Second Time Lucky? The Continuing Adaptation of Voters and Parties to the Single Transferable Vote in Scotland

Dr. Alistair Clark,
School of Geography, Politics & Sociology,
Newcastle University,
Newcastle upon Tyne,
NE1 7RU.
E: alistair.clark@ncl.ac.uk

Draft – Comments are very welcome but not for citation without the author's permission.

Second Time Lucky? The Continuing Adaptation of Voters and Parties to the Single Transferable Vote in Scotland

Abstract

The 2012 round of Scottish local elections, held as a standalone contest, under STV provides a clearer indication of how STV has impacted on political behaviour than the previous round in 2007 which was held concurrently with elections to the Scottish parliament. Utilising aggregate ward-level data, this article presents a preliminary analysis of how parties and voters have adapted to the new system. It finds that voters have adapted well to STV, and that party loyalties remain important under the new system even if voters have considerably more choice.

Second Time Lucky? The Continuing Adaptation of Voters and Parties to the Single Transferable Vote in Scotland[1]

Local elections seldom attract extensive interest from either the media or academic commentators. However, the introduction of the single transferable vote (STV) for Scottish local elections in 2007 ensured that considerable attention was focused on how the new system worked in practice (Bennie and Clark, 2008; Clark, 2012; Clark and Bennie, 2008a; b; Curtice, 2007; Curtice et al, 2009; Denver and Bochel, 2007; Denver et al., 2009). 2007 was the first time STV had been deployed in Britain in recent decades, and its introduction confirmed Scotland's status as a 'testing ground' for electoral systems.[2] Those were also complex multilevel elections since STV was being used concurrently with the Additional Member System (AMS) system for elections to the Scottish parliament. While analysts noted varying degrees of both party and voter adaptation to STV in 2007, the 2012 round of Scottish local elections provide a much clearer indication of how the system has impacted on political behaviour. For the first time since devolution, local elections were not held concurrently with those for the Scottish parliament. Voters would be choosing local representatives unencumbered by having also to consider the Scottish parliamentary picture, while parties could also concentrate their campaign techniques on the new electoral system. This is important because STV is not extensively used as an electoral system. Its use in any new country is therefore of interest not only to country specialists, but also to comparative electoral systems scholars interested in how the system works in practice. This article therefore provides a preliminary assessment of the use of STV in the 2012 local elections by both parties and voters. The first part details the context for the campaign, and outlines the results. The second section examines how parties dealt with STV, examining in particular their candidate strategies. The final section moves on to assess how voters dealt with STV, in particular examining preference usage and transfer patterns. While parties continue to show signs of adaptation, 2012 demonstrates that voters have little difficulty with the new electoral system.

Context and Results

The run up to the 2012 Scottish local elections was dominated by constitutional issues in advance of the 2014 referendum on Scottish independence. This was a result of the Scottish National Party (SNP) having won an unprecedented and unexpected majority in the 2011 Scottish parliament elections (Curtice, 2011). Moreover, the nature and size of the SNP victory had left the other three main parties apparently in disarray with various leadership contests and organisational changes dominating their internal politics. The scene therefore appeared propitious for the SNP to make further advances in the 2012 council elections, the last round of major national elections before the 2014 referendum.

A number of other issues appeared to point to a Labour Party in crisis and towards considerable momentum for the SNP. Glasgow City Council became particularly totemic in this regard. The majority Labour group on Glasgow council suffered a number of resignations and rebellions over the deselection of a number of its incumbent councillors leaving the control of the council and local policy in some doubt. Indeed, rebels formed an alternative organisation – eventually named Glasgow First – to challenge Labour, while the *Sunday Herald* claimed on a front page cover (12th February 2012) that 'The Sun Sets on Labour's Scottish Heartland' (See also Gordon and Hutcheon, 2012). To underline this, the SNP launched its local government campaign at the party's spring conference in Glasgow in early March, almost a month before the other parties launched their campaigns. Glasgow was equally totemic for Labour, being one of only two councils the party retained majority control of in 2007. A loss of this stronghold, or even a move to no overall control (NOC), would have represented a major blow for the party in Scotland. It would also have impacted upon its UK-wide sense of recovery under Ed Miliband. Both Labour and the Liberal Democrats ran campaigns focused on similar issues: jobs and training, public services and the challenges of an aging population. Both also emphasised localism by producing local manifestos across Scotland.

Table 1: Voteshare and Seats in Scottish Local Government, 2007 and 2012

	% 2007	% 2012	Seats 2007	Seats 2012	% Seats 2007	% Seats 2012
SNP	27.9	32.4	363	425	29.7	34.8
Labour	28.1	31.4	348	394	28.5	32.2
Lib Dems	12.7	6.6	166	71	13.6	5.8
Cons	15.6	13.3	143	115	11.7	9.4
Greens	2.2	2.3	8	14	0.7	1.1
Independents	10.9	11.8	187	196	15.3	16.0
Others	2.7	2.3	7	8	0.6	0.6

Note: Voteshare refers to the share of first preference votes only. For 2007 results see: Clark and Bennie 2008a; Denver et al., 2009.

