

## **‘POST-MODERN’ CAMPAIGNING? CONSTITUENCY PARTY ACTIVITIES IN THE 2003 SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS**

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Election campaigning is of central interest to the study of comparative politics. Recently efforts have been made to conceptualise how parties campaign. Robert Rohrschneider (2002) for example offers what he calls a mobilising-chasing continuum whereby, at the ends of this spectrum, parties either concentrate on mobilising their core electorate, or on chasing or converting undecided voters. Another idea that has gained some credence is that of ‘post-modern’ campaigning (Farrell and Webb 2000, pp.103-108; Norris 2000a; 2000b, pp. 137-161). In large part, this is predicated upon the existence of increasingly professionalized, high-tech and targeted campaigns. However, this literature does not explicitly spell out what happens at the local level. Using data from a survey of Scottish constituency parties carried out in the aftermath of the 2003 elections, this article therefore examines the campaigning techniques utilised by Scotland’s constituency parties in the 2003 Scottish parliament election in an attempt to gain an insight into what this means on the ground. Are constituency parties using up-to-date ‘post-modern’ techniques or are they relying on tried and tested methods in order to get the vote out? Although the effects of these techniques are not addressed in this particular assessment, the article nevertheless provides an initial snapshot of constituency campaigning in post-devolution conditions.

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## **THE 'POST MODERNISATION' OF ELECTION CAMPAIGNING**

A number of authors have highlighted changes in the campaigning methods of political parties in recent decades. In particular, the idea of 'post-modern' campaigning has been forwarded by Pippa Norris (2000a; 2000b, pp. 137-161), while David Farrell and Paul Webb (2000, pp.103-108) have similarly identified moves towards 'new methods' of campaigning. Underpinning both sets of arguments is the targeting of constituencies and the deployment of new technologies such as the internet to communicate with electors. An implication of Norris's arguments, however, is that what might be termed 'second order' elections (i.e. non-Westminster elections, such as those for local government, the devolved institutions or the European Parliament) are less likely to demonstrate evidence of such methods.

There is nevertheless a considerable gap in these arguments. As David Denver and Gordon Hands (2000, p. 1) rightly note, very little of these discussions on 'post-modern' campaigning actually focuses at the local level. In part, this is likely to be because local campaigns tend to be seen by many as 'ritualistic' (Kavanagh 1970). At the same time, falling memberships and levels of activism call into question the ability of local parties to execute many of their roles, not least those relating to campaigning. Nevertheless, numerous studies have highlighted the importance of constituency electioneering in benefiting a party in terms of votes and in having a positive effect on turnout (for example: Denver and Hands 1997, pp.268-275; Denver and MacAllister 2003; Pattie and Johnston 2003). It is therefore important to understand constituency party activity.

How then do the campaigning efforts of Scotland's constituency parties fit into these models? A postal survey of the constituency associations of Scotland's four main political parties was carried out in the aftermath of the 2003 Scottish parliament election in order to establish how these local parties fulfil their democratic functions in post-devolution Scotland. While the survey examined a number of areas of local party life, a substantial portion of it was devoted to campaigning activities. Details of the survey can be found in the appendix at the end of the article. The data from the survey provides an excellent opportunity to examine local campaign activities in an election other than that for Westminster (see Denver and MacAllister 2003). Here, taking a cue from the Norris and Farrell and Webb approaches, 'new' methods of campaigning examined at constituency level are contact between headquarters and the constituency, campaign preparation, and, following Denver and

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Hands (2000), the use of personal computers, the internet, direct mail and telephone canvassing. Data is also presented on a further aspect, specifically related to the Additional Member electoral system used in Scottish parliament elections. This is the amount of effort put into campaigning for parties' regional list candidates.

#### **'NEW' METHODS OF LOCAL CAMPAIGNING IN SCOTLAND?**

Central to the post-modern model is the idea that central party officials closely co-ordinate activities in the constituencies. Indeed, David Denver et al (2004, p. 304) indicate that in a Westminster context local campaigns 'have ceased to be truly local: in the key seats, central party headquarters have sought to impose their model of campaigning on the constituencies, to import special organisers and to manage the campaigns'.

