

‘A HISTORIC MOMENT’? THE RESULTS OF THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS 2007

David Denver

The outcome of the 2007 elections in Scotland, which saw the SNP replacing Labour as the largest party in the Scottish Parliament, clearly marked a significant departure in Scottish politics. These were the first national elections in more than fifty years in which Labour did not emerge as the most popular party in Scotland. The SNP leader, Alex Salmond, described it as ‘a historic moment’. Unsurprisingly the historic SNP victory dominated newspaper headlines but, in the immediate aftermath of the elections, the success of the SNP vied for attention with two other aspects of the electoral process that for most people rarely merit even a moment’s thought – the design of ballot papers and the counting of votes. Before analysing the election results, therefore, I will comment on each of these, beginning with the latter.

For the first time in Scotland, votes in 2007 were counted electronically. The main reason for introducing computerised counting was to cope with the local council elections which were held on the same day. These were conducted for the first time using the Single Transferable Vote (STV) electoral system. Counting and determining results by hand under STV can be a very arduous and lengthy business – counts can go on for days – and with 353 separate ward counts to undertake electronic counting appeared a sensible option. In fact, although it was little noticed by the media, this aspect of the process worked rather well. Local results were announced relatively quickly after counting began and in short order details of the voting were made available on council websites which will surely keep future generations of PhD students busy.

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As far as the Parliament elections were concerned, however, the vote counting did not proceed so smoothly. Results were slower to be announced than normal (frustratingly for radio and television commentators) and in some cases problems with the technology caused counts to be abandoned until the next day. As a consequence, most unusually in Scotland, people went to bed without knowing who had won what turned out to be a very close election. More seriously, however, when results were announced it emerged that there were very many more rejected (also known as ‘spoiled’ or ‘void’) ballots than normal.

Table 1 shows the incidence of rejected ballots in the 2007 elections as compared with the two previous elections. As can be seen, the number and proportion of ballots rejected increased very sharply – especially in constituency contests – as compared with previous occasions. It was this, together with counting delays, that prompted much adverse press comment with headlines such as ‘Who is to blame?’ (**The Herald** 5 May 2007) and ‘The worst poll debacle in the history of British democracy’ (**Scotsman** 5 May 2007).

Most commentators have attributed the sharp increase in rejected ballots to a change in the design of the ballot papers used. Whereas in 1999 and 2003 voters were handed two ballot papers – one for the constituency and one for the region – and instructed to vote for one party or candidate on each, in 2007 there was a single ballot paper with the list contestants printed on the left hand side and constituency candidates on the right. The printed instructions indicated that the elector had two votes. This change was introduced at least partly to dispel the notion that the regional vote is a ‘second’ vote which is somehow less valuable or important than the ‘first’ (constituency) vote. Whatever the motives, however, the new ballot paper appears to have confused a significant minority of voters. Moreover, the confusion may have been politically important as there were 16 constituency contests in which the number of rejected ballots was greater than the winning candidate’s majority. Of these, the SNP won 9, Labour 5 and the Liberal Democrats 2.

Across constituencies, the number of constituency candidates did not affect the proportion of rejected ballots in either the constituency or regional votes. There is a suggestion, however, that the length of the regional list might have had some effect. Glasgow and Lothians had the largest number of contestants at regional level (23 in both cases) and they had the highest proportions of rejected ballots in both elections. In Glasgow the figures are 4.2 per cent in the list voting and 7.9 per cent in the constituency voting while the respective

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figures for Lothians are 3.1 per cent and 5.2 per cent. More generally, at constituency level there are significant correlations between the length of the regional list and the proportion of ballots rejected in both the list voting (0.523) and the constituency voting (0.711). This relationship persists even when elementary controls are made for the educational level and social status of the constituency electorate.