Table 1 compares the results for the 2007 and 2012 local elections. One expectation was that the SNP would build upon the momentum demonstrated in the 2011 Scottish parliament elections and thereby continue eating into Labour's core heartland in the central belt of Scotland. In the event, the SNP ended up the largest party both in terms of its share of first preference votes won, up 4.5 points on 2007, but also in terms of the number of seats won adding 62 additional SNP councillors to the 363 achieved in 2007 when the party was also the largest in terms of seats. However, the SNP failed to win Glasgow, which remains majority Labour controlled, and its result elsewhere did not live up to expectations, largely because many voters returned to the Labour fold. Labour also increased its voteshare by 3.3 points on 2007 and its tally of seats by 46 councillors. Both Labour and the SNP appear to have benefited from the slump in Liberal Democrat fortunes, the party continuing to decline as a consequence of its participation in government with the Conservatives at Westminster.

The Liberal Democrats appear to have taken most of the blame for the unpopularity of the Westminster coalition, losing more than half of their councillors in Scotland. While the Conservatives also lost seats and voteshare, this was at a shallower rate of decline than their coalition counterparts reflecting the fact that Conservative support was already almost at rock bottom in Scotland and had little further to fall. Since infighting between the Scottish Socialist Party and its Solidarity breakaway means that both have ceased to be centre stage among smaller parties, the main small party representative is now the Green Party. While the Green voteshare remained relatively constant at 2.3 per cent, the Greens added a further 6 councillors to their 2007 tally. Finally, independents are an established feature of Scottish politics, particularly in the Highlands and Islands. The voteshare for independents increased from 10.8 to 11.9 per cent, while numbers of independent councillors rose slightly from 187 to 196.

STV is meant to be a more proportional electoral system than plurality systems such as first past the post, the electoral system used until 2003 to elect Scottish councillors. However, the Scottish variant puts a potential brake on proportionality with district magnitudes of either three or four. This means that in a three member ward, a party needs 26 per cent of the vote to be elected, while in a four member ward 21 per cent is required. This sets a potentially high barrier for small parties and for parties which may be limited in their ability to attract preference transfers.

Table 1 suggests that both the SNP and independents are overrepresented in council chambers after the election. Indeed, 11.8 per cent of first preferences for independents yielded 16 per cent of seats, while the SNP achieved 34.8 per cent of seats on 32.4 per cent of first preferences. Labour and the Liberal Democrats both appear to have broad proportionality between their vote and seat share. However, smaller organisations can claim to be somewhat underrepresented, with the Greens achieving 2.3 per cent voteshare but only 1.1 per cent of seats and 'Others' also achieving a 2.3 per cent voteshare but only 0.6 per cent of seats. The most underrepresented party is the Conservatives with 13.3 per cent of the vote yielding only 9.4 per cent of seats, a similar level of underrepresentation to that experienced by the party in 2007 (Denver et al., 2009).

Table 2: Disproportionality of Scottish STV system, 2012

Measure	Score
DV	7.5
ADV	11.1
Lsq	4.7

Source: Author's calculations.

The stand-alone nature of the 2012 election allows the disproportionality of the Scottish STV system to be measured free from the intervening variable of a concurrent parliamentary election. Table 2 highlights three measures of disproportionality commonly used in the comparative electoral systems literature. These are deviation from proportionality (DV), alternative DV (ADV) and the least squares index (Lsq) (for discussion of these measures see: Dunleavy and Margetts, 2004; Farrell, 2011; Gallagher and Mitchell, Appendix

B). Thus with both DV and Lsq, the lower the score, the more proportional the system, with DV, in practice, unlikely to be lower than 4. On both measures, the Scottish variant of STV appears relatively proportional, with the Lsq measure in particular putting Scotland ahead of PR-STV in Ireland in Farrell's (2011: 234-235) comparative assessment of electoral systems during the 2000s. Dunleavy and Margetts' (2004) ADV measurement of disproportionality ranges from 0-100, with 0 representing a perfect representative democracy and 100 not being a representative democracy at all. On this measure, Scottish STV is also close to the proportional and representative end of the index. Despite its relatively small district magnitude, the 2012 results suggest that the Scottish STV system performs relatively proportionally.