One indicator of post-modern campaigning then might be that there is regular HQ-constituency contact both before and during an election campaign. Respondents were asked how often contact about campaign matters took place between party HQ and the constituency prior to and during the 2003 campaign. While this cannot unravel the directionality of such contact, nevertheless a clear picture emerges of local associations in relatively regular contact with their Scottish party HQ. Insofar as pre-campaign contact is concerned, 87 per cent of constituency Labour parties (CLPs), 86 per cent of SNP associations, 80 per cent of Liberal Democrat local parties and 96 per cent of Conservative associations report either frequent or occasional contacts with Scottish party HQ. Except with Labour, where 94 per cent reported frequent or occasional contacts during the campaign, these proportions fell back during the election to 79 per cent for the SNP, 67 per cent for the Lib Dems and 84 per cent for the Tories.

The extent to which local parties had special organisers appointed by party HQ is another indicator of the co-ordination of local campaign activity. This certainly happened in some constituencies. Labour for example appointed campaign organisers to cover a number of key seats such as those in Aberdeen and Dundee. The loss of Aberdeen North and Dundee East to the SNP suggests that such organisers are not necessarily always a route to success; even if Aberdeen Central and Dundee West were held by Labour, in Dundee East and Aberdeen North they were countered by strong SNP campaigns. However, appointing special organisers is not widespread. Few local associations report having such an organiser appointed. Only 24 per

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cent of Conservative associations had such an organiser, a figure that falls to 20 per cent for Labour, 13 per cent for the Lib Dems and 11 per cent for the SNP. Unlike the two larger parties, both the Conservatives and the Lib Dems appointed the majority of these organisers more than a year before the election.

The extent to which constituency parties begin planning in advance of an election is a good indicator of whether a state of 'permanent' campaigning exists at local level (Denver and Hands 2000). 'New' or 'post-modern' campaigns ought to feature local parties planning the preparation of their local campaign well in advance of the election. This is particularly the case in Scotland, where the fixed four-year parliamentary term means that the date of the election is known well in advance. Indeed, very few constituency parties only started planning in the six months prior to the campaign beginning. The party that claimed to have begun this earliest was the SNP: 43 per cent of its organisations indicated that they began serious planning more than a year in advance while a further 36 per cent reported doing so between six to twelve months before. Similarly, 52 per cent of Conservative associations report starting serious planning more than a year before. The two Scottish Executive coalition partners seemed to have started planning later than the opposition. Only 23 per cent of Lib Dem local parties began doing so more than a year before, and this drops sharply to 7 per cent of responding CLPs that began planning more than twelve months prior to the campaign.

One feature of the modernisation of local campaigning over the past decade has been the increasing use of computers to undertake routine tasks. Although necessarily less detailed than previous analyses (see Denver and Hands 2000, p. 10) because of the wide range of non-campaigning areas the survey addressed, Table 1 nevertheless presents data on computer use in 2003. Given the ubiquity of personal computers in everyday life, their use should be expected to be virtually universal in campaigning. The vast majority of constituency campaigns used computers in 2003 – 93 per cent of SNP associations, and more than four-fifths of responding Labour and Liberal Democrat constituency parties. Somewhat surprisingly however, more than a quarter of Conservative associations and just under a fifth of Lib Dem local parties report not doing so. The existence of computing equipment within Scottish constituency parties is greater during elections than between campaigns. For instance, the survey also asked what resources were provided by either party HQ or activists and volunteers. Virtually no local parties had computing equipment provided by HQ, while 48 per cent of CLPs, 71 per

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cent of SNP associations, 55 per cent of Lib Dem local parties and 40 per cent of Conservative Associations had computing equipment contributed by activists. Smaller proportions of local associations used HQ-provided election software and computerised versions of the electoral register than used computers more generally. Labour and the SNP led the way in using HQ-provided election software, while Labour and the Liberal Democrats had the largest proportions of local parties using a computerised version of the electoral register. On the whole, it seems that the Conservatives were least inclined to use IT in their campaigns; only around half of responding associations used HQ software or electronic electoral registers.

**Table 1**

**Computer use in local campaigns 2003**

	Labour	SNP	Lib Dem	Cons
% used computers	87	93	83	72
% used HQ election software	63	61	55	44
% used computerised electoral register	73	64	68	56
Base N	(30)	(28)	(40)	(25)

*Source: 2003 Survey of Scottish Constituency Parties*

The survey asked about the amount of effort that local parties put into a range of other activities. A number of these can be argued to be examples of 'post-modernisation'. For instance, telephone canvassing is a potentially cost-efficient way of identifying voters' intentions, while efforts to appeal to specific groups of electors is an example of the more targeted approach Norris implies is part of post-modern campaigning. Moreover, much of the 'post-modernisation' argument is predicated on the use of the internet to communicate with voters (Farrell and Webb 2000, pp. 110-113; Norris 2000b, pp. 148-149). Table 2 presents data on these activities.

