2012 Scottish Local Government Elections
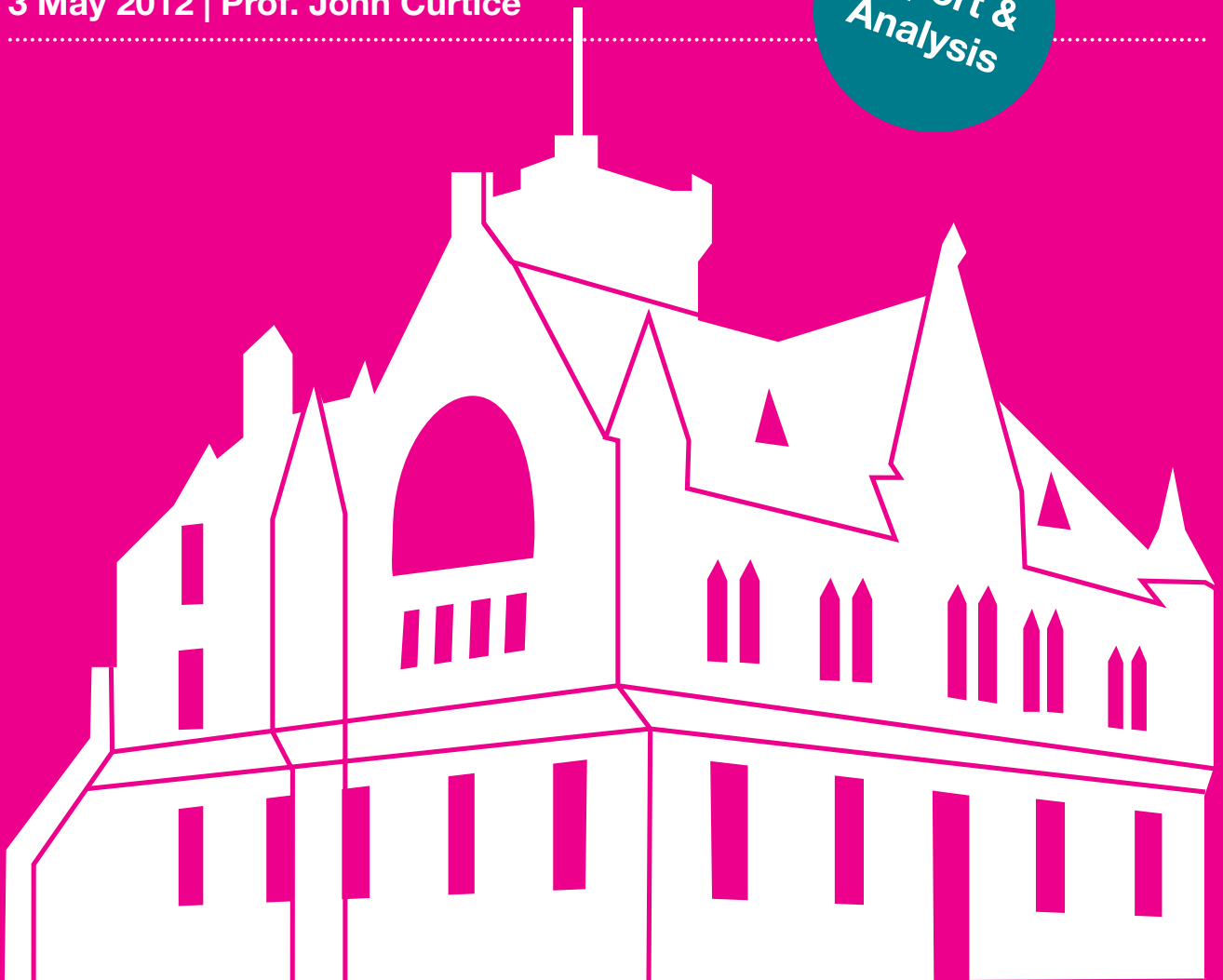
3 May 2012 | Prof. John Curtice

Report & Analysis

☐Electoral
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Acknowledgements

Contents

Foreword: STV's Second Outing

1. Women's representation in local government went up from 21.8% in 2007 to an all time high of 24% in 2012. See Less Male, Pale and Stale? Women and the 2012 Scottish Local Government Elections, Meryl Kenny and Fiona Mackay. *Scottish Affairs*, no. 80, summer 2012.

In 2007 Scotland began using the Single Transferable Vote (STV) for local government elections. The First Past the Post system - once used for all public elections in mainland Britain - was consigned to history.

May 2012 marked the second outing for the system, and the first since elections to the Scottish Parliament were 'decoupled'.

We have sought to understand what that change has meant for Scotland's voters, to see how the public and the parties have adapted, and if expectations – of both supporters and critics alike – have been borne out.

The first STV vote clearly saw massive changes in how elections and local democracy worked in Scotland.

Voter choice more than doubled, uncontested seats became a thing of the past, and the rotten boroughs that once plagued Scotland were undone.

2012 has shown modest, but measurable improvements. What we are witnessing is evidence that both voters and parties are becoming more adept at making the most of the possibilities presented by STV. We are seeing a new system bedding in.

But, as expected, the first local elections since decoupling did see a dramatic drop in voter participation. Turnout in this election was 39.1% - a 14% drop from the last election. That figure may remain head and shoulders above the 31% that turned out in English authorities that year, but that will be of little comfort to anyone with concerns about the health of our democracy.

STV in Scotland has not been a silver bullet for all the ills of local government. Only modest gains on gender balance mean councils will remain

"male, pale, and stale" until we see real progress from parties on candidate selection.[1]

Yes, more action is needed but the system is ensuring that more voices are being heard on more councils than ever before.

There are clearly lessons for those in England and Wales who believe their local democracy can and should be better.

Willie Sullivan,
Electoral Reform Society Scotland

Expanding voter choice

2003 (FPTP)	2007 (STV)	2012 (STV)

| **3.4** | **7.4** | **7.1** |
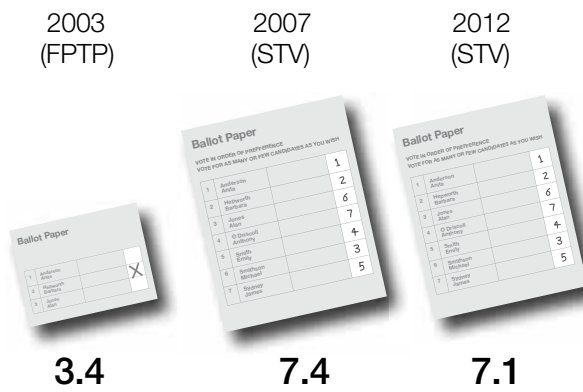
Average number of candidates standing per ward

Getting something for your trouble

2003 (FPTP)	2007 (STV)	2012 (STV)

| **52.3%** | **74.0%** | **76.7%** |
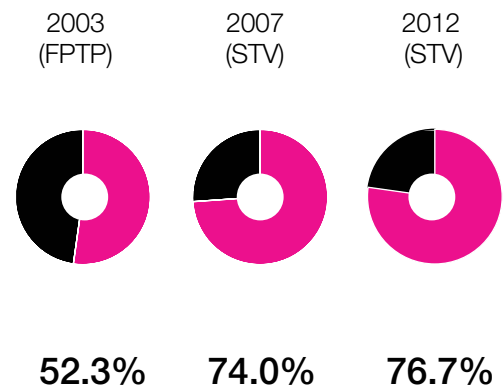
Percentage of voters giving their FPTP vote (2003) or STV first preference (2007, 2012) to a successful candidate.