Table 1
Rejected Ballots in Scottish Parliament Elections 1999-2007

	1999	2003	2007
Constituency Contests			
Number	9,210	12,810	85,644
% of all ballots	0.39	0.66	4.08
Regional List Voting			
Number	7,268	12,482	60,454
% of all ballots	0.31	0.67	2.88

TURNOUT

The issue of rejected ballots impinges directly on the analysis of turnout in the elections. Turnout can be calculated in one of two ways. The first measure is percentage of the eligible electorate which turns out to vote and the second is the percentage of the eligible electorate which turns out to vote *and casts a valid ballot*. The BBC and some newspapers use the latter because the necessary data are readily available – a simple tot up of the votes for each candidate produces the total valid ballots. Nonetheless, the first is clearly the most appropriate measure if what we are interested in is the proportion of electors who make the effort to vote. Some may spoil their vote deliberately or in error but they have nonetheless voted. In normal circumstances the difference between the two measures is very small. In the context of the 2007 Scottish elections, however, the difference is significant and so ‘total turnout’ (i.e. including rejected ballots) is the measure used here.

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Unsurprisingly, since voting in 2007 involved marking a single ballot paper, turnout in the constituency contests and for the regional lists was identical, standing at 53.9 per cent for Scotland as a whole. This represented a significant increase of 4.2 percentage points on the figure in 2003. The increase, no doubt, was mainly due to the widespread expectation that the election would be a close-run thing with a strong possibility that the SNP could oust Labour as the largest party in the Parliament. As Table 2 shows turnout was up all across the country with a notably large increase in Edinburgh (where, oddly, there had been a notably large decrease in 2003). With the exception of Glasgow, turnout exceeded 50 per cent everywhere and was within a relatively narrow range – from 50.6 per cent in Aberdeen to 59.4 per cent in Dunbartonshire.

There was much more variation, of course, in turnout at constituency level. It ranged from 38.0 per cent in Glasgow Shettleston (which took the wooden spoon for the third consecutive election) to 64.8 per cent in Eastwood. There were 16 constituencies in which turnout was below 50 per cent (nine of them in Glasgow) and eight in which turnout was greater than 60 per cent.

Although turnout increased in every constituency, the pattern of variation in turnout across constituencies was very similar to that found in previous elections. Table 3 shows the correlations between constituency turnouts at the last three elections and the degree of continuity is impressive. There are constituencies where turnout is always relatively low and others where it is always relatively high even if the absolute turnout level changes. In general, the low turnout constituencies are in relatively deprived urban areas with much social housing while more middle-class, suburban and rural areas have higher turnouts.

Politics also plays a part in determining turnout levels. One would expect parties to campaign harder in more marginal seats – indeed campaigning that is heavily targeted on marginal seats is now the norm in British elections – and thus produce higher turnouts. So it proved in these elections, with a correlation coefficient of 0.512 indicating the strength of the association between the marginality of constituencies in 2003 and turnout in 2007. The impact of constituency marginality on turnout was greater than in the 2003 election (coefficient 0.329) suggesting that the parties are increasingly concentrating their resources on seats at risk or potential gains.

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Table 2
Turnout 2007 and Turnout Change in Cities/Regions 1999-2003

	Turnout (%)	Change 97-99
Scotland	53.9	+4.2
Aberdeen	50.6	+3.0
Dundee	51.2	+2.1
Edinburgh	58.4	+6.7
Glasgow	44.4	+3.5
Highlands & Islands	57.8	+3.8
North East Scotland	53.4	+5.1
Perth & Angus	56.5	+5.1
Fife	50.8	+4.3
Central Scotland	56.5	+3.4
Lothians	55.3	+5.2
Lanarkshire	51.7	+3.3
Renfrewshire	58.5	+4.7
Dunbartonshire	59.4	+5.1
Ayrshire	54.8	+2.6
Borders	56.0	+4.3
Dumfries & Galloway	57.1	+2.2

Note: these 'regions' do not correspond to those used for list voting in the elections. See Appendix for details.

Table 3
Correlations: Constituency Turnouts 1999-2007

	Turnout 1999	Turnout 2003
Turnout 2003	0.921	
Turnout 2007	0.912	0.944

THE NATIONAL OUTCOME

Table 4 shows the overall results of the election while Table 5 shows changes from the last election. In the constituency contests the main story, of course, is that the SNP just overtook Labour to become the largest party in terms of votes. In fact, there was only a modest decline in Labour's vote share (-2.4) but the SNP (+9.0) appears to have profited mainly from the slump in support for 'others'. The latter was mostly due to the withdrawal of the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) from the constituency contests. The Liberal Democrats increased their vote share a little while Conservative support was unchanged from 2003. There is no evidence, then, of a 'Cameron effect' in Scotland (nor, indeed, of a 'Campbell effect' which had seen Liberal Democrat support decline in other parts of Britain).