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**Table 2**  
**'Post-modern' local campaign activities in 2003**

		Little or no effort (%)	Some effort (%)	Substantial effort (%)	N
Labour	Phone canvassing	45	28	28	29
	Maintaining website a	87	7	7	30
	Appealing to specific groups	47	27	27	30
SNP	Phone canvassing	50	25	25	28
	Maintaining website a	68	25	7	28
	Appealing to specific groups	46	29	25	28
Lib Dem	Phone canvassing	84	11	5	38
	Maintaining website a	82	-	18	39
	Appealing to specific groups	66	16	18	38
Cons	Phone canvassing	65	13	22	23
	Maintaining website a	71	17	13	24
	Appealing to specific groups	48	9	43	23

*Source: 2003 Survey of Scottish Constituency Parties*

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Evident here is that so-called 'new' or 'post-modern' campaigning techniques did not receive a great deal of effort in Scottish local parties in 2003. While a small number of local parties have elaborate websites, they are in the minority. Across parties, the vast majority of associations put little or no effort into web-based activity. At most, only 18 per cent of Liberal Democrat organisations put substantial effort into this. Indeed, only 5 per cent of respondents to the 2003 Scottish election study used the internet to get election information (Electoral Commission/ICM 2003). As it is most likely that media and central party websites were the main sources of internet information, it is far from clear that there is an audience amongst voters for local party websites.

Telephone canvassing was also not something that most constituency organisations admit to putting substantial effort into in 2003. Telephone canvassing was virtually non-existent with the Liberal Democrats, although between around 21 and 27 per cent of the other three parties' organisations report substantial efforts. This may reflect an assessment as to the (in)effectiveness of telephone canvassing (Gerber and Green 2000, 2001; Pattie and Johnston 2003). However, it may also reflect the fact that, with Labour and the SNP at least, much of this was done by national call centres, thereby demonstrating a degree of division of labour between both parties' different organisational levels. Indeed, far from perceiving it as ineffective, the SNP particularly attribute their success in three marginal constituencies to the work of their national call centre (SNP 2003, p. 4).

With the exception of the Conservatives, constituency parties do not appear to have made extensive efforts to appeal to specific groups of voters. Just under half of CLPs, and SNP and Conservative associations report little effort in this area. Least active were the Lib Dems; 66 per cent report little effort. Most active in appealing to specific voters were the Tories; 43 per cent report substantial effort in this area. For further detail, respondents were invited to indicate which groups they had targeted with special leaflets in a write-in question in the survey. Only small numbers responded and this obviously depends on the local tactical situation. Nevertheless, most CLPs that responded to this indicated that they targeted both pensioners and young people, while a lesser number also report doing so with undecided or 'soft' Labour voters. Interestingly given that small party alternatives such as the Greens and SSP made ground against both Labour and the SNP in 2003 (Denver 2003), only one CLP reports targeting voters who identify with these parties, in this case the Greens. SNP organisations that answered this focused

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on young and first time voters, although a small number also report targeting the fishing community and former Labour supporters. Of the small number of Conservative associations that answered this question, farmers seemed to be the main recipients of targeted literature, with a number of others stressing floating voters or those that had responded to local surveys. Finally, amongst Liberal Democrat organisations, the majority of respondents indicated that they were targeting students and young voters.

A related measure is the extent to which constituency parties used direct mail. The survey asked a number of questions about this. Firstly, it asked if constituency organisations had used their canvassing records to identify voters to which direct mail might be sent. More than four-fifths of responding Labour and SNP organisations did so, while around three quarters of Lib Dem and Conservative associations also report doing so. The use of direct mail also provides an insight into which types of voters local organisations were targeting. Table 3 charts the uses of direct mail on core, undecided and other parties' voters. Moving from left to right in Table 3, for all parties it is clear that more direct mail was sent to core voters than undecided voters, and more to undecided voters than other parties' voters. This suggests that the object of the 2003 campaign for all parties was mobilising, not converting, electors. Interestingly, the two smaller parties, the Tories and Lib Dems, were more likely to make conversion efforts than Labour or the SNP.