Eliminating Uncontested Seats

2003 (FPTP)   61 wards

2007 (STV)   0 wards

2012 (STV)   0 wards
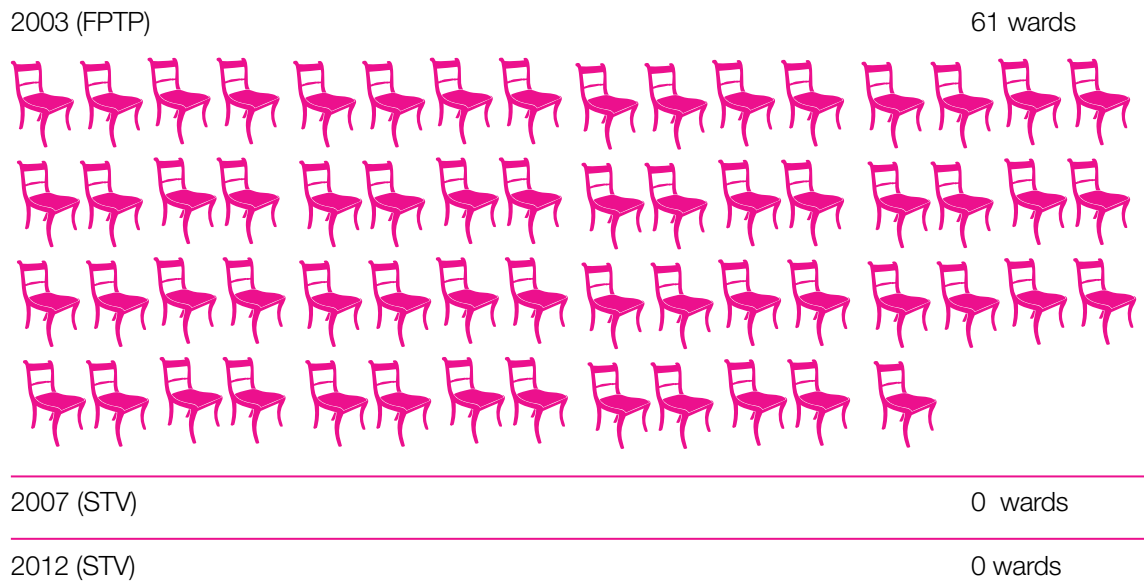
Total number of uncontested wards

Introduction

On May 3rd 2012, Scotland's voters went to the polls to elect all of the country's 1,223 local councillors. For only the second time the elections were conducted using the Single Transferable Vote (STV) in multi-member wards. Moreover, as the first STV election in 2007 was held alongside a Scottish Parliament election (where a variant of the Additional Member System was in use), this was actually the first occasion on which the system was deployed in a standalone election that was not at risk of being overshadowed by a more high profile parallel contest. Given too that Scotland's local elections are the only ones on the British side of the Irish Sea where STV is currently in use, what happened in the 2012 elections is an invaluable source of evidence on how British parties and voters respond to its introduction, with important implications for the debate about whether the system should be used in other elections in the UK.

This report examines the lessons of this first use of STV in a modern standalone election anywhere in Great Britain. After outlining the overall result, it addresses three key questions:

1. How much and what kinds of choices did the parties present to voters?
2. What kinds of choices did voters express on their ballot paper?
3. How were the votes cast by voters reflected in the seats won and power secured by the parties?

We address these questions by undertaking a detailed examination of the ward by ward election results themselves. As in 2007, the STV ballots were counted electronically and, as a result, rather more information about the choices expressed by voters has been made available than would otherwise be the case, most notably in respect of the number of preferences every voter cast. There are, though, still some limitations as to what can be gleaned from the

results alone, most notably any ability to identify the political and demographic characteristics of voters who behave in a particular way (Curtice and Marsh, 2008). The data needed to undertake that kind of research has, however, been collected as part of the 2012 Scottish Social Attitudes survey and they will be the subject of future publications designed to cast further light on how STV worked in practice in 2012.

What is the Single Transferable Vote?

Under STV voters are invited to place the candidates on the ballot paper in order of preference by placing a '1' against the name of the candidate they prefer most, a '2' against the candidate who is their second preference, etc. Voters are free to choose how many candidates they rank. To be elected a candidate needs to garner sufficient votes to meet the 'quota,' that is one more than the figure obtained when the number of votes cast is divided by the number of seats to be filled plus one. If the total number of first preferences cast for any candidate is greater than the quota, that candidate is immediately elected and their surplus vote (that is the difference between their share of the first preference vote and the quota) transferred to the remaining candidates in accordance with the second preferences expressed by that successful candidate's voters. If after this process fewer candidates have been elected than there are seats to be filled then the candidate with fewest votes is eliminated and their votes transferred to the other candidates (still in the count) in accordance with the next preference expressed by the eliminated candidate's voters. This procedure is repeated as necessary until as many candidates have satisfied the quota (through a combination of first preference votes and second and subsequent preferences transferred from

other candidates) as there are seats to be filled. For further details see Renwick (2011).

Where an election is conducted on partisan lines, STV tends to produce results that are approximately proportional to first preferences won, though where a party is particularly adept at winning voters' lower preferences they may secure rather more than their proportionate share of seats. However, the proportionality of the outcome is constrained by the number of seats to be filled; the fewer seats there are to be filled the less proportional the outcome is likely to be, both in an individual ward and across a council as a whole (Lijphart, 1994). Not least of the reasons for this is that the fewer the number of seats, the more difficult it is for smaller parties to win any. Under the STV system that has been implemented in Scotland, wards elect only three or four councillors, a characteristic that can be expected to limit the degree to which proportional outcomes are obtained.

The 2012 Elections

The 2012 elections were held just twelve months after the Scottish National Party (SNP) achieved an outstanding success in winning an overall majority in the 2011 Scottish Parliament election, a result that meant that Scotland was headed for a referendum on whether or not it should leave the UK. Much of the political interest in these elections thus lay in whether they would be graced by a repetition of that SNP success or whether, instead, Labour would demonstrate that it was on the road to recovery. Meanwhile, the opinion polls suggested that the Liberal Democrats were still deeply unpopular on account of their involvement in the UK government coalition, and thus might well lose ground heavily. The central question for the Conservatives remained whether there were any signs at last of recovery from the minor party status into which the party had been cast ever since the late 1990s.

Table 1.1. Summary of result of 2012 Scottish Local Elections

	1st preferences	%	Change in % since 2007	Seats	Change in Seats since 2007
Conservative	206,599	13.3	-2.3	115	-28
Labour	488,703	31.4	+3.3	394	+46
Liberal Democrat	103,087	6.6	-6.1	71	-95
SNP	503,233	32.3	+4.4	425	+62
Green	36,000	2.3	+0.1	14	+6
Independent	188,701	12.1	+1.2	200	+13
Others	30,150	1.9	-0.8	4	-3
Turnout	1,556,473	39.1			

Note: One extra seat was added to a ward in West Lothian, and thus the tally of gains and losses in the final column does not sum to zero.
Source: ERS Dataset of 2012 results

2. Though we might note that the potential vote for such candidates was somewhat understated under single member plurality because of the ability of some Independents in rural Scotland to secure election unopposed.