Despite coming second in votes, Labour took most of the constituency seats (37) although the party lost ten that it had won in 2003 (nine to the SNP and one to the Liberal Democrats). The Conservatives comfortably retained the three seats that they held and, somewhat surprisingly, added another (Roxburgh and Berwickshire). This may be another indication of targeted campaigning. As well as losing Roxburgh and Berwickshire to the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats lost Argyll and Bute and Gordon to the SNP (Alex Salmond being the victor in Gordon). The seat changes were completed by the retirement of Independent Dennis Canavan in Falkirk West (gained by the SNP) and the defeat of health campaigner Jean Turner in Strathkelvin and Bearsden (the sole Labour gain).

In the list voting, the SNP made a very strong advance even though support for the other major parties was little changed compared with 2003. They were rewarded with 26 list seats including five of the seven available in both Central Scotland and South of Scotland. As in the constituencies, the big losers were the minor parties. The Green Party's share of votes fell back and they lost five of their seven seats. Margo MacDonald, standing again as an Independent in Lothians, was the only other non-major party candidate to win a list seat. Among the minor parties, the Scottish Senior Citizens Unity Party managed 1.0 per cent and the BNP 1.2 per cent across Scotland. In 'the battle of the Trots', Solidarity, formed and led by Tommy Sheridan after his falling out with the SSP, easily outpulled the latter with 1.5 per cent to 0.6 per cent of the votes but even adding their votes together they would have struggled to win a seat. In what has the appearance of another internecine struggle, the Scottish Christian Party (1.3 per cent) defeated the Christian People's Alliance (0.7 per cent). The

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worst performance of all was by Duncan Thorp, an Independent who amassed 73 votes across the whole of the Lothians.

Table 4
The Distribution of Votes and Seats in Scotland 2007

	Constituencies		Regional Lists		Total Seats
	Share of Votes %	Seats Won	Share of Votes %	Seats Won	
Conservative	16.6	4	13.9	13	17
Labour	32.2	37	29.2	9	46
Lib Dem	16.2	11	11.3	5	16
SNP	32.9	21	31.0	26	47
Green	0.1	0	4.0	2	2
Others	2.0	0	10.6	1	1

Table 5
Changes in the Distribution of Votes and Seats 2003-07

	Constituencies		Regional Lists		Total Seats
	Share of Votes %	Seats Won	Share of Votes %	Seats Won	
Conservative	0.0	+1	-1.6	-2	-1
Labour	-2.4	-9	-0.1	+5	-4
Lib Dem	+0.8	-2	-0.5	+1	-1
SNP	+9.0	+12	+10.1	+8	+20
Green	+0.1	0	-2.9	-5	-5
Others	-7.5	-2	-5.1	-7	-9

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The final tally of seats meant that the SNP were (just) the largest party but no two parties (other than the improbable combination of Labour and the SNP) could achieve an overall majority of seats in the Parliament. In the event, the leader of the SNP, Alex Salmond, became First Minister heading a minority administration with support from the two Green MSPs.

Table 6 shows the distribution of support across the cities and sub-regions of Scotland in the constituency elections. As these data make clear, Scotland is far from a homogeneous country in terms of party support. Indeed, even the four major cities are very different. In Aberdeen, the SNP had a comfortable lead in popular support in 2007 with the Liberal Democrats and Labour vying for second place and the Conservatives trailing. In Dundee, the SNP were even further ahead but the Conservatives beat the Liberal Democrats (although both are very weak). In Edinburgh the four main parties have similar levels of support. Only in Glasgow is Labour clearly the best-supported party.

In the other parts of Scotland, the Conservatives remain very weak across the central belt, failing to reach 20 per cent of the votes in Fife, Central Scotland, Lothians, Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire and Dunbartonshire (as well as in the Highlands and Islands). Support for the Liberal Democrats is very uneven. While they have an established presence in the Highlands and Borders and have made inroads in North East Scotland and Fife, they remain weak elsewhere. In contrast, the SNP performed well in all parts of Scotland with over 40 per cent of the votes in North East Scotland and Perth and Angus and no areas of obvious weakness. Labour's former hegemony in the central belt was shattered in the 2007 election. In addition to Glasgow, the party had more than 40 per cent of the vote only in Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire. Whether this is a short-term blip caused by the temporary unpopularity of the government at Westminster or marks a long-term realignment of Scottish electoral politics, as suggested by Alex Salmond, remains to be seen.