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**Table 3**

**Use of direct mail to target voters**

	Core voters	Undecided voters	Other parties' voters	N
Labour	70	48	22	23
SNP	88	38	21	24
Lib Dem	56	52	48	27
Cons	77	59	41	22

*Source: 2003 Survey of Scottish Constituency Parties*

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The survey also contains some additional information on what might be termed 'new' campaigning activity not mentioned by Norris (2000a; 2000b) or Farrell and Webb (2000). One increasingly important method in Britain

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that has recently received much attention given electoral controversy in Birmingham and elsewhere is the extension of postal voting in an attempt to increase electoral participation. As Table 4 demonstrates, Labour put most effort into this in 2003, presumably because it was the party most concerned about being hurt by low turnout.

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**Table 4**

**Proportion of constituency parties putting substantial effort into postal voting**

	%	N
Labour	66	29
SNP	36	28
Liberal Democrats	18	38
Conservatives	46	24

*Source: 2003 Survey of Scottish Constituency Parties*

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Another potential indicator is the extent to which parties have campaigning links with other organisations. Since Otto Kirchheimer (1966) forwarded his ‘catch-all’ thesis such an idea has been associated with discussions of party and campaign change. While there were examples of this in 2003, the SNP associating itself with pro-fishing industry campaigners for example, such activity appears to be rare in the constituencies. With the exception of the help Labour traditionally receives from the trade unions, only a small handful of SNP and Lib Dem organisations, and no Conservative associations, report receiving such help.

In what might also be conceived of as a ‘new’ method of campaigning, Scottish parties are forced by the Additional Member electoral system to campaign not only in constituencies, but also for regional list candidates. Indeed, with Labour dominating the constituency vote, the other three parties rely heavily on this for a considerable proportion of their representation at Holyrood. The survey therefore asked local party respondents how much effort they put into campaigning for their regional list candidates. To a large extent, the aggregate pattern of responses here is not marked by substantial effort. Given its domination of constituencies, this is hardly surprising for Labour (Dyer 1998). Indeed, 86 per cent of CLPs report putting little effort into this. For the Liberal Democrats, although just over a quarter put

substantial effort into list campaigning, more than half of their local parties (54 per cent) put little effort into it. Given their dependence on the list section of the vote, the Conservatives seemed best organised here. While half of Tory respondents report putting little effort into this, 42 per cent nevertheless indicated that they put substantial effort into campaigning for the party's list candidates. Aside from Labour, the party that appears to have put the least effort into this was the SNP. Indeed, only 18 per cent of SNP associations report substantial effort in this area, as opposed to the 68 per cent that indicated little effort in campaigning for the party's lists. While it might be expected that local parties would put more effort into list campaigning in regions where they are weak in the constituencies, more detailed analysis indicates that this was generally not the case. In other words, in 2003 Scotland's local parties on the whole did not expend much effort on campaigning for their list candidates.

### **STILL IMPORTANT? 'PRE-MODERN' LOCAL CAMPAIGNING IN SCOTLAND**

If the evidence for 'new' or 'post-modern' campaigning methods is not wholly convincing, and points towards the persistence of traditional campaign activities, can the data support any other interpretation? The survey offers a range of further data on other campaign activities.

One area of constituency party activity that has been reported to be in decline is holding election meetings where electors can listen to, meet and question a party's candidate. However, Denver and Hands (1992, p. 534) have suggested that they live on to some extent in some areas of Scotland, particularly in rural areas. How effective these meetings are in communicating with electors is open to question. For instance, in early research on local party campaign activity, Bochel and Denver (1972, p. 240) suggest that only 3 per cent of electors attended local government election meetings in 1968, a proportion that is highly unlikely to have risen since then, even if this was a parliamentary election. Moreover, they argue that meetings are counter-productive because they keep the candidate away from meeting voters on doorsteps. Similarly, local parties divert members to such meetings to demonstrate support, thereby taking them away from active campaigning. Nevertheless, they are an indicator of traditional methods of electioneering. Respondents were therefore asked how many public election meetings were held by the local party during the campaign. While few constituency

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associations indicate that they put a great degree of effort into holding public meetings, only 10 per cent of CLPs, 18 per cent of SNP associations 19 per cent of Lib Dem organisations and 20 per cent of Conservative local parties held no meetings whatsoever. Most indicate holding between one and five meetings – 62 per cent of the Lib Dems, 56 per cent for the Tories, and 50 per cent each for both Labour and the SNP. Sizeable minorities of each party's associations report holding between six and ten meetings however – just under a third of CLPs, a quarter of SNP local parties and 16 per cent of Lib Dem and Conservative organisations.