Table 1.1 summarises the overall result of the election across Scotland as a whole. The SNP did indeed emerge with the largest share of first preferences, the first time ever that it had outpolled Labour in the popular vote in a Scotland wide set of local elections. However, its lead was a narrow one, a little less than a single percentage point, and well below the lead of some fourteen to eighteen points (on the constituency and list votes respectively) that the party had enjoyed in the previous year's Scottish Parliament election (Curtice and Steven, 2011). Thus while an excellent outcome for the SNP by the historical standard of previous local elections, the result appeared rather disappointing relative to the expectations generated by its success a year earlier.

However, the relatively pessimistic expectations of how well the Liberal Democrats would do were largely fulfilled. The party's share of first preferences was almost halved and its tally of councillors more than halved. Meanwhile support for the Conservatives also fell, albeit less precipitously, to what proved to be the party's second lowest share of the popular vote ever in a round of Scottish local elections. In contrast the small Green party maintained its share of the first preference vote, while at the same time managing to nearly double its modest tally of local councillors.

In fact as many as one in eight voters eschewed giving their first preference vote to a political party candidate at all, giving it instead to an Independent candidate. Not only did that represent a small increase in Independents' share of first preference votes as compared with 2007, but also it meant that the share of the popular vote won by Independent candidates was higher than at any time since 1974[2]. One of the concerns originally expressed about the introduction of any system of proportional representation in Scottish local elections was that it should not become unduly difficult for

Independent candidates to win seats (Kerley, 2001). STV seems to have succeeded in meeting that concern.

At 39.1% the turnout (defined as the proportion of the registered electorate that cast a valid vote) was, unsurprisingly, markedly lower than in 2007 (52.8%) when a parallel Scottish Parliament election was held. However it also proved to be lower than at any previous round of Scottish local elections held since the major reorganization of the 1970s. The previous all–time low since then, 41.4%, had been registered in 1992 when the local elections took place just a month after a UK-wide general election. The election clearly provided further evidence of the increasing difficulty of getting voters to the polls, irrespective of the electoral system in use.

Candidates

How much choice did voters have?

Overall, 2,496 candidates stood in the election. This represented a drop of 110 as compared with 2007. However, as Table 2.1 shows, this drop was very uneven. It was primarily occasioned by substantial declines in the number of Liberal Democrat, Other and Independent candidates. The decline in the number of Liberal Democrat standard bearers was a reflection of the party's poor electoral standing. The fall in the number of Other candidates reflected the continuing implosion in the electoral and organizational strength of the Scottish Socialist Party and Solidarity in the wake of Tommy Sheridan's court battles; between them these two parties of the left nominated no less than 115 fewer candidates than they had done in 2007.

Meanwhile there was actually a sharp increase in the number of candidates nominated by the SNP. The party had nominated at least one candidate in almost every ward in 2007, but this time it extended its reach to all bar two of the six wards on Orkney and five of the seven in the Shetlands, two councils where Independent councillors predominate. However, it was estimated that in 2007 the SNP had in some half dozen to a dozen wards nominated fewer candidates than seats it was capable of winning (Baston, 2007), while the party's high hopes for the 2012 elections also encouraged it this time around to nominate at least two candidates in over two-thirds of Scotland's 353 wards. In contrast both Labour and the Conservatives adopted somewhat more conservative nomination strategies than in 2007. Although it contested at least as many wards as last time, Labour in particular sharply reduced the number of wards in which it adopted the highly

Table 2.1 Number of candidates nominated by each party

	No. of wards in which stood stated no. of candidates					
	None	1	2	3	More than 3	Total Candidates
Conservatives	22 (n/c)	303 (+14)	25 (-14)	3 (-1)	-	362 (-17)
Labour	43 (-7)	140 (+16)	153 (+10)	17 (-20)	-	497 (-24)
Liberal Democrats	123 (+41)	214 (n/c)	15 (-39)	1 (-2)	-	247 (-84)
SNP	7 (-11)	100 (-139)	225 (+134)	21 (+16)	-	613 (+177)
Greens	267 (+14)	86 (-14)	0 (n/c)	0 (n/c)	-	86 (-14)
Independents	135 (+19)	113 (+5)	42 (-11)	31 (n/c)	32 (-13)	465 (-86)
Others	196 (+26)	114 (+9)	30 (-26)	5 (-14)	8 (+5)	226 (-62)

Figures in brackets show change since 2007. n/c = no change
Source: ERS Dataset of 2012 Results.

optimistic strategy of nominating as many as three candidates, a practice that had occurred primarily in places where there had been three Labour incumbent councillors elected under first past the post and where all of them were keen to try to retain their place under the new system. Even so, the party still nominated at least two candidates in nearly half of all Scotland's wards.

Thus in some respects the average voter was offered slightly less choice in 2012 than in 2007. Although the average ballot paper contained more names (7.9) where there were four councillors to be elected than where there were three (6.3), both figures represented something of a decline (of 0.4 and 0.3 respectively) compared with the equivalent statistic for 2007. However, so far as nominations from the four largest parties were concerned, despite the decline in Liberal Democrat candidatures, rather more choice was made available than in 2007, and especially so in wards that elected four councillors. On average there were 5.4 candidates nominated by the four largest parties in the average four member ward, an increase of 0.3, while there were 4.4 such candidates in the average three member ward, an increase of 0.1. Perhaps most importantly, most of those who were backing one of Scotland's two largest parties were presented with a choice of candidates from their preferred party. No less than 82% of the first preference vote won by the SNP was cast in wards where the party nominated two or more candidates, while the same was true of 78% of the first preference vote cast for Labour.

Under - and Over - nomination

By increasing the number of candidates that they nominated, the SNP reduced the risk they ran in 2007 that they might fail to pick up seats because they were running insufficient candidates. There was perhaps just one instance where the party might have profitably run an additional candidate. In the Wick ward of Highland council, the party nominated just one candidate whose total first preference vote amounted to 1.85 times the quota. However given that both a Labour and an Independent candidate both secured only a little less than one quota, the odds are probably still against a second SNP candidate managing to win a seat in this three seat ward.

In slightly reducing the number of candidates they nominated Labour, meanwhile, could have increased the chances that they under-nominated. In practice only a handful of possibilities stand out. The clearest is probably in the Inverness-Millburn ward of Highland council where the first preferences cast for the single Labour candidate amounted to some 1.83 times the quota, while the third and final seat went to a Liberal Democrat candidate whose first preference vote amounted to less than a third of a quota. Less clear are two instances in the Coatbridge West and Thorniewood wards in North Lanarkshire, where on the first preference vote the two Labour candidates between them won 2.99 and 2.82 times the quota respectively. However in both instances a third Labour candidate would have had to have fended off the challenge for the third and final seat from a SNP candidate whose share of the first preference vote was only a little below a full quota.

There is probably also one instance where the Conservatives under-nominated. The first preference vote for the single Tory candidate standing in the South Kintyre ward of Argyll & Bute amounted to 1.85 quotas, while the third and final seat was won by a Liberal Democrat whose first preference constituted only .57 of a quota. Meanwhile, at the other end of the spectrum, the SNP undoubtedly overestimated its strength in the Govan ward in Glasgow, where the party nominated three candidates whose

combined first preference tally amounted to no more than 1.63 times the quota. However, it is far from clear that the failure of a second SNP candidate to be elected was caused by this apparent over-nomination.