CONSTITUENCY VARIATIONS IN PARTY SUPPORT

The broad national picture of an increase in SNP support and decline in Labour's vote share was reflected in most constituencies. The SNP's share was down in only three seats (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale, Shetland and Paisley South) while Labour's decreased in 51 seats. Nonetheless there was considerable variation across constituencies in the extent of changes in party support. The swing between Labour and the SNP ranged from 3.4 per cent to Labour in Paisley South to 15.2 per cent to the SNP in Airdrie and Shotts.

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Change in the Conservative vote share ran from -8.8 per cent in Gordon to +11.5 in Roxburgh and Berwickshire while for the Liberal Democrats the relevant figures are -11.2 per cent in Greenock and Inverclyde and + 20.5 per cent in Shetland.

Table 6
Party Shares of Votes in Cities/Regions 2007 (constituency vote)

	Con %	Lab %	Lib Dem %	SNP %	Other %
Aberdeen	12.9	26.9	25.5	34.7	0.0
Dundee	9.3	34.8	8.4	47.5	0.0
Edinburgh	19.8	27.6	26.9	25.4	0.3
Glasgow	8.5	46.0	8.8	31.3	5.3
Highlands & Islands	12.5	17.5	35.0	34.1	0.9
North East Scotland	20.8	10.0	25.9	43.0	0.4
Perth & Angus	28.8	12.5	11.5	46.7	0.6
Fife	13.6	32.6	23.3	29.6	0.8
Central Scotland	15.4	37.3	9.6	37.3	0.5
Lothians	11.8	39.1	10.9	35.5	2.7
Lanarkshire	10.4	44.9	8.5	32.0	4.2
Renfrewshire	19.9	41.8	10.3	26.6	1.5
Dunbartonshire	14.4	37.1	12.0	28.3	8.2
Ayrshire	21.1	36.6	5.9	32.9	3.5
Borders	29.0	11.0	34.5	25.5	0.0
Dumfries & Galloway	38.1	29.2	6.5	25.7	0.5

Notes: These 'regions' do not correspond to those used for list voting in the elections. See the Appendix for details.

The reasons for variations in changes in support from constituency to constituency might include differences in the tactical situation, in the popularity or otherwise of particular local candidates, in the alternatives available to vote for or in the intensity of campaign effort. In contrast to

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previous experience, however, the tactical situation made little difference in 2007. Table 7 shows overall changes in party support in constituencies grouped according to which parties filled the top two places in 2003. In seats where the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats were in contention both of these parties lost more than average but otherwise there was not much variation in how their support changed. Labour's decline and the SNP's increase in support were of the same order no matter what the tactical situation was (with the sole exception that the SNP did less well where they were in contention with the Conservatives).

Table 7
Changes in Party Shares of Votes According to Tactical Situation in Constituency

	Lab/SNP	Lab/Con	Lib Dem/Con	Lib Dem/Lab	SNP/Con
Change in:					
% Con	+0.1	-0.5	-2.3	+0.5	+1.0
% Lab	-2.7	-3.8	-1.6	-3.7	-1.5
% Lib Dem	+1.1	-0.4	-4.0	-0.9	+0.2
% SNP	+8.9	+9.7	+11.6	+10.4	+4.3
number of constituencies	40	6	7	7	6

Notes: Constituencies are grouped according to the parties which filled the first two places in the 2003 election. One category is not shown: Lib Dem/SNP (3 cases). Four constituencies in which the major parties did not fill the top two places in 2003 are excluded – Dunfermline West, Falkirk West, Glasgow Pollok and Strathkelvin and Bearsden.