Face-to-face contact between party workers and voters is central to traditional methods of campaigning. However, declining party memberships and activism call into question the ability of local parties to do so comprehensively given the number of households involved and the relatively short period of time between the dissolution of parliament and the day of the election. It is possible to get a sense of the extent of the electorate canvassed from the 2003 Scottish election study. Although the relevant question unfortunately conflates telephone and doorstep canvassing, only 21 per cent of respondents report either receiving a telephone call or visit from party representatives (Electoral Commission/ICM 2003).

These caveats notwithstanding, if traditional methods are to the fore in sub-national elections, as Norris (2000a: 2000b, pp. 137-161) suggests, it should be expected that doorstep canvassing would be one of the main campaign activities undertaken by Scotland's local parties in 2003. The survey therefore asked whether local parties used their records to organise doorstep visits. A considerable proportion did so – 92 per cent of CLPs, 90 per cent of Conservative associations, 88 per cent of SNP organisations and 76 per cent of Lib Dem local parties. This should be expected. Despite being more time consuming for party activists, studies of canvassing have repeatedly shown that doorstep canvassing is more effective than other methods such as telephone calls (Gerber and Green 2000, 2001; Pattie and Johnston 2003).

Interestingly, doorstep visits were used most with 'core' voters. Indeed, 74 per cent of Labour respondents, 82 per cent of Lib Dem local parties and 73 per cent of Conservative associations visited party identifiers. By contrast, smaller proportions visited undecided voters – 70 per cent of Labour local parties, 70 per cent of Lib Dem organisations and 68 per cent of Conservative associations. This is to some degree indicative of local parties concerned first of all to mobilise their core electorate before moving on to try to convert uncommitted voters. The exception here is the SNP. While only 50 per cent

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of the Nationalists' constituency organisations doorstepped the party's core identifiers, 92 per cent report doing so with undecided voters.

If doorstep visits remain popular, what of other pre-polling day campaign activities? The survey offers insights into the amount of effort Scottish local parties expended upon what might be termed 'traditional' activities of delivering leaflets, sending out election addresses, attracting local media coverage, organising street stalls and holding constituency party meetings. Table 5 sets out these activities by party. What emerges from this is a fairly unambiguous picture of Scottish constituency parties being overwhelmingly concerned with two main activities, distributing leaflets and sending out the candidate's election address. Around three-quarters or more of each party's local organisations report undertaking both of these activities. In a Scottish context, this very much echoes Katz and Eldersveld's (1961, p.16) early American finding that 'the one area in which ... (local) parties are seen as very active is in the distribution of literature'. With the exception of the Liberal Democrats, who had around three-quarters of their local parties putting substantial effort into leaflet distribution, each of the other three parties had on or around 90 per cent reporting substantial effort in this area. Similarly, around four-fifths of each party's constituency organisations put substantial effort into sending out election addresses. Such activity clearly registers with voters; 79 per cent of respondents to the 2003 Scottish election study report reading leaflets from candidates (Electoral Commission/ICM 2003).

Getting local media coverage is traditionally important to local parties, not least because it gives them the opportunity to focus specifically on what they have done, or are promising to do, for their local community. In 2003 this was arguably even more important given that the national news media was predominantly concerned with reporting the news emanating from the war in Iraq. Sizeable proportions of constituency parties reported making attempts to encourage the local media to cover their campaigns. The SNP were particularly active here with just under two-thirds reporting substantial effort in this area. Around half of Labour and Conservative local parties also put substantial effort into attaining local media coverage, a proportion that falls to around two-fifths of Lib Dem local parties.