Indeed, although we can cite one or two instances of apparent under-nomination, for the most part it must be concluded that all of the parties adopted nomination strategies that were consistent with their electoral strength. Given the relatively small size of the wards being used in Scottish local elections, this means only relatively well supported parties, such as Labour and the SNP, are ever likely to find it profitable to nominate more than one candidate and thus present their voters with one of the distinctive features of STV, an opportunity to choose a candidate rather than just a party. Still, that opportunity was at least realised in 2012 for the vast bulk of Labour and SNP supporters.

Votes

Turnout

Although turnout was as much as 14 points lower than in 2007, the variation in its level from one ward to another was much the same as in 2007. The correlation between the turnout in a ward in 2007 and that in 2012 was no less than .84. In short, the relative propensity of different parts of Scotland to participate in the local elections was little affected by the decision to hold the local elections separately from a Scottish Parliamentary contest. Thus turnout was once again generally lower in less affluent, more socially deprived parts of Scotland, as indicated by the fact that there is a clear negative correlation between Labour's share of the first preference vote and the level of turnout (-0.48). As in 2007 too, the lowest level of turnout was in Glasgow (31.7%). However, turnout did fall noticeably less than elsewhere in the three island council elections (Shetland, 54.2%, -4.8; Na h-Eileanan an Iar, 52.2%, -10.3; and Orkney, 50.6%, no change) which were also the only three areas where over half the electorate voted. Doubtless this is an indication of the relative importance and standing of local government in these island communities – and suggests that it is the lack of that standing in much of mainland Scotland that helps to account for the markedly lower level of turnout in 2012 than in 2007.

Rejected Ballots

The 2007 Scottish elections became mired in controversy because of the high incidence of spoilt or invalid ballots. In reality, the problem was one that primarily affected the Scottish Parliament election where confusion created by the introduction of a single ballot paper to record two votes resulted in 4.1% of constituency votes and 2.9% of regional votes being rejected (Gould, 2007). At 1.83%, the incidence of invalid votes in the local elections conducted under STV was

much lower. Nevertheless, it was still notably higher than in previous local elections held using the single member plurality system. In 2003, for example, just 0.77% of ballots had been ruled invalid (Bochel and Denver, 2007). It was also somewhat higher than at some, though not all, recent STV elections in Northern Ireland, where just 0.89% of ballot were ruled invalid in the 2007 Assembly election, but as many as 1.5% were in 2003, and 1.84% in 2011 (when the election was held in parallel with local elections in which 2% of ballots were rejected) (Electoral Commission, 2007; 2011). Thus there continues to be some debate about how far the opportunity that STV affords voters to do more than simply cast an 'X' vote inevitably comes at the expense of a higher than desirable level of invalid votes.

The incidence of invalid votes was somewhat but not dramatically lower this time than in 2007; 27,048 or 1.71% of all ballots cast were not included in the count. The most common reason, accounting for just over half (50.1%) of all rejected ballots, was that the voter had cast more than one first preference. The incidence of ballots rejected for that reason was more common the greater the number of candidates standing (correlation +0.31). This suggests that when presented with more than one candidate from their preferred party some voters failed to appreciate they had to place them in order rather than simply give an 'X' to them all, and that there remains a need to improve voter understanding of this aspect of the STV system.

The second most common reason why ballot papers were rejected was that the voter's intention as to whom they intended to give their first preference was uncertain. This accounted for 30.8% of all votes that were rejected. Such behaviour was not associated with the number of candidates on the ballot paper. In addition, 18.8% of ballots were rejected because no first preference had been indicated, while just 0.2% were put aside because the voter had revealed

their identity and less than 0.1% constituted wholly blank ballots. As in 2007 (Denver et al., 2009), the overall incidence of rejected ballots tended to be higher in less affluent, more socially deprived areas, as indicated by the fact that the correlation between the proportion of ballots ruled invalid and Labour's share of the first preference vote was no less than +0.57. Such a pattern is though far from unique to STV (Carman et al., 2009) and suggests a continued need for efforts at voter education to pay special attention to the needs of those with more limited social and educational resources.

Expressing Preferences

One of the opportunities that STV affords voters is to express a more nuanced choice by placing the candidates on the ballot paper in order of preference rather than simply marking their ballot paper with an 'X'. However, there is no obligation on voters to cast more than one preference, and thus one important test of whether STV is working as its advocates intend is whether voters do take up the opportunity to cast more than one preference.

There appears to have been a marked increase on 2007 in the proportion of voters who expressed more than one preference. As many as 86.3% of all ballot papers contained a second as well as a first preference. This represents an increase of eight points on the equivalent proportion in 2007 (Denver et al., 2009).[3] As we might anticipate, that proportion was somewhat higher (88.8%) in seats where four candidates were to be elected, and as a result typically more candidates stood, than in wards where there were only three seats to be filled (83.6%). In his analysis of the 2007 elections Baston (2007) reported the overall incidence of ballots that contained just one preference for 12 councils. In Table 3.1 we show the equivalent figures for 2012 for those same councils and

indicate how they compare with those for 2007. It appears the incidence of voters only expressing one preference declined more or less everywhere. However, we might note the decline was particularly marked in both Fife and Glasgow, two areas of relative nationalist strength where there was a particularly marked increase in the number of wards where more than one SNP candidate was nominated. This suggests that at least part of the explanation for the greater willingness of voters to cast more than one preference was the much greater incidence of multiple SNP candidatures, thereby giving SNP supporters in particular more reason to want to express more than one preference.

Table 3.1 Incidence of Single Preference Voting, Selected Councils, 2007 and 2012.

	2012 %	2007 %	Change in %
East Ayrshire	14.9	21.5	-6.6
East Dunbartonshire	24.3	26.1	-1.8
Edinburgh	15.9	21.3	-5.4
Fife	10.8	21.3	-10.5
Glasgow	9.7	23.7	-14.0
Highland	15.2	22.3	-7.1
Na h'Eileanan an Iar	13.9	18.1	-4.2
North Ayrshire	13.3	19.7	-6.4
Shetland	10.6	11.2	-0.6
South Ayrshire	18.0	21.2	-3.2
West Lothian	9.0	13.0	-4.0

Sources: Baston 2007; ERS Dataset of 2012 results

Indeed we might note that there was no similar increase in the proportion of ballot papers on which a third or a fourth preference was expressed. Just 55.8% of ballot papers contained a third preference, an increase of only two points on the equivalent figure in 2007.[4] Meanwhile only 23.0% of ballot papers contained a fourth preference, which actually represents a drop of seven points on the equivalent figure

for 2007.[5] This further suggests that voters were induced to use more preferences by the increased availability of major party, and especially nationalist, candidates rather than by any increased propensity to express a preference for candidates of more than one party (see also Denver et al., 2012).

The degree to which voters' use of the ballot paper was influenced by the range of the choice put before them is further demonstrated in Table 3.2, which shows how the proportion of ballot papers that contained at least three preferences varied according to the number of candidates on the paper. Where there were fewer than six candidates on the ballot paper less than half of voters went so far as to express three preferences. In contrast where there were as many as nine or more candidates, no less than three-fifths did so.