One expected consequence of the decision to hold local elections separately from Scottish parliament contests was that turnout would drop considerably from the 53.8 per cent achieved in 2007. In the event, turnout held up better than expected with an average across Scotland of around 40 per cent. Highest turnouts were experienced in the three Island councils with Shetland on 55 per cent, Western Isles with 53.2 per cent and Orkney at 50.6 per cent. This may say something about the unique and predominantly independent political culture in the Islands. By contrast, three of Scotland's main cities were at the bottom end of turnout in 2012, with Glasgow recording 32.3 per cent, Aberdeen 33.4 per cent and Dundee 35.9 per cent. The highest mainland turnout was 48.2 per cent in East Renfrewshire, followed by Argyll and Bute with 46.6 per cent and East Dunbartonshire with 45.5 per cent. Low turnout is regularly associated with deprived wards and constituencies (Denver and Hands, 2004). However, it was two wards in relatively affluent Aberdeen which recorded the lowest turnouts of the election with George Street/Harbour on 20.5 per cent and Tillydrone/Seaton/Old Aberdeen on 21.9 per cent. While these are not the most affluent areas of the city, why these should have lower turnout than deprived wards in other considerably more deprived urban areas requires further research.[3] The highest ward turnouts were also found in the islands, with 64 per cent in Shetland West the greatest turnout in these elections. By contrast, the highest mainland turnout was 54.7 in Dee ward in Dumfries and Galloway council.

Candidates and Local Campaigns

In the 2007 round of STV elections, parties were criticised for not optimising their candidate strategies and taking advantage of the potential to benefit from voters' transfer preferences by running more than one candidate in a ward. The Electoral Reform Society (2007) for instance suggested that the SNP cost itself around 15 seats by not offering enough candidates to capitalise on its popularity. The party that offered most teams of candidates in 2007 was Labour with two or more candidates in 51 per cent of all wards. For most other parties the dominant strategy was to offer only one candidate per ward. As a consequence the overall number of candidates in 2007 fell somewhat from 4195 in 2003, to 2607 under STV in 2007, largely as a consequence of the reduction in the number of wards from 1,222 to 353 (Clark and Bennie, 2008a, 2008b).

The total numbers of candidates continued to drop in 2012, with a total of 2496 contesting the elections across Scotland. This means that the number of people actually

Figure 1: Main Party Candidates, Scottish Local Elections 2003-2012
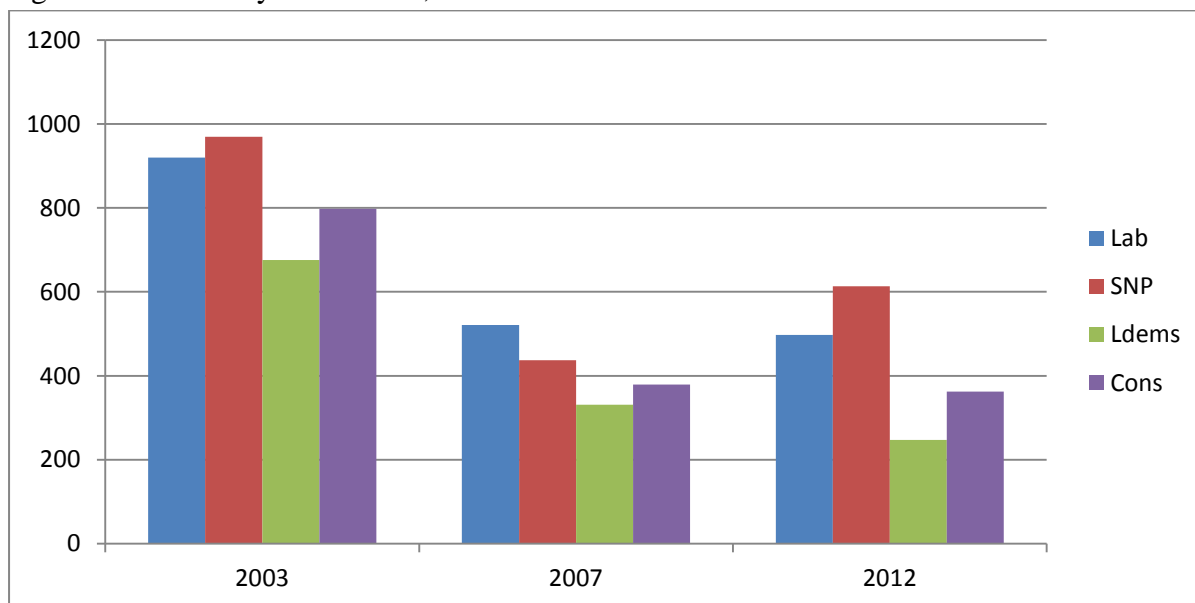
Source: Clark, 2005; Clark and Bennie, 2008b.

contesting local elections has fallen by around 40 per cent from the level seen at the last first past the post election in 2003. This notwithstanding, STV certainly gives voters more candidates to vote for on their ballot paper. In Scotland, the number of candidates per ward ranged between 4 and 14 with an average of 7. The main four parties extended their campaign coverage in 2012, offering 1719 candidates by comparison with 1668 five years earlier. Figure 1 illustrates the level of candidatures over time for the four main parties. The party responsible for this rise in mainstream party candidates was the SNP which extended its numbers of candidates significantly to 613, up from 437 in 2007. Labour offered slightly fewer, down from 521 to 497. The Liberal Democrats fell most dramatically, from 331 in 2007 to 247. The Conservatives offered 362 candidates, down slightly on the 379 offered in 2007. The balance of the total of 2496 consisted of 457 non-partisan Independent candidates, and various 'others'. These included 86 Green candidates, 14 fewer than in 2007. They also included 37 UKIP candidates, 31 Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) candidates, 32 standing under the 'anti-cuts' banner, and 20 standing as 'Glasgow First', the breakaway from Labour in the city.