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**Table 5**  
**'Traditional' Local Campaign Activities in 2003**

		Little or no effort (%)	Some effort (%)	Substantial (%)	N
Labour	Distributing leaflets	-	10	90	30
	Sending election addresses	3	13	83	29
	Attracting local media	23	30	47	30
	Organising street stalls	30	30	40	30
	Holding local party meetings	63	33	3	30
	Recruiting members	77	20	3	30
	Fundraising	67	17	17	30
	SNP	Distributing leaflets	-	11	89
	Sending election addresses	11	4	86	28
	Attracting local media	18	18	64	28
	Organising street stalls	29	46	25	28
	Holding local party meetings	36	25	39	28
	Recruiting members	50	43	7	28
	Fundraising	36	36	29	28

*Table 5 continued on next page.*

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*Table 5 continued*

		Little or no effort (%)	Some effort (%)	Substantial (%)	N	
Lib Dem	Distributing leaflets	10	15	74	39	
	Sending election addresses	13	8	80	39	
	Attracting local media	33	26	41	39	
	Organising street stalls	92	8	-	39	
	Holding local party meetings	67	13	21	39	
	Recruiting members	47	28	13	39	
	Fundraising	47	56	23	21	39
Cons	Distributing leaflets	13	-	88	24	
	Sending election addresses	13	8	79	24	
	Attracting local media	29	21	50	24	
	Organising street stalls	71	13	17	24	
	Holding local party meetings	71	13	17	24	
	Recruiting members	47	13	17	24	
	Fundraising	47	42	21	38	24

*Source: 2003 Survey of Scottish Constituency Parties*

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Setting up street stalls however was not particularly popular with local parties during the 2003 campaign. Only Labour seem to have endeavoured to engage with the public in this way to any great extent with 40 per cent reporting substantial effort in doing so. Similarly, most local parties did not put substantial effort into holding local party meetings, another element which Norris (2000b, pp.141-142) suggests is typical of traditional campaigning. Instead, in 2003 the majority of Scotland's local parties were focused, as might be expected during an election, outwards towards the electorate rather than inwards on party organisational matters.

That constituency parties were not particularly focused on organisational maintenance is perhaps most evident when two other aspects of party organisation are examined in Table 5. Kavanagh (1970) suggests that elections are a chance for local parties to build up their organisational resources. In particular, they will benefit local parties as more potential members will join. During the 2003 Scottish elections, there is little sign of constituency parties actively seeking new members. Although the SNP seem to have been most active here, in all parties between a half and just over three-quarters of local parties report little or no effort in recruiting members. The picture is more varied in relation to fundraising however. Over half of Labour and Liberal Democrat local parties report little or no effort in this area, whereas more than a quarter of SNP organisations and a third of Conservative associations report substantial efforts to raise money.

The mobilising theme noted above is very much apparent when the parties' polling day activities are considered. The survey asked local parties which activities they undertook on 1 May 2003. These activities are reported in Table 6. As with doorstep canvassing, in all four parties by far the most effort was expended upon mobilising their party's own supporters either by visiting, calling or driving them to the polling station. Conversely, only around a quarter or less of each party's constituency organisations undertook activities designed to get out undecided voters. With commentary speculating about low turnouts for a considerable period in advance of the election, polling day was undoubtedly a case of local parties ensuring that their core electorate actually went out to vote, thereby underlining the points made above about direct mail and doorstep visits. It is not however indicative of local parties going to great lengths to convert voters to their cause.

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**Table 6**  
**Polling day activities by party**

	Labour %	SNP %	Lib Dem %	Cons %
Good morning cards	35	39	64	46
Visited own voters	48	58	42	50
Telephoned own voters	52	62	18	50
Drove own voters to polls	97	85	55	73
Visited undecided voters	21	19	18	18
Telephoned undecided voters	24	19	9	27
Drove undecided voters to polls	24	19	15	14
Took numbers at polling stations	55	62	33	55
Base N	(29)	(26)	(33)	(22)

*Source: 2003 Survey of Scottish Constituency Parties*

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## CONCLUSION

This article has offered a preliminary snapshot of the campaigning methods used by Scotland's constituency parties in 2003. One difficulty is that in 'post-modern' or 'new' campaigning, neither Norris (2000a, 2000b) nor Farrell and Webb (2000) explicitly spell out what happens at local level. The article has therefore attempted to shed some light on this. Further work however needs to be done on this, as well as into the effects of each of these methods in a Scottish context.

This assessment reveals a mixed picture of local campaigning in the 2003 Scottish parliament election. On the one hand, there was some evidence of so-called 'new' or 'post-modern' campaigning to be found in 2003, such as the use of computing equipment to support the local party's efforts, regular contact between party HQs and their constituency organisations, and the fact that most local parties report having started planning their campaign well in

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advance. On the other, traditional styles of campaigning are very much alive and kicking in Scotland. This provides a counter to those who would argue that electioneering is all about professional marketing-style campaigns. While these efforts may exist centrally, new campaign methods such as the internet, telephone canvassing and so on were barely utilised in the Scottish constituencies, despite the fact that they may have considerable labour-saving benefits for local parties who are commonly perceived to be in a state of membership decline.