The pattern of variation in absolute levels of party support across constituencies – as with variations in turnout – is a familiar one. The correlation coefficients measuring the association between the shares of vote received in the constituencies in each of the last three elections are shown in Table 8. While the coefficients for the SNP are smaller than those for the other parties – suggesting that the pattern of support for the SNP across constituencies is a little less stable – all of these correlations are very strong. They indicate that where a party had a good performance in 1999 and 2003 it

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was also relatively strong in 2007; where it was previously weak it again had a poor result. Although the correlation coefficients enable us to be precise about the strength of the association, the message that they convey is not exactly news. Most people are aware that different parties tend to do well in particular seats. No one would expect the Conservatives suddenly to become a major player in the Glasgow constituencies, for example. However we can use the regression equations on which the correlation coefficients are based to identify constituencies in which the various parties did particularly well or badly in 2007. The equations predict what a party's vote share in 2007 'ought' to have been on the basis of its 2003 performance. We can then compare the prediction with the share actually received and the difference is a measure how much better or worse the party did than expected on the basis of the overall changes in support.

Table 8
Correlations: Vote Shares of Parties in Elections 1999-2003

	Con	Lab	LibDem	SNP
1999-2003	0.946	0.941	0.927	0.881
1999-2007	0.932	0.885	0.916	0.817
2003-2007	0.944	0.927	0.928	0.855

Note: In each case the coefficient is based on 73 constituencies and all are statistically significant.

In these terms, Table 9 shows the five best and five worst constituency performances by each of the major parties. Space does not permit detailed discussion but some salient points can be made. First, a number of constituencies appear in more than one list. This is obviously because a very good performance by one party normally implies a very bad result for one or more of the other parties. Thus, Roxburgh and Berwickshire was an exceptionally good result for the Conservatives and poor for both the Liberal Democrats and the SNP. Secondly, Falkirk West appears as the best performance of all by both Labour and the SNP because they no longer had to compete against the popular Independent, Dennis Canavan. Similarly, Labour did well in Glasgow Pollok because Tommy Sheridan was not standing this time. Alex Salmond clearly had an impact on the SNP vote in Gordon which

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Table 9
Best and Worst Party performances in 2007

<i>Best</i>		<i>Worst</i>	
Conservative			
Roxburgh & Berwickshire	+12.1	Gordon	-8.4
Eastwood	+7.8	Inverness East, Nairn, Lochaber	-6.0
Galloway & Upper Nithsdale	+6.8	Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley	-5.9
Renfrewshire West	+4.6	Shetland	-4.8
Dunfermline East	+4.3	Orkney	-4.6
Labour			
Falkirk West	+22.3	Caithness, Sutherland and E. Ross	-11.3
Glasgow Pollok	+10.9	Airdrie and Shotts	-8.9
Paisley South	+9.2	Edinburgh East and Musselburgh	-8.0
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	+9.0	Inverness East, Nairn, Lochaber	-7.5
Paisley North	+7.4	Tweeddale, Ettrick & Lauderdale	-7.5
Liberal Democrats			
Shetland	+21.3	Greenock and Inverclyde	-11.4
Dunfermline West	+18.4	Aberdeen South	-8.8
Inverness East, Nairn, Lochaber	+10.7	Aberdeen North	-8.1
Edinburgh North & Leith	+9.6	Roxburgh and Berwickshire	-6.9
Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale	+8.0	Eastwood	-5.4
SNP			
Falkirk West	+14.0	Shetland	-13.2
Gordon	+9.6	Galloway and Upper Nithsdale	-11.1
Dundee West	+8.4	Paisley South	-7.7
Airdrie & Shotts	+8.1	Roxburgh & Berwickshire	-7.4
Edinburgh East & Musselburgh	+5.8	Paisley North	-6.4

Note: the figures indicate by how much each party exceeded (+) or fell short of (-) the share of the vote predicted on the basis of its share in 1999.

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was also the Conservatives' poorest result. The Conservative leader, Annabel Goldie also had a good result in West Renfrewshire. These particular cases apart, it is clear that the Liberal Democrats did badly in Aberdeen and Greenock. This may have something to do with the fact that in the latter they controlled the local council while in the former they were the largest party on the council. On the other hand their success in Dunfermline West is clearly a knock-on effect from the Westminster Parliamentary by-election there in 2006, when they captured the seat from Labour. It is not obvious, however, why Labour did very well and the SNP badly in Paisley.