Deciding to run with multiple candidates in a multi-member STV constituency can be complex (Gallagher, 1980; Katz, 1981; Lijphart and Irwin, 1979). Voters can choose between parties and candidates. Consequently, local parties need data on both voters' party preferences and their candidate loyalties to be able to make informed judgements. The need for such data in large part accounts for the high levels of party contacting activity in Irish STV elections (Marsh, 2004). Following Irish practice of campaigning under STV, Scottish party campaigns have imported a campaign technique labelled vote management. This aims to maximise preference transfers between a party's candidates in a ward, minimize leakage of transfers to other parties' candidates and ultimately attempts to ensure that parties with more than one candidate in a constituency have more than one candidate elected. Typically, this involves the local party organisation dividing up the constituency or ward into areas which

are effectively the preserve of one or other of their candidates. In their campaign literature and election posters, the local party then advises voters how they would like them to cast their preferences for their candidates. Thus, in a ward where a party offers two candidates they advise voters in area A of the ward to vote 1 for candidate A and 2 for candidate B. In area B of the ward, this advice is reversed to vote 1 for candidate B, 2 for candidate A.

In the 2007 round of STV elections, Clark (2012; Clark and Bennie, 2008a; 2008b) pointed to local party organisations not having the necessary data on candidate loyalties and preference transfers thereby limiting their ability to act as rational vote maximisers. There were nevertheless some good examples of adaptation to STV vote management campaigning techniques where parties deployed more than one candidate. This was particularly the case with Labour who demonstrated some quite sophisticated vote management, not least in the 37 wards where the party offered three candidates. Although the dominant strategy for the other three main parties was to offer just one candidate, where they ran a team a variety of approaches was evident to vote management in local literature. Some of these efforts were more sophisticated and successful than others, local organisations overestimating support in some places, and calling it quite well in others.

In 2012, the parties had the benefit not only of detailed ward-level data regarding preferences and transfers from the 2007 STV contest, they also had voter ID data from the more recent 2010 general and 2011 Scottish parliament elections. In addition to their canvassing activities in the run up to the local elections, parties should therefore have had considerable amounts of information allowing them to make relatively informed candidate decisions, even if this data concentrated more on party loyalties and preferences than on potential loyalties towards candidates.

Table 3: Major Party Candidates per Ward 2012

	SNP	%	Lab	%	LDem	%	Cons	%
0	7	2.0	43	12.2	123	34.8	21	5.9
1	100	28.3	140	39.7	214	60.6	303	85.8
2	225	63.7	153	43.3	15	4.2	25	7.1
3	21	5.9	17	4.8	1	0.3	3	0.8
Total Cands	613		497		247		362	

Table 3 highlights the extent to which the main parties took the opportunity to offer multiple candidates in wards in 2012. For the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives, the predominant strategy was, as in 2007, to offer one party candidate in a ward. The Conservatives adopted this approach in 85 per cent of wards, while the Liberal Democrats had one candidate in 60 per cent of wards. More worrying for the Liberal Democrats, they had the largest number of seats of all four parties in which it did not offer a candidate; voters could not opt for a Liberal Democrat in over a third of wards even if they had wanted to, reflecting continued, and arguably increasing, Liberal Democrat weakness in some areas of Scotland (Clark, 2007). By contrast, where Labour and the SNP stood, their dominant strategy was to offer multiple candidates. Labour built upon its experience in 2007 with teams of candidates; 153 wards had two Labour candidates in 2012, while a further 17 wards

had three Labour candidates to choose from. Having learned from not fielding enough candidates in 2007, the SNP offered two candidates in almost two-thirds of all wards, and three candidates in a further 21. Indeed, the SNP was quite clearly emphasising this aspect of campaign strategy. The party's campaign message was '1, 2, 3, SNP'. This was underlined in its election broadcast both by giving voters advice on how to complete the ballot paper, and more subtly with the song 'Let's Stick Together' providing the backing music.

The basis of any successful STV vote management strategy is to get enough first preferences to allow voters' preference transfers to come into play where candidates have not been elected on the first round of counting on the basis of first preferences. Table 4 analyses mainstream party performance in regard to first preferences. Labour appears to have attracted higher levels of first preferences than its competitors, achieving an average of 91.3 per cent of quota and with 198 of the party's candidates recording results of more than 100 per cent of quota. SNP candidates on average achieved 81.5 per cent of quota, with 186 Nationalist candidates recording 100 per cent or more of quota. The two smaller parties were much less popular. The Liberal Democrats averaged only 41.3 per cent of quota where they stood, the poorest performance of the four main parties, with only 20 Liberal Democrats achieving more than quota on first preferences. The Conservatives averaged 54.2 per cent of quota on first preferences with 46 of the party's candidates achieving more than quota. In addition to Liberal Democrats being punished for their participation in government with the Conservatives at Westminster, it is likely that the performance differential between the two smaller parties can largely be attributed to the greater number of candidates offered by the Conservatives. In short, where parties don't stand, they won't attract votes.