Table 3.2 Proportion of Voters Expressing at least Three Preferences by Number of Candidates Standing

Number of candidates	% marked at least three preferences
4	41.5
5	48.0
6	51.4
7	56.9
8	59.6
9	61.1
10	64.7
11 or more	65.3

Source: ERS Dataset of 2012 results.

Pattern of Transfers

What, however, do voters do with their second and subsequent preferences? The standard results of an STV count, even one counted

electronically, do not provide us with full information on the preferences expressed by every voter. Complex files containing detailed information on how many voters placed the candidates in each of the possible preference orders have recently been made available for every individual ward, but it will be awhile before the evidence they provide on the general pattern of voters' preference orders can be successfully extracted. However in the meantime we can gain insight into what patterns were typical when the votes of a candidate had to be redistributed, either because that candidate had won more votes than the quota or because they were at the bottom of the pile and eliminated from the count. Two very different situations where this happens should be distinguished. The first is when the votes of a candidate are redistributed but a candidate from the same party remains in the count. We will refer to such instances as a 'non-terminal transfer'. The second is when the votes of a candidate are transferred and no other candidate from that party remains in the count. This we term a 'terminal transfer'.

So far as non-terminal transfers are concerned, our principal interest lies in the degree to which voters of the candidate whose votes are being transferred give their next preference to another candidate of the same party. For the most part, this appears overwhelmingly, but far from universally, to have been the course of action voters adopted, and especially where a non-terminal transfer of the votes of a Labour or SNP candidate took place. On average across all of the non-terminal transfers of votes for SNP candidates, 78.7% of the vote was transferred to another SNP candidate. In the case of all non-terminal transfers of the votes of Labour candidates, 77.9% of the vote was transferred to a fellow party standard bearer. In contrast, the equivalent figures for non-terminal transfers involving Conservative and Liberal Democrat candidates, 67.6% and 66.7% respectively, were rather lower, suggesting that candidates

Table 3.3 Average First Terminal Transfer Rates

Transferred from	% of votes transferred to					
	Con	Lab	LD	SNP	Ind /Other	Non- Transferable
Conservative	-	8.0	32.4	8.3	17.6	33.6
Labour	5.8	-	13.2	16.5	16.7	47.8
Liberal Democrat	21.8	20.4	-	15.5	19.3	23.1
SNP	6.0	18.1	14.1	-	17.8	44.2

Source: ERS Dataset of 2012 Results

has the incidental advantage of giving equal weight to transfers arising as the result of the distribution of a surplus as it does to those arising as a result of the elimination of a candidate. We anticipate that these advantages outweigh the risk that our figures might be affected by a differential pattern of transfers amongst those for whom the party in question was not their first preference.

7. Again our methodology differs somewhat from Denver et al., whose analysis is restricted to terminal transfers in wards in which no other candidate has already been eliminated or been deemed to have been elected. Our analysis will include some instances where some of the votes that were transferred were not first preference votes for the candidate whose votes were being transferred. Our approach again has the advantage of being based on a larger number of wards.

for those two parties were rather more reliant on personal votes for them as an individual rather than because of their party label. Not dissimilar differences between the candidates of different parties were evident in the pattern of non-terminal transfers in 2007 (Denver et al., 2009).[6]

Meanwhile, Table 3.3 looks at how each of the four main parties' votes were transferred when a terminal transfer occurred. We confine our attention to the first terminal transfer of a major party candidate in a ward and to those instances where all of the other three parties still had a candidate in the count. Note that an Independent or other party candidate may or may not have still been in the count. The table shows for each of the four main parties the proportion of the transferred vote that on average went to a candidate of each of the other parties, or was non-transferable because no other candidate remained in the count.[7]

Again an important difference emerges between what happened when Labour and SNP votes were being transferred, and the pattern that pertained when Conservative and (especially) Liberal Democrat ones were. On average 40% of votes were deemed non-transferable when the first major party terminal transfer occurred; a majority of voters were evidently willing to express a degree of support to candidates of more than one partisan colour. But the figure was noticeably bigger when Labour or SNP ballots

were being transferred than when Conservative or Liberal Democrat ones were; only a third of Conservative ballots failed to indicate any further preference, and rather less than a quarter of Liberal Democrat ones. As we have seen, Labour and SNP voters were most likely to have been presented with more than one candidate and thus may well have been more likely to feel it sufficient to confine their preferences to candidates of their preferred party. In contrast most Conservative and Liberal Democrat voters will only have had one candidate for whom they could vote, and thus could only express more than one preference by giving one or more lower preferences to a candidate of a different party. Liberal Democrat supporters may also have been aware that their candidate's prospects of being elected were much weaker than five years previously, and that thus they might need to cast a lower preference in order to ensure that their vote was not wasted (see also Curtice and Marsh, 2009).

Where votes were transferred to another candidate, some patterns were more common than others. As in 2007, both Labour and SNP supporters were reluctant to give a lower preference to a Conservative candidate, an indication of the degree to which the Conservative party remains marginalised in the eyes of many voters. However, this time this reluctance was less obvious amongst Liberal Democrat supporters. In contrast to 2007,

Table 3.4 Average Green Terminal Transfer Rates

% Transferred to					
Con	Lab	LD	SNP	Independent /Other	Non- Transferable
5.1	19.2	19.9	18.3	17.0	20.4

Source: ERS Dataset of 2012 Results

8. Looking at all those instances where the votes of a Green candidate were transferred, irrespective of which other candidates were still present in the count, does not disturb the summary presented in this and the previous sentence.

meanwhile, the Liberal Democrats were no longer the most popular next preference of Labour supporters, nor were they, as they had been in 2007, as popular a choice as Labour amongst SNP supporters. These patterns suggest that the formation of the coalition between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats at Westminster had an impact on the lower preferences expressed by some voters.

What often appears to have been a relatively attractive option for supporters of all four main parties when it was available, however, was to give a lower preference to an Independent or other party candidate. Here it might be noted that Table 3.3 actually rather understates voters' propensity to do so as our average rates of transfer to Independents and Others are calculated across all the wards in the relevant sample, in some of which no Independent or other party candidate remained in the count. If we calculate the average rate of transfer to Independents and Others in just those wards where such a candidate was still in the count, we find that no less than 27% of Conservative and Liberal Democrat votes were transferred in that way, as were 24% of SNP votes and 21% of Labour ones. It would seem that for many voters, giving a lower preference to an Independent or Other party candidate was an easier Rubicon to cross.

We can also undertake a similar analysis of what happened when a Green candidate either had their surplus distributed or they were eliminated

from the count. Of particular interest are those wards, some 14 in all, where this happened at a stage when at least one candidate from all four of the main parties was still in the count. Two features, both discernible from Table 3.4, are of interest. First, much like Liberal Democrat voters, Green supporters appear to have been relatively willing to give a lower preference to a candidate of a different political persuasion. Just one in five votes cast for Green candidates was non-transferable when all of the principal alternative options remained in the count. Second, Green supporters appear to have been more or less equally inclined to give a lower preference to a Labour, Liberal Democrat or SNP candidate, whereas in 2007 they were most likely to switch to the Liberal Democrats. Only the Conservatives proved to be a relatively unpopular option.[8] Many Green supporters too switched to an Independent or Other candidate when available; in the 12 of the 14 instances included in the table where at least one such candidate was still in the count, as many as 20% of Green votes transferred on average in that direction.

