrat

Scottish Affairs

and SNP support but it also reflects the diverse forms which party competition takes in different constituencies and the resultant tactical voting which takes place. For example, on the basis of its socio-economic composition it would be expected that a constituency such as Edinburgh West would be strongly Conservative, but for purely local reasons there have been a series of close contests between them and the Liberal Democrats. In similarly upmarket Eastwood, the Conservatives have been in a very comfortable position in the past and in 1997 it was Labour, not the Liberal Democrats, who reaped the benefit of Conservative decline.

TURNOUT

In the euphoria on the one hand and gloom on the other which accompanied Labour's landslide victory in the election, little attention was paid by media commentators to another significant feature of the results - the sharp fall in the turnout of electors. In Scotland, overall turnout declined from 75.4% in 1992 to 71.4% in 1997. This drop (-4.0%) was smaller than in Britain as a whole (-6.3%) but Scottish turnout was nonetheless lower than at any general election since 1945.

Table 7

Turnout and Turnout Change in Cities/Regions 1992-97 (%)

	1992	1997	Change	No of Constits
Aberdeen	68.1	69.9	+1.8	3
Dundee	71.0	68.5	-2.5	2
Edinburgh	75.0	71.7	-3.3	6
Glasgow	69.0	61.6	-7.4	9
Highlands & Isles	72.6	70.8	-1.8	6
North East Scot	74.1	70.5	-3.6	4
Perth & Angus	76.5	73.4	-3.1	3
Fife	75.9	69.6	-6.3	5
Central Scotland	78.7	76.2	-2.5	4
Lothians	78.5	73.6	-4.9	4
Lanarkshire	77.1	72.0	-5.1	9

The 1997 General Election in Scotland

Renfrewshire	77.1	73.0	-4.1	5
Dunbartonshire	79.2	75.9	-3.3	3
Ayrshire	79.1	75.7	-3.4	5
Borders	77.9	75.3	-2.6	2
Dumfries & Galloway	80.8	79.3	-1.5	2
Scotland	75.4	71.4	-4.0	72

Table 7 shows the 1997 turnout in the cities and sub-areas and also an estimate of turnout change since 1992. The lowest turnout was in Glasgow (61.6%) but three of the four cities, along with Fife, dipped below 70%. Dumfries and Galloway, containing two marginal seats, recorded the highest turnout (as in 1992) but no area of Scotland exceeded 80%. Looking at the figures for change, the apparent increase in turnout in Aberdeen is probably misleading, since the city now contains many voters who were previously in constituencies outside its boundaries. Otherwise, the fall in turnout occurred right across Scotland and was particularly severe in Glasgow and Fife.

It is not possible to analyse turnout change at constituency level, since it is impossible to estimate what the 1992 turnout might have been in the new constituencies, but we can focus on 1997 turnout itself and attempt to explain how this varied across constituencies. It need hardly be said that there were very considerable differences in turnout. In four constituencies (all in Glasgow) less than 60% of the electorate turned out, the lowest figure being in Glasgow Shettleston (55.9%). On the other hand, the best turnout was in Stirling (81.8%) and five other constituencies had a turnout in excess of 78% (Eastwood, Dumfries, Strathkelvin and Bearsden, Galloway and Upper Nithsdale and Ayr).

Previous research has established that variations in constituency turnout in general elections can be largely explained by two sorts of factors. Firstly, turnout levels are affected by the social composition of constituencies. In broad terms, turnout tends to be lower in poorer areas and in those in which a large proportion of the electorate lives in privately rented accommodation (which is associated with a relatively transient population) and higher in more affluent areas. The second factor is the electoral context in constituencies. In particular, turnout is usually higher in more marginal areas

Scottish Affairs

and lower in those which are safe for one party or another. This occurs, at least partly, because parties put more effort into campaigning in more marginal seats. In addition, strong campaigns by minor parties can lead to increased turnout.

Table 8 shows correlation coefficients measuring the association between constituency turnout in the 1992 and 1997 elections and previous marginality ('notional marginality' in the case of 1997) as well as a number of variables indicating the social composition of constituencies.

The figures show that, as expected, turnout tends to be greater in more marginal seats (correlation +0.535) and that this relationship was stronger in 1997 than in 1992. In terms of social composition, there is no significant association between the occupational structure of Scottish constituencies and turnout. On the other hand, housing structure is clearly an important influence. The coefficient for percentage owner occupiers is strongly positive while the other housing categories produce negative coefficients. This is generally interpreted as reflecting the fact that areas with high levels of owner occupation tend also to be areas that are relatively affluent and relatively stable in terms of population movement. The negative coefficient for proportion of people who privately rent their housing is as expected. As owner occupation has expanded in Scotland, it is increasingly the case that those living in council accommodation are the poorest and most deprived section of the community. As can be seen, in both 1992 and 1997 the more council tenants there were in a constituency, the lower was the turnout.