Table 4: Proportion (%) of Quota Achieved on First Preferences, By Party

	Min	Max	Mean	Std Dev.	N	N >= 100%
Labour	10.1	193.6	91.3	39.8	497	198
SNP	13.5	195.0	81.5	34.8	613	186
LDems	1.5	161.6	41.3	34.8	247	20
Cons	5.7	183.3	54.2	37.0	362	46

The second crucial area for parties that offered more than one candidate is to ensure that the second candidate is starting from a high enough level of first preferences so that voters' preference transfers can then come into effect. Table 4 suggests that Labour started from a better position in this regard with higher average first preferences and more candidates on more than one quota. Controlling only for where the two main parties offered teams of candidates and examining those wards where their candidates had achieved over 100 per cent of quota underlines this impression. Where the party had two or more candidates standing, Labour achieved on average 133.8 of quota. By contrast, in the equivalent wards for the SNP, Nationalist candidates achieved on average 122.5 of quota. Although it is not possible to examine this from aggregate data, one possible explanation suggests itself. This is that the SNP's large number of either new or non-incumbent candidates performed less well in attracting first preferences, and that consequently it was less able to benefit from incumbency or name recognition in local campaigns. By contrast, Labour had extensive experience in

dealing with the difficulties of both incumbency and vote management in 2007 and this may have underlined the need to attract first preferences as a platform on which to optimise the number of candidates elected.

How Did Voters Use STV in 2012?

As a preferential electoral system where voters can cast as many preferences as there are candidates, STV appears potentially more complex for voters than just marking a cross under first past the post, or even the Scottish parliament's additional member system (AMS). Concerns about this potential complexity persist in some quarters in Scotland. On the other hand, the idea of ranking something '1, 2, 3, and so on', as the 2012 ballot paper indicated, is in itself a relatively straightforward idea to grasp. Whether or not there are high levels of rejected ballots is a key indicator of whether or not voters adapted well to the STV system. In 2007, high levels of rejected ballots for the Scottish parliamentary contest often led to the misguided idea that preferential voting led to substantial numbers of rejected ballots. In reality STV performed relatively well in 2007 with levels of rejected ballots being comparable with those in countries with much longer experience of STV voting (Denver et al., 2009: 268-269).

The 2012 round of elections provides a much clearer indication however since these were standalone elections where voters were not confronted by multiple ballot papers and instructions on how to vote. Moreover, there had been an extensive voter education campaign while polling station staff also, as a matter of course, reminded voters of the preferential nature of STV. Under such circumstances, it should be expected that there was a lower level of rejected ballots in 2012. This was confirmed by the results. In total, only 1.7 per cent (27,046) of ballots were rejected, slightly lower than the 1.83 per cent (38,351) of rejected ballots in 2007 (Denver et al., 2009: 268-269). This compares very well with the 1.84 per cent rejected in the 2011 Northern Ireland Assembly election and 2 per cent in the 2011 Northern Irish council elections, both held under STV with an electorate much more used to the system (Electoral Commission, 2011: 45).

Table 5: Lower preference transfers as a % of valid first preferences

Cands	Prefs 2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Wards
4	65.3	37.4	18.8											19
5	79.4	46.6	20.3	16.0										42
6	75.9	46.3	17.8	11.7	10.3									80
7	81.6	52.6	21.2	11.6	9.0	8.2								93
8	84.6	57.0	23.5	11.6	8.2	7.2	6.6							55
9	86.0	58.3	24.6	11.7	7.6	6.2	5.6	5.2						28
10	86.8	61.4	26.8	12.2	7.4	5.7	5.0	4.7	4.4					16
11	90.5	65.2	27.6	13.1	8.0	5.8	5.0	4.5	4.2	3.9				12
12	91.5	55.7	26.0	12.1	7.4	5.3	4.4	3.8	3.7	3.4	3.1			2
13	92.0	67.8	28.7	12.7	7.0	4.4	3.4	2.9	2.7	2.6	2.5	2.3		4
14	90.5	70.3	28.1	13.1	7.3	4.7	3.7	3.1	2.8	2.6	2.4	2.3	2.1	1
All	81.3	52.6	21.7	11.8	7.6	4.6	2.2	1.0	0.5	0.2	0.08	0.05	0.01	353
Wards	328	328	328	310	268	211	114	60	34	19	7	5	1	