Alphabetic Voting

One of the distinctive features of STV and one much valued by its advocates is that it gives voters the opportunity to cast their vote on the basis of what they think of the candidates instead of – or as well as – their opinion of the parties those candidates represent. Indeed, where a party nominates more than one candidate in

Table 3.5 Ballot Order, Incumbency and Relative Success of Candidates in Wards where a Party Nominated Two Candidates

	No. of wards in which stood 2 candidates	No. in which higher placed candidate won more 1st preferences	No. in which lower placed candidate won more 1st preferences	No. of lower placed candidates who won more 1st preferences who were incumbents
Conservatives	25	20	5	2
Labour	153	127	26	21
Liberal Democrats	15	8	7	6
SNP	225	178	47*	37**
TOTAL	418	333	85	66

* includes one ward where the party's two candidates won the same number of first preferences
** includes one ward where the second candidate had previously been an incumbent councillor in a different ward
Source: ERS Dataset of 2012 Results

a ward, even the most partisan of voters has to decide the order in which to place those candidates. However, there is a risk that voters who are primarily motivated by their support for a particular party may be indifferent as to which of their preferred parties' candidates is elected, and simply opt to place its candidates in the order in which they appear on the ballot (Robson and Walsh, 1974; Marsh, 1981; Ortega Villodres and de la Puerta, 2004; Ortega Villodres, 2008). Thus if candidates are listed on the ballot paper in alphabetic order of family name, as was the case in both the 2007 and 2012 Scottish local elections, those whose family names begin with the letters towards the beginning of the alphabet may well be more likely to be elected.

There was considerable evidence of such alphabetic voting in the first STV elections in 2007. Around 60% of all voters gave their first preference to a candidate higher up the ballot paper than the candidate to whom they gave their second preference (Curtice and Marsh, 2008). Where a party nominated more than one candidate the chances of the candidate placed

lower down the ballot paper being elected were far lower than those of the candidate placed higher on the ballot paper (Denver and Bochel, 2007). However, one reason why the prevalence of such voting might have been so high in 2007 is that candidates in the local government elections found it difficult to secure the interest and attention of voters because the local contest was overshadowed by the parallel parliamentary one. Perhaps at the second round of elections under STV in 2012 voters would be more aware of the individual candidates standing in their area and be better placed to exercise a judgement about their individual merits. Perhaps too, being aware of the problem, the parties would make more strenuous and effective efforts to overcome it by issuing advice to their supporters as how to cast their first and second preferences, thereby encouraging some to give their first preference to a lower placed candidate.

Table 3.5 analyses the relative success of the candidates in those instances where a party nominated two candidates in a ward in 2012, showing in how many cases the candidate

placed higher up the ballot paper won more first preference votes and in how many the candidate placed lower down the ballot paper did so. In addition, for those instances where the lower placed candidate was the more successful we also show how many of those candidates were incumbent councillors and thus perhaps relatively well known in their ward.

Alphabetic voting remained relatively common in 2012. In no less than 80% of those instances where one of the four main parties nominated a pair of candidates, the candidate placed higher on the ballot paper won more first preferences than their running mate did. If voters had not taken any cognisance of the order in which those candidates had been placed, that proportion should have been close to 50%. Only in the case of the small number of paired Liberal Democrat nominations was the proportion close to that figure.

At the same time we can see that many of those candidates that bucked their position on the ballot paper to outpoll their higher placed running mate were in fact incumbent councillors. Over three-quarters of more successful lower placed candidates fell into that category. It is this phenomenon that helps explain why ballot

position was not related to the relative success of Liberal Democrat candidates, as many of those Liberal Democrat candidates placed lower down the ballot paper were incumbent councillors. So it appears that a relatively well known candidate can attract high levels of first preference support irrespective of their position on the ballot paper, but that in most cases where a party nominated a pair of candidates, too few voters were aware of the relative merits of the individual candidates to be in a position to exercise an informed judgement.

This conclusion is not disturbed if we also look at what happened in that smaller number of instances where a party nominated three candidates. As Table 3.6 shows, the candidate placed highest on the ballot paper won most first preferences on 62% of the occasions where these circumstances arose, nearly twice the proportion that we would expect (33%) if position on the ballot paper did not make any difference. Moreover on all but one of the occasions where the middle or bottom placed candidate won most first preferences, the individual in question was an incumbent councillor.

The effect of ballot position on candidates' share of the first preference vote was far from

Table 3.6 Ballot Order, Incumbency and Relative Success of Candidates in Wards where a Party Nominated Three Candidates

	No. of wards in which stood 3 candidates	No. in which higher placed candidate won more 1st preferences	No. in which lower placed candidate won more 1st preferences	No. of lower placed candidates who won more 1st preferences who were incumbents
Conservatives	3	1	2	2
Labour	17	11	6	5
Liberal Democrats	1	1	0	-
SNP	21	13	8	8
TOTAL	42	26	16	15

Source: ERS Dataset of 2012 Results

trivial. Where a party nominated two candidates then on average the candidate placed higher up on the ballot paper secured almost 10% (9.9%) more of the first preference vote than the lower placed candidate. In so far as the parties themselves made efforts to try and ensure that their nominees secured a relatively even share of first preferences by issuing voters in different parts of a ward with different advice on the order in which to rank their candidates, it has to be concluded that their efforts generally reaped a poor harvest. The differential was greatest for Labour candidates amongst whom on average the higher placed candidate won as much as 12.8% more of the vote. The equivalent figure for SNP and Conservative candidates was rather lower at 8.5% and 8.8% respectively. As we would anticipate from Table 3.5, only in the case of the small number of Liberal Democrat dual nominations was the differential a small one, two points exactly.

Proportionality & Power

So far we examined the pattern of nominations made by the parties and the character of the votes cast by voters. Now we turn to how the two interacted with each other. We examine how far the reward each party received in terms of seats reflected the share of votes it received. In addition we consider who acquired power once the results had been declared.

Proportionality

In Table 4.1 we show for each of Scotland's 32 local councils how far the share of seats won by each party deviated from its share of the first preference vote. A positive figure indicates that that party's share of seats was greater than its share of first preference votes, while a negative figure indicates that a party's share of the seats was less than its share of the first preference vote. In the case of the Other column the figure is for the combined tally of seats and votes for all those parties not otherwise included in the table. Meanwhile, in the final column we present for each council a figure that summarises the degree to which the result overall deviated from proportionality. This is simply the sum of the absolute value of the individual deviations divided by two (Loosemore and Hanby, 1971). Full details of the share of the first preference vote and the share of seats won by each of the parties in each authority are to be found in the Appendix to this report.

Some parties benefited more than others from the way in which the STV system operated. Both Labour and the SNP typically secured a bigger share of seats than they did of first preference votes, while the opposite was true for everyone else, including both the Liberal Democrats and (especially) the Conservatives. Such an outcome is much as we would expect. As we noted earlier, systems of proportional representation typically treat larger parties somewhat more favourably than smaller parties, and especially so when the number of seats being elected in each district is relatively low (Lijphart, 1994). Thus Scotland's two largest parties generally benefitted from tthe way seats were distributed while all of the smaller ones typically lost out to some degree. But if a usually larger party was weak locally then it could lose out too; all of the relatively few places where Labour's share of the seats was less than its share of the first preference vote were ones where the party was locally weak.