I noted above that most people (and certainly all readers of this piece) would be well aware that levels of support for the various parties differ radically across constituencies. Most are also aware that these variations relate to the social composition of the constituencies – at least as far as Conservative and Labour support are concerned. The impact of a variety of social and demographic factors on levels of support for the parties across constituencies in 2007 is described in Table 10 using correlation coefficients which measure how strongly variations in each party's vote share are associated with variations in the social characteristics of constituencies that are listed.

Variations in Conservative and Labour support are related to the social characteristics of constituencies much as would be expected. The Conservatives do better where there are more people with professional and managerial jobs, more owner occupiers, more older people, more people employed in agriculture and more people who claim an affiliation to the Church of Scotland. They do worse where there are more people who rent their homes from the council or a housing association and more young people, in more urban areas (persons per hectare), where there are more households without a car and more Roman Catholics. In general, the pattern of Labour support is a mirror image of that for the Conservatives. Liberal Democrat support is positively related to the proportion of people renting their homes privately but, that apart, the pattern of their support across constituencies is a sort of paler reflection of that for the Conservatives. Both parties tend to do well or badly in the same sorts of seats.

What is striking about SNP support is the fact that it is not structured very strongly at all by these social and economic characteristics of constituencies. Only three coefficients are statistically significant and they indicate relatively weak associations. Nonetheless, the SNP do better the more manual workers there are (surprisingly this variable is not correlated significantly with Labour support) and worse where there are more professionals and managers and

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people with a degree. Apart from these variables, the party attracts a similar level of support in all types of constituencies. The fact that support for the SNP does not appear to be drawn disproportionately from any particular group defined in terms of age, housing, religious denomination, being rural or urban, and so on might be a major source of strength for the party. It is clearly useful to be able to attract from a wide range of people and the SNP is a good example of a 'catch all' party. On the other hand it means that SNP support is geographically dispersed and this is a major handicap in trying to win seats under the first-past-the post electoral system. That is why the SNP won fewer constituency seats than Labour despite having slightly more votes. In a proportional system, however, the geographical dispersion of votes does not have a significant impact on the distribution of seats.

Table 10
The Correlates of Party Support in Constituencies in 2007

	Con	Lab	Lib.Dem	SNP
% Professional and Managerial	0.249	-0.243	0.257	-0.345
% Manual workers	-0.006	-0.111	-0.019	0.322
% owner occupiers	0.426	-0.465	0.291	-0.129
% private tenants	0.198	-0.405	0.338	-0.059
% social renters	-0.539	0.683	-0.463	0.142
% people aged 18-24	-0.249	0.185	0.004	-0.111
% people aged 65 +	0.417	-0.264	0.047	-0.001
% employed in agriculture	0.599	-0.646	0.317	-0.007
persons per hectare	-0.377	0.397	-0.111	-0.138
% households with no car	-0.504	0.645	-0.344	0.035
% ethnic minority	-0.223	0.193	-0.071	-0.053
% with degree	0.309	-0.433	0.425	-0.311
% Church of Scotland	0.565	-0.471	0.107	0.093
% Roman Catholic	-0.477	0.730	-0.495	-0.119

Note: Coefficients printed in bold are statistically significant, $p < .05$. In all cases the N is 73.

LIST VOTING

The shares of list votes in the eight electoral regions and the number of list seats won by the parties in the election are shown in Table 11. Changes from 2003 are shown in Table 12.

On first glance, the votes for ‘others’ look fairly impressive but these votes were shared between a large number of parties and individuals and there was a sharp decline in their support compared with 2003. The best performance by a small party in a region was 4.1 per cent for Solidarity in Glasgow – not quite enough to win a seat – while the best performing Independent was Margo MacDonald in Lothians with 6.7 per cent. The Greens also lost support in every electoral area and the same was true of the Conservatives, although in the latter case the decline was modest. Changes in list voting for Labour and the Liberal Democrats were also generally relatively small but in every electoral area the SNP share of list votes increased very sharply.

CONSTITUENCY AND LIST VOTING COMPARED

It is plain from even a cursory glance at the overall election results (Table 4) that many voters must have voted for different parties in the constituency and list voting. The vote shares of all four major parties were smaller in the list voting than in the constituency votes. This is largely because there was a much larger range of parties and candidates on offer in the regional lists. Solidarity did not contest any constituencies and the Greens contested only one, for example, so that the vast majority of their list votes must have come from people who voted for other parties in the constituency contest (although a few may have deliberately spoiled their constituency vote).