The second indicator of how voters have adapted to STV is their use of preferences. By contrast with the compulsion to complete the ballot paper in Australia, voters are permitted to offer only a first preference in Scotland. The preferential nature of the system would nevertheless be defeated if large numbers of voters chose only to vote for one candidate. Experience in 2007 demonstrated that voters had essentially understood the system and acted accordingly, with 78 per cent casting a second preference and 54 per cent offering a third preference (Denver et al., 2009). Data from council preference summary reports indicate that a similar pattern was evident in 2012.[4] Table 5 sets out the number of lower preferences cast as a proportion of first preferences across a range of candidate configurations. In total, 81.3 per cent of those who cast a first preference also marked a second preference, while levels of third preferences fell to 52.6 per cent. The proportion of voters using more than three preferences drops away sharply from there, with at best just over a fifth of voters indicating a fourth preference. Whatever the candidate configuration of the ward, it is nevertheless evident that a number of voters go all the way to the end of their ballot paper. Greater proportions of voters do so the shorter the ballot paper is, but this remains the case even where large number of candidates stand with, in the most extreme example some voters completing all 14 preferences offered to them in Glasgow's Govan ward.

A key aspect of STV is voters' ability to transfer their preferences between both parties and candidates. Analysis of transfers has therefore been central to understanding voters' use of STV elsewhere, as in Ireland. Key questions include the level of transfer solidarity where parties offer more than one candidate, and the level of transfers to other parties where only one party candidate is offered. Denver et al. (2009) approach this in their analysis of the 2007 elections by analysing only those wards where either one candidate is eliminated after round one of counting, or alternatively where only one candidate is elected. This means that voters' intentions are not complicated by, for instance, having two candidates elected in round one of the count. Thus, the intention and preference structure behind the voter's choice should be clear. For the purpose of comparability with the 2007 round of local elections, the analysis reported in tables 6 and 7 builds upon this approach. It also excludes results from the three island councils since they are predominantly independent oriented. Excluding the island councils and those wards where more than one candidate was elected in round one leaves 168 wards within which second preference transfers can be analysed.

Table 6: Second preference transfer solidarity where running mate available

To\From	Labour %	SNP %	Lib Dem %	Con %	Ind %
Non-transferable	7.7	5.9	6.3	7.8	18.1
Labour	77.3	5.0	2.3	4.6	6.6
SNP	7.8	75.2	7.9	5.8	13.7
Lib Dem	1.2	2.6	72.6	5.1	13.2
Con	1.3	3.0	7.8	69.2	10.2
Green	0.8	0.4	1.6	1.6	2.1
Ind	2.3	7.1	-	5.8	34.2
Other	1.4	0.8	1.3	0.2	2.0
N wards	46	26	4	7	19

Table 6 assesses transfer solidarity between parties' teams of running mates. In 2007, intra-party running mates were the main destination for voters' second preferences although levels of transfer solidarity varied by party. Three things are evident in table 6. Firstly, in 2012 levels of second preference transfers between party candidates remain the predominant pattern where parties offered more than one candidate. Thus, with Labour, SNP and Liberal Democrat teams of candidates, levels of transfer solidarity are above 72 per cent, while with the Conservatives intra-party transfers fall just below 70 per cent. This is a level of transfer solidarity higher than seen in the 2011 Irish general election and compares very favourably with intra-party transfers in much less volatile Irish elections (Gallagher, 2011; Sinnott and McBride, 2011). It is also a higher level of solidarity than seen in Scotland in 2007, when the highest levels were seen between SNP candidates at 70.6 per cent and Labour candidates at 66.3 per cent. While the pattern of independent transfers is more diverse, where another independent candidate is available, over a third of second preferences also went to another independent, broadly the same level as in 2007 (Denver et al, 2009: 275). Secondly, where parties ran teams of candidates, levels of non-transferable votes are relatively low at between 5.9 to 7.8 per cent for the main four parties. This is a lower level of non-transferable votes where parties offered more than one candidate than in 2007 when the level varied between 10-16.6 per cent (Denver et al., 2009: 275). Thirdly, the party that appears to have benefited most from leakage from other parties, despite them having more than one candidate in the ward, is the SNP, attracting anywhere between 5.8 to 13.7 per cent of second preference transfers from other parties. This notwithstanding, the message for parties where they ran more than one candidate is that doing so means fewer non-transferable votes, and high levels of transfers remaining within the party.

Table 7: Second preference transfers where no running mate available

To\From	Labour %	SNP %	Lib Dem %	Con %	Greens %	Ind %	Others %
Non-transferable	31.4	30.8	16.5	30.3	15.9	23.8	32.4
Labour	-	13.2	19.9	9.4	16.0	21.3	27.3
SNP	21.4	-	16.5	13.5	25.7	20.9	21.1
Lib Dem	13.8	18.0	-	28.4	10.5	12.8	4.2
Con	9.6	10.0	28.0	-	15.2	14.6	10.2
Green	8.6	12.4	10.2	4.9	-	0.4	2.2
Ind	12.1	8.8	7.5	10.0	14.3	-	1.7
Other	3.1	6.8	1.4	3.4	2.3	6.2	1.0
N wards	11	9	7	11	5	9	12