Overall the system produced results that were moderately disproportional. Apart from the three island councils where the potential for disproportionality was constrained by the dominance of Independents, the least disproportional results were in Aberdeenshire and Falkirk, both with an overall score of 6.1. The most disproportional was Dundee with a score of 16.2. In most places the disproportionality score was not far distant from ten, and indeed, the arithmetic average across all 32 councils was 9.7. At 10.2 the median score was almost exactly the same as in 2007 (10.4).

Inevitably this degree of disproportionality meant that in some instances a party was able to win over half of all the seats even though it won less than half the votes. Indeed, apart from the three island councils where Independents monopolised both votes and seats, in only one such case, Labour's success in securing a majority in North Lanarkshire, did a party winning an overall majority of seats also secure more than half of the first preference vote. Equally, the disproportionality meant that where relatively few first preference votes separated the party with most votes from that with the second largest haul, the party with most votes was not necessarily the one that secured most seats. In four cases (Aberdeen, East Ayrshire, Falkirk and West Lothian) the party with the second highest tally of first preference votes secured most seats, while in another four (Clackmannan, East Dunbartonshire, Midlothian and Moray) the

Table 4.1 Deviation from Proportionality by Council

Council	Con	Lab	LD	SNP	Grn	Ind	Oth	Overall Deviation from Proportionality
			% seats - % votes					
Aberdeen	-2.7	9.8	-3.5	3.6	-2.5	-4.2	-0.6	13.4
Aberdeenshire	-0.6	-3.9	2.3	2.3	-0.9	1.5	-0.7	6.1
Angus	-3.9	-3.9	-2.3	7.3	-	2.8	-	10.1
Argyll and Bute	-4.4	-4.6	-0.3	6.4	-0.2	3.3	-0.1	9.6
Clackmannanshire	-4.3	6.3	-0.9	-1.6	-	0.5	-	6.8
Dumfries and Galloway	3.2	2.6	-1.8	1.8	-1.8	-3.2	-0.7	7.6
Dundee	-7.8	4.3	-5.5	11.8	-0.6	-1.0	-1.3	16.2
East Ayrshire	-5.0	2.4	-0.2	7.3	-	-4.5	-	9.7
East Dunbartonshire	-7.1	5.0	-2.4	7.9	-0.7	-1.7	-1.0	12.9
East Lothian	-1.3	0.4	-5.8	8.8	-	-1.2	-0.8	9.2
East Renfrewshire	0.3	8.9	-3.4	0.2	-0.8	-4.9	-0.2	9.4
Edinburgh	-2.2	6.4	-4.2	4.2	-1.1	-1.8	-1.2	10.5
Falkirk	-5.0	6.0	-	0.1	-	-1.2	-	6.1
Fife	-4.0	6.4	-0.3	2.3	-1.0	-0.8	-2.6	8.6
Glasgow	-4.7	9.0	-1.7	1.6	0.7	-1.7	-3.3	11.3
Highland	-5.1	-2.6	5.3	1.7	-1.0	3.5	-1.9	10.5
Inverclyde	-5.1	5.8	2.1	4.6	-	-6.4	-0.9	12.4
Midlothian	-8.5	5.0	-3.7	5.1	1.1	1.8	-0.7	12.9
Moray	-6.0	2.4	-0.7	-1.0	-2.8	9.7	-1.6	12.1
Na h-Eileanan an Iar	-	5.1	-	-1.3	-	-3.9	-	5.1
North Ayrshire	-6.0	5.3	-1.6	4.4	-	1.0	-3.1	10.7
North Lanarkshire	-5.5	7.6	-0.4	2.7	-	-3.9	-0.6	10.3
Orkney Islands	-	-	-	-3.0	-	3.1	-0.1	3.1
Perth and Kinross	-0.8	-1.9	-0.7	3.6	-1.0	0.8	-	4.4
Renfrewshire	-6.6	7.4	-1.9	2.2	-	0.9	-2.1	10.5
Scottish Borders	6.2	- 6.3	1.2	5.7	-0.4	-2.1	-4.2	13.1
Shetland Islands	-	-	-	-1.9	-	3.1	-1.2	3.1
South Ayrshire	1.8	5.0	-0.7	0.7	-	-6.8	-	7.5
South Lanarkshire	-6.4	6.1	-1.3	5.4	-1.4	0.0	-2.5	11.5
Stirling	-1.7	7.8	-5.5	3.7	-1.3	-2.1	-0.9	11.5
West Dunbartonshire	-4.2	7.9	-	-3.0	-	0.6	-1.2	8.5
West Lothian	-5.8	10.4	-0.4	5.1	-	-2.2	-7.0	15.4
Average	-3.6	4.0	-1.4	3.1	-0.9	-0.7	-1.6	9.7

- Did not contest any seats

Source: ERS Dataset of 2012 Results

second party in terms of first preference votes won as many seats as the party that won most votes. As it happened on five of these occasions it was the SNP that 'lost out', while on the other three it was Labour.

Impact of Transfers

Under STV, however, seats are not simply allocated on the basis of first preference votes alone. Indeed, as Table 4.2 shows, of the 1,223 candidates who were elected, less than half, 532 (43.5%), achieved the quota solely on the basis of first preference votes. The figure is only a little higher than in 2007. SNP candidates, however, were much less likely than they were in 2007 to have been elected on first preferences alone, a reflection of the fact that the party presented multiple candidates in far more wards. The opposite proved to be the case for Labour, who had scaled back the number of wards where they nominated three candidates and whose share of the first preference vote increased somewhat. Of the larger parties the one whose

candidates were most likely to require transfers to be elected was once again the Liberal Democrat party; less than one in three of its successful candidates secured election on the basis of first preference votes alone.

The ability of those candidates whose tally of first preference votes was less than the quota to secure election depends on their ability to secure transfers from other candidates, either from a running mate or from candidates standing for other parties. As we saw in the previous chapter, where they were available, securing transfers from a running mate was generally a lot easier than obtaining transfers from a candidate of another party. Indeed, we saw at Table 3.3 that was particularly true for Conservative candidates. Meanwhile Liberal Democrat candidates were less successful in gaining transfers from other parties than they had been in 2007. The adverse impact of these patterns on these two parties' ability to win seats is illustrated in Table 4.3. This shows for each party how many of its candidates were successful despite not having been either one of the three candidates with most first

Table 4.2 Candidates Elected on First Preferences by Party

	Elected on 1st prefs/Total Elected	% successful candidates elected on 1st prefs	% elected on 1st prefs in 2007
Conservative	46/115	40.0	40.6
Labour	199/394	50.5	37.4
Liberal Democrat	20/71	28.2	21.7
SNP	185/425	43.5	56.5
Green	1/14	7.1	0.0
Independents	79/200	39.5	31.6
Others	2/4	50.0	14.3
Total	532/1223	43.5	39.7

Source: ERS Dataset of 2012 Results

Table 4.3 Candidates Not in a Winning Position on First Preference who secured Election by Party

	Elected though not in top 3 or 4	Not elected even though in top 3 or 4	Net gain/loss	Net gain/loss 2007
Conservative	1	16	-15	-24
Labour	21	8	+13	-17
Liberal Democrat	4	3	+1	+29
SNP	19	29	-10	0
Green	1	1	0	+1
Independents	22	9	+13	+8
Other	0	2	-2	+3

Source: ERS Dataset of 2012 Results

preferences in a three member ward or one of the four with the most preferences in a four member battle. Equally the table also shows on how many occasions a party's candidate failed to be elected despite being in a winning position on the first preference vote.