There are many possible reasons why voters might switch parties between the constituency and list elections. They might, for example, wish to support a particularly popular candidate in the constituency but not his or her party in the list. Alternatively, a popular candidate on the list (such as Margo MacDonald) might attract voters from other parties. Evidence of these sorts of processes at work is plentiful if we identify the constituencies in which the parties’ shares of the list vote declined most as compared with their constituency performance.

The biggest declines for the Conservatives were in Edinburgh Pentlands, Ayr, Renfrewshire West and Galloway and Upper Nithsdale. These were the three seats that they already held and the one contested by the current leader.

Table 12
Changes in Party Shares of List Votes 1999-2003

	Con	Lab	Lib Dem	SNP	Green	Others
Central Scotland	-0.6	-0.8	-0.7	+8.8	-2.1	-4.5
Glasgow	-0.8	+0.4	-0.1	+9.9	-1.9	-7.5
Highlands & Islands	-3.5	-4.6	+1.1	+11.0	-3.6	-0.5
Lothians	-2.0	+1.8	+1.7	+10.2	-5.0	-6.7
Mid Scotland & Fife	-1.3	+1.1	+1.2	+10.0	-3.1	-7.8
North East Scotland	-2.9	-0.1	-3.1	+13.1	-2.1	-5.0
South of Scotland	-1.7	-1.2	-0.1	+9.5	-2.4	-4.1
West of Scotland	-0.5	-1.6	-3.9	+8.7	-2.6	-3.3

From the election results alone it is impossible to be precise about the extent and nature of ‘ticket splitting’ between constituency and list votes, since they allow us to measure only the net effects of movements between parties. Some switching from Labour to the SNP, for example, may have been cancelled out by switching in the opposite direction. Nonetheless, we can obtain an estimate of the minimum proportion of voters who must have switched parties by summing the changes in each party’s votes and dividing by two (to take account of the fact that defectors from one party are also recruits to another). It must be emphasised, however, that this calculation gives a minimum figure only. The true amount of switching would undoubtedly be greater. Using this method in 1999, the overall minimum proportion voting for different parties was estimated at 11.5 per cent while in 2003 the figure was 17.1 per cent. In 2007 the estimate suggests a decline in ticket splitting to a minimum of 13.9 per cent. The decline is due, no doubt, to the reduced popularity of minor parties.

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For reasons that are far from clear the largest amount of ticket splitting appears to have occurred in the Western Isles but the next four constituencies in order are all in Edinburgh and this probably reflects the relatively strong support there for both the Green Party and Margo MacDonald in the regional list voting.

CONCLUSION

The message delivered by the Scottish electorate in 2007 was less complex than it had been in 2003. In the latter election 17 MSPs were elected who were not associated with mainstream parties. The ‘minnows’ had succeeded remarkably in taking on the big party battalions. In one sense 2007 saw a return to normality, with only three MSPs elected from outwith the big parties. In another respect, however, the election outcome was far from normal. The SNP advance was truly spectacular and marked a major departure in Scottish electoral politics.

Explaining the success of the SNP is not the primary purpose of this article but it can safely be suggested that it was not due to the voters suddenly being converted to the cause of Scottish independence. In a survey of the electorate carried out immediately after the election for the Scottish Election Study, only 32 per cent of respondents indicated that they favoured Scottish independence. Even among those who voted SNP just under a third did not favour independence. The most likely explanations are, firstly, that the Labour government in London was generally unpopular for a variety of reasons and, secondly, that the electorate was more impressed with the SNP leader, Alex Salmond, than with the incumbent First Minister, Jack McConnell. In the same post-election survey, when respondents were asked to rate McConnell’s performance on a scale from zero to 10 the mean score given was 4.4. The mean when they were asked to rate how well Salmond would be likely to do was 5.4. The difference may appear small but it indicates that Salmond was clearly rated more favourably than his chief rival. Whether his relative popularity will survive the rigours of office remains to be seen – and on that will depend the prospects of the SNP in the next elections in four years time.

APPENDIX

In terms of constituencies, the composition of the Scottish ‘regions’ used in Tables 2 and 6 in the text is as follows.

The Results Of The Scottish Parliament Elections 2007

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
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, Dumbarton, 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

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