Table 7 assesses wards where parties only offered one candidate to voters. It is noteworthy that such a campaign strategy resulted in considerably higher levels of non-transferable votes across all party options, peaking at over 30 per cent for the Conservatives, SNP and Labour. The SNP again benefits from relatively high levels of transfers from their competitors, with more than a fifth of Labour second preferences going to the Nationalists when there was no second Labour candidate available. At 13 per cent, a much smaller proportion of the Nationalist vote transferred to Labour however. Interestingly, the highest

level of intra-party transfers was between the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives at around 28 per cent in both directions. In 2007, there was a similar level of transfers between Conservatives and Liberal Democrats at around 27.5 per cent. However, levels of Liberal Democrat-Conservative transfers where there was no Liberal Democrat running mate were much lower at 11.2 per cent in 2007 (Denver et al., 2009: 276). Although difficult to assess the reasons for this with aggregate data, the fact that both parties are currently in coalition at Westminster is surely more than coincidental. Transfers from the Liberal Democrats notwithstanding, the Conservatives look somewhat isolated with the lowest level of transfers from the two main parties and reliant on transfers from smaller parties. This is a similar pattern as seen in 2007 (Denver et al., 2009: 276). Finally, and intriguingly given the ongoing and high profile debate on Scottish independence, 13.5 per cent of second preferences from Conservative voters went to the SNP. While such transfers do not necessarily indicate support for independence from Conservative voters, they do provide further evidence, if any is needed, that if the SNP is to have any hope of winning its cherished aim of independence it is going to have to appeal across all party affiliations, not just those who may have had some more obvious history of overlaps with nationalism such as Labour.

A final aspect of STV voting has caused some controversy in both the system's comparative use and in the first elections in Scotland. This is the issue of ballot position effects, with evidence suggesting that the higher candidates are up the ballot paper, the more first preference votes they will receive (Darcy and McAllister, 1990; Denver et al, 2009; Robson and Walsh, 1974). Evidence of ballot paper effects in 2007 led to Scottish government research and consultation into the issue (Martin et al, 2011), although no further action was taken. However, it remains controversial amongst candidates and has again been raised in post election assessments (Scottish Parliament, 2012: Col. 1120-1122). Unless randomisation of ballot papers were introduced, such effects should be expected and results indicate that this remained in evidence in the 2012 round of local elections. Indeed, the relationship between position on the ballot paper and the number of first preferences received was a correlation coefficient of -.200, which was statistically significant at the p<0.01 level.

Conclusion

The 2012 round of STV local elections in Scotland provide a good opportunity to extend knowledge of how the system works in practice, uncomplicated by concurrent elections to another institution. Understanding how the system works is important not just for Scottish politics commentators, but also for electoral systems analysts since there are relatively few countries that use STV in practice. Since STV provides vast amounts of data for analysis, this article has endeavoured to provide a preliminary assessment of how parties and voters used the system in 2012. Undoubtedly questions remain, such as a detailed examination of ward level results, the influence of lower level transfers and the impact of the system on council chambers up and down Scotland. This notwithstanding, the preliminary analysis presented here highlights two key sets of findings, underlining similar points made about the 2007 round of STV elections (Denver et al., 2009). The first is that voters have adapted well to the STV system, despite some expectations and suggestions to the contrary. More than four fifths indicated a second preference while more than half marked a third preference, suggesting that

voters have little difficulty with preferential voting. Reinforcing this point, levels of rejected ballots were lower than in 2007 and compared very favourably with those in recent elections under STV in Northern Ireland. Secondly, while there is some evidence of inter-party transfers between parties, ultimately party loyalties mattered. Levels of transfer solidarity where parties offered more than one candidate were high, indeed more so than in 2007 and at levels comparable with the use of PR-STV in Irish elections. Further assessment of ward results will highlight whether or not parties got their candidate strategies right and more detailed patterns of transfer usage. Nevertheless, at the aggregate level, offering teams of candidates, particularly for Labour and the SNP, did minimise leakage to other parties. For voters however, the ability to choose between parties and candidates remains and with the average number of candidates per ward being 7, the use of STV in Scotland gives voters considerably more choice than their counterparts have for comparable local elections elsewhere in Britain.

References

Bennie, L. (2006) 'Transition to STV: Scottish Local Government Elections 2007'. *Representation* 42 (4), pp273-287.

Bennie, L. and Clark, A. (2008) 'The Transformation of Local Politics? STV and the 2007 Scottish Local Government Elections', *Representation*, 44, (3), pp225-238.

Clark, A. (2007) 'Community Politics? Grassroots Liberal Democrats and the 2003 Scottish Parliament Elections', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations,* 9, (4), pp696-712.

Clark, A. (2012) 'Party Organisation and Concurrent Multi-Level Local Campaigning: The 2007 Scottish Elections Under MMP and STV', *Party Politics*, 18, (4), pp603-622.

Clark, A. and Bennie, L. (2008a) 'Electoral Reform and Party Adaptation: The Introduction of the Single Transferable Vote in Scotland', *Political Quarterly,* 79, (2), pp241-251.