Instead, it is traditional methods, which Norris (2000a; 2000b, pp. 137-161) might term 'pre-modern', such as door-to-door canvassing and leaflet delivery that seem to have been most evident in the 2003 Scottish Parliament Election. Indeed, with 79 per cent of election study respondents reporting receiving leaflets, it is possible to argue that in 2003 leaflet delivery was by far the most important activity for local parties. Even if local parties did put considerable effort into doorstep canvassing, the fact that, for a variety of reasons, they reached at best 21 per cent of voters indicates that this was not an election where high levels of direct contact between voters and constituency parties was evident. Furthermore, rather than concentrating upon converting undecided voters, the efforts of local parties were predominantly concerned with mobilising those 'core' voters who identified with the party. With concerns about low participation proliferating amongst politicians and commentators, this is understandable. Nevertheless, it is not suggestive of the attempts to convert undecided electors that underpin 'post-modern' notions of campaigning or models suggesting that parties 'chase' dealigned voters (Rohrschneider 2002). This largely confirms the idea that traditional electioneering arrangements will remain important at constituency level in 'sub-national' or 'second order' (i.e. non-Westminster) elections.

In empirical terms, then, this article has shown that there are a number of difficulties with the 'post-modernisation' argument in relation to the campaign activities of Scotland's local parties in 2003. In part this may have stemmed from two points. Firstly, based heavily as it is on claims that 'targeting' specific voters has grown, the argument demonstrates a degree of ahistoricity; targeting has been a part of party campaigning since Sidney Webb, the leading Fabian, espoused it in the 1930s (Wring 1996, p. 104). Secondly, Denver and Hands (2000, p. 2) indicate that a difficulty with the 'post-modernisation' argument is that it assumes a qualitative change in campaigning activity by parties. In the context of British general elections, they argue that such an assessment is open to some doubt because tried and

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tested campaigning techniques continue to be used. Such a judgement is equally applicable in relation to Scotland's constituency parties in what was widely perceived to be a 'second order' election. If such methods and activities persist in 'first-order' general elections, it should not be overly surprising that traditional forms of campaigning were to the fore in the 2003 Scottish parliament election. Indeed, Alan Ware (1992) points to the importance of habit in determining the activities undertaken by local parties. Habit can also however mean a somewhat conservative resistance to change. If traditional methods have proved reliable and effective, then local parties might feel they have no necessary reason to abandon them for something that they may be unsure about. At best then, in the 2003 Scottish parliament elections what was evident was more likely to be a process of gradually evolving constituency campaigning methods than a revolution of 'new' or 'post-modern' grassroots campaigning.

### **APPENDIX**

The research for this article was undertaken by a postal survey of the constituency parties of the four main Scottish parties. The survey was carried out in the aftermath of the 2003 Scottish parliament election and covered party organisations in all 73 Scottish parliament constituencies. The total response rate was 42 per cent. The response rate by party is outlined in Table A1. Where responses have been classified as unusable, this is for two reasons. Firstly, the main reason is that they have been returned but completion has been declined by the respondent. Secondly, despite questionnaires being sent to each constituency, respondents have combined the responses of two local parties who work closely together into one response. This makes it impossible to disentangle the effects of local campaigning and activity across the constituencies concerned and therefore the response is unusable.

All tables report the valid percent, i.e. the percentage of those constituency parties that responded to the question at hand. The sole exception to this is Table 1 regarding computer use where the second and third variables on election software and computerised electoral registers do not use valid percent. This allows those constituency parties who said no to whether they used computers to be taken account of in these two variables. All percentages mentioned either in the text, or reported in the tables, have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

**Table A1**

**Response rates for study of Scottish Constituency Parties 2003.**

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	Labour	SNP	Lib Dems	Conservatives
Total responses	31	28	44	26
Valid responses	30	28	40	25
Unusable responses	1	0	4	1
Response rate (excluding unusables)	41.1%	38.4%	54.8%	34.2%

*Source: 2003 Survey of Scottish Constituency Parties*

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In Tables 2 and 5, responses were originally on a 5 point scale with 1 meaning no effort whatsoever and 5 meaning very substantial effort. In these tables, little effort corresponds to responses 1 and 2, some effort to response 3 and substantial effort to responses 4 and 5.

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