Table 8

Correlates of Scottish Constituency Turnouts. 1992 and 1997

	1992	1997
Previous marginality	0.398*	0.535*
% Professional and Managerial	0.199	0.197
% Manual workers	-0.229	-0.176
% owner occupiers	0.484*	0.587*
% private tenants	-0.463*	-0.432*
% local authority tenants	-0.253*	-0.328*
% young people aged 18-29	-0.581*	-0.580*

The 1997 General Election in Scotland

% old people aged 75 +	-0.192	-0.188
% employed in agriculture	0.087	0.223
persons per hectare	-0.554*	-0.698*
% households with no car	-0.610*	-0.732*
% ethnic minority	-0.446*	-0.471*

*Note: * = statistically significant, $p < .05$*

Survey studies find that younger voters are significantly less likely to vote than other groups and this is reflected in the strong negative correlation found using the constituency data. There is no significant association with the proportion of older people, however. The number of persons per hectare in a constituency indicates the extent to which it is an urban or rural area and the data show that turnout is lower in more urban areas - and especially in those with a very high population density (inner cities) - than it is in less densely populated areas. The proportion of households with no car is strongly negatively related to turnout levels and, finally, the larger the proportion of ethnic minority residents the lower is the turnout.

As with patterns of party support, we need to be careful in interpreting the constituency data and can examine all of these variables simultaneously in a multivariate analysis. This shows that just three variables are significant when all others are held constant - previous marginality, percentage with no car and percentage private renters - and together they account for 71% of the variation in constituency turnouts. 'Predicting' the 1997 turnout of individual constituencies on the basis of these three variables we find that it was greater than expected in Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (+6.5), Dumfries (+5.7) and Strathkelvin and Bearsden (+5.1) and lower than expected in Orkney and Shetland (-6.6), Aberdeen North (-6.0), Kirkcaldy (-5.8) and Banff and Buchan (-5.3).

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that the results of the general election in Scotland were dramatic - especially in terms of seats won. It seems likely, however, that they will bring about even more dramatic changes in Scottish politics. Although devolution was not at the top of the list of voters' concerns, the fact that only parties committed to changing Scotland's constitutional position won seats was widely interpreted as a mandate for change. The new

Scottish Affairs

Government has already announced plans for holding a referendum on the question in the Autumn of 1997. The failure of previous devolution plans in 1979 was closely linked to the unpopularity of the Government at the time and a speedy referendum is clearly designed to forestall that problem on this occasion. If things go according to plan then there should be a Scottish Parliament in being - and, moreover, a Parliament elected by some form of proportional representation - by 1999.

Given this last point it is important to remember that Labour's overwhelming victory in the election, in terms of seats, was won with less than half of the votes. This provides a glimmer of light for the other parties. If the Conservatives can successfully resolve their current internal struggles over the party's attitude to devolution (and other matters related to personalities) then all three 'opposition' parties might yet find that they have a significant role to play in the new Scottish politics especially if the Labour Government runs into a period of electoral unpopularity. Under a proportional system Scotland will be an even more fascinating arena of electoral competition.

APPENDIX

The former nine Scottish Regions (and 53 Districts) on which the new constituencies were based have now been replaced by 29 unitary authorities. Although a few constituencies cross local authority borders I have grouped the new constituencies into 16 sub-areas of Scotland. The allocation of constituencies to these sub-areas is as follows

Aberdeen: Aberdeen Central, North and South

Dundee: Dundee East and West

Edinburgh: Edinburgh Central, East & Musselburgh, North & Leith, Pentlands, South, West

Glasgow: Glasgow Anniesland, Baillieston, Cathcart, Govan, Kelvin, Maryhill, Pollok, Shettleston, Springburn

Highlands & Islands: Argyll & Bute, Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross, Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber; Orkney & Shetland, Ross, Skye and Inverness West, Western Isles

North East Scotland: Aberdeenshire West & Kincardine, Banff & Buchan, Gordon, Moray

Perth & Angus: Angus, Perth, Tayside North

Fife: Dunfermline East and West, Fife Central, North East Fife, Kirkcaldy

Central Scotland: Falkirk East and West, Ochil, Stirling

Lothians: East Lothian, Linlithgow, Livingston, Midlothian

The 1997 General Election in Scotland

Lanarkshire: Airdrie & Shotts, Clydesdale, Coatbridge & Chryston, Cumbernauld & Kilsyth, East Kilbride, Glasgow Rutherglen, Hamilton North & Bellshill, Hamilton South, Motherwell & Wishaw

Renfrewshire: Eastwood, Greenock & Inverclyde, Paisley North and South, Renfrewshire West

Dunbartonshire: Clydebank & Milngavie, Dunbarton, Strathkelvin & Bearsden

Ayrshire: Ayr, Carrick Cumnock and Doon Valley, Cunninghame North and South, Kilmarnock and Loudoun

Borders: Roxburgh and Berwickshire, Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale

Dumfries & Galloway: Dumfries, Galloway & Upper Nithsdale

REFERENCES

Denver, D. (1995), 'The Fourth General Review of Parliamentary Constituencies in Scotland', **Scottish Affairs**, Spring, pp. 60-72.

Rallings, C. and Thrasher, M. (1995), **Media Guide to the New Parliamentary Constituencies**, Local Government Elections Centre, University of Plymouth.

May 1997