Clark, A. and Bennie, L. (2008b) 'Strategic Actors or Muddling Through? Political Parties, Local Campaigning and the Single Transferable Vote', *Representation*, 44, (4), pp327-340.

Curtice, J. (2007) 'STV Goes Tartan: A Preliminary Analysis of its use in the 2007 Scottish Local Elections'. *Representation* 43 (3): 209-216.

Curtice, J., McCrone, D., McEwen, N., Marsh, M. and Ormston, R. (2009) *Revolution or Evolution? The 2007 Scottish Elections*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Curtice, J. (2011) 'The 2011 Scottish Election: Records Tumble, Barriers Breached', *Scottish Affairs*, 76, pp51-73.

Darcy, R. and McAllister, I. (1990) 'Ballot Position Effects', *Electoral Studies*, 9, (1), pp. 5-17.

Denver, D. and Bochel, H. (2007) 'A Quiet Revolution: STV and the Scottish Council Elections of 2007'. *Scottish Affairs* 61: 1-17.

Denver, D. and Hands, G. (2004) 'Exploring Variations in Turnout: Constituencies and Wards in the Scottish Parliament Elections of 1999 and 2003', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 6, (4), pp527-542.

Denver, D., Clark, A. and Bennie. L. (2009) 'Voter Reactions to a Preferential Ballot: The 2007 Scottish Local Elections', *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties,* 19, (3), pp265-282.

Dunleavy, P. and Margetts, H. (2004) 'How Proportional are the British AMS Systems?', *Representation*, 40, (4), pp316-328.

Electoral Commission (2011) *Report on the Northern Ireland Assembly Election on 5 May 2011*, Belfast: Electoral Commission.

Electoral Reform Society (2007) *Local Authority Elections in Scotland, 3 May 2007: Report and Analysis*, London: Electoral Reform Society.

Farrell, D. M. (2011) *Electoral Systems: A Comparative Introduction 2e*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Gallagher, M. (1980) 'Candidate Selection in Ireland: The Impact of Localism and the Electoral System', *British Journal of Political Science*, 10, (4), pp. 489-503.

Gallagher, M. and Mitchell, P. (2008) *The Politics of Electoral Systems*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gallagher, M. (2011) 'Ireland's Earthquake Election: Analysis of the Results' in M. Gallagher and M. Marsh (eds.) *How Ireland Voted 2011: The Full Story of Ireland's Earthquake Election*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, pp139-171.

Gordon, T. and Hutcheon, P. (2012) 'Labour in Glasgow: The Long Goodbye...', *Sunday Herald*, 12th February.

Katz, R. (1981) 'But How Many Candidates Should We Have in Donegal? Numbers of Nominees and Electoral Efficiency in Ireland', *British Journal of Political Science*, 11, (1), pp. 117-122.

Lijphart, A. and Irwin, G. (1979) 'Nomination Strategies in the Irish STV System: The Dáil Elections of 1969, 1973 and 1977', *British Journal of Political Science*, 9, (3), pp. 362-369.

Marsh, M. (2004) 'None of That Post-Modern Stuff Around Here: Grassroots Campaigning in the 2002 Irish General Election', in R. Scully et al. (eds.) *British Elections and Parties Review Vol. 14,* Abingdon: Taylor and Francis, pp245-267.

Martin, C., Murray, L., Treanor, S. and Chan, V. (2011) *Testing of the Ballot Paper for the 2012 Local Government Elections in Scotland*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

Robson, C. and Walsh, B. (1974) 'The Importance of Positional Bias in the Irish General Election of 1973', *Political Studies*, 22 (2), pp191-203.

Scottish Parliament (2012) *Official Report: Local Government and Regeneration Committee*, Edinburgh: Scottish Parliament, 13th June.

Sinnott, R. and McBride, J. (2011) 'Preference Voting Under PR-STV 1948-2011', in M. Gallagher and M. Marsh (eds.) *How Ireland Voted 2011: The Full Story of Ireland's Earthquake Election*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, pp205-221.

---

[1] I am extremely grateful to Jonathan Buzzeo for his invaluable work in collecting and inputting the not inconsiderable amounts of data that have contributed to this article. I am also grateful to the Newcastle University School of Geography, Politics and Sociology research committee for funding this research assistance and to participants at the 2012 PSA Territorial Politics Group conference for their helpful comments. The usual disclaimer applies.

[2] Scotland now has four different electoral systems for elections to different institutions: first past the post for Westminster, AMS for the Scottish parliament, closed list PR for European elections and from 2007, STV for council contests. For details on the process of introducing STV in Scotland, see Bennie (2006).

[3] An accurate and up-to-date analysis will have to await the release of data from the 2011 census which was unavailable at the time of writing.

[4] This analysis is based on preference summary report data from 328 wards. At the time of writing, data was not available from Argyll and Bute, Inverclyde, and Stirling councils, and Fortissat, Kilbrine and Beith and Thurso wards.