Overall just 68 candidates secured election by leapfrogging into one of the top three or four places through transfers, five fewer than in 2007 and just 5.6% of all those elected. But the Conservatives suffered more from this process than any other party. This helps to explain why on average the party's share of seats won failed more than that of any other party to match its share of the first preference vote. Meanwhile the Liberal Democrats barely derived any net benefit at all from leapfrogging on the back of transfers, whereas in 2007 they had clearly been the principal beneficiaries. This time around it was Labour along with Independents who benefited most, while on balance the SNP lost out somewhat.

The SNP were also more likely to fail to win a seat because, where the party nominated more than one candidate, its share of the first preference vote was divided so unevenly that its less popular candidate was left at a disadvantage that could not be overcome through winning transfers. There were at least five wards where the nationalists' share of the first preference vote constituted the equivalent of around two quotas, thereby seemingly leaving them better placed than any other party to secure the last seat, but where their vote was very unevenly distributed and where the party did not pick up that last seat, leaving it with only one.[9] In contrast there is only one instance where Labour clearly seems to have suffered the same fate.[10] The nationalists suffered this relative misfortune even though on average the difference between the first preference vote share of their candidates where the party nominated two was, at 11.2%, actually a little lower than the equivalent figure for Labour (12.8%).

Power

Who, though, ended up with the power and responsibility for running Scotland's councils? Table 4.4 summarises the political colour and character of the administrations that were formed in each of Scotland's 32 local councils. Further details of the administration formed in each individual council are shown in the Appendix to this report.

There is a widespread assumption that the use of proportional representation almost inevitably leads to coalition government. Yet just as that has proved not necessarily to be the case at Holyrood, so the same is also true of local government. Coalitions were formed in less than half of Scotland's local councils, a marked drop on the number of such administrations formed immediately after the 2007 elections. In fact one party (or an Independent group) secured an overall majority, and thus overall control, in no less than nine councils, assisted in many cases, as we noted earlier, by the not inconsiderable disproportionality that the system generated. Meanwhile there are another eight councils where a single party formed a minority administration.

Not least of the reasons for this change was the much diminished level of Liberal Democrat representation. The party had been a member of no less than 13 coalition administrations in 2007, usually as the junior partner. This time they were rarely in a position to act as kingmaker, and ended up with involvement in just four administrations. Ironically, the party that had been primarily responsible for the introduction of STV in Scotland's local elections found itself at just the second time of asking in too weak a position to derive much profit from its operation.

What, however, might have been less easily anticipated is that, despite winning most first preference votes and most seats, the SNP emerged as one of the governing parties on fewer councils than Labour did. The reason is straightforward. As can be discerned from Table A.2 in the Appendix, although the SNP won most seats across Scotland as a whole, it emerged as the largest single party on just seven councils. Labour, in contrast, found itself in that position on twice as many councils. Labour's electoral strength varies considerably from one part of the country to another, and as a result while it won little (less than 10% of the seats) or no representation on seven councils (including two it did not contest at all), it secured over 45% of the seats in another seven. In contrast the SNP's strength is much more evenly spread; nowhere did it capture less than one-fifth of the seats, other than in the two councils in the Northern Isles, but only in three places did it win more than 45%. The nationalists thus found themselves frustratingly with lots of good second places in Scotland's council chambers, but relatively few firsts.

Of course, just as there is no guarantee (as we saw earlier) that the party with most first preference votes in a council area will win most

Table 4.4 Summary of Partisanship and Type of Council Administrations, 2012

	Con	Lab	LD	SNP	Ind	Total
Majority Control	0 (n/c)	4 (+2)	0 (n/c)	2 (+2)	3 (n/c)	9 (+4)
Minority Administration	1 (n/c)	4 (n/c)	0 (n/c)	3 (+2)	0 (n/c)	8 (+2)
Coalition	9 (+2)	8 (+1)	4 (-9)	8 (-3)	8 (n/c)	15 (-6)
Total	10 (+2)	16 (+3)	4 (-9)	13 (+1)	11 (n/c)	32

Figures in brackets show change since immediately after the 2007 election. n/c = no change.

Sources: Calculated from Table A.3; Baston (2007).

11. There were four councils in which two parties tied for first place in seats. In each case one of those parties, but not the other, formed part of the council administration.

seats (and that where that did not happen the SNP were a little more likely to lose out), there is also no guarantee that, unless it wins over half, the party with most seats will form part of a council's administration. In two of the six cases where the SNP emerged as the largest group (Aberdeenshire and Stirling), the party found itself shut out of power. However, the same thing happened to Labour in Dumfries & Galloway (and indeed to the Conservatives in the Scottish Borders). Given that all of the four largest parties in Scotland formed at least one coalition with each of their three principal competitors, it is not clear that the SNP, or indeed any other party, was systematically locked out of power through a reluctance of other parties to form a coalition with them – deep and multiple though the political dividing lines might be in Scotland, none has in practice proved to be an insuperable barrier to local power sharing. As a result, in most cases the arithmetic advantage gained by winning most seats proved to be sufficient to ensure that the 'winner' locally was also at least one of the parties that grasped the reins of power.[11]

Conclusion

As we have remarked on a number of occasions in this report, one of the key attributes of STV in the eyes of its advocates is the opportunity it creates for voters to express a more nuanced choice. Instead of being confined to placing a single 'X' on a ballot paper, voters are given the opportunity to place candidates in order of preference. In so doing they may, if they so wish, express a degree of support for candidates of more than one party and, moreover, may be invited to say which of a set of candidates nominated by the same party they prefer most. The results of the 2012 elections confirmed that voters in Scotland are willing to take the opportunity to express more than one preference. Not only did the overwhelming majority of voters cast at least two preferences, but also the proportion that did so increased markedly on 2007. The main reason for this increase seems to have been the decision of the SNP to put up multiple candidates in many more wards than before, thereby giving the party's supporters a clear incentive to cast more than one preference. Beyond that, however, it appears that a majority of voters are willing to express support for candidates of more than one partisan colour, though it is less clear whether such behaviour was any more common in 2012 than five years previously.

There are though also clearly some important limits to the ability and willingness of voters to express a nuanced choice. A small minority at least still seems to be unaware that they should mark their ballot, '1,2,3' rather than with multiple 'X's. Rather more have apparent difficulty in exercising a judgement as to which of a party's set of multiple candidates they should place first. Even though the 2012 election was not overshadowed by a coincident parliamentary contest, alphabetic voting appears to have been commonplace once again, and had a substantial impact on the ability of candidates to secure election. Only incumbent councillors, who doubtless were much more likely to be well known locally, proved able to buck this trend. Given the potential impact that a poorly distributed first preference vote can have on a party's chances of winning seats, alphabetic voting is a phenomenon that all of the parties, and especially Labour and the SNP, have an interest in trying to counteract. One solution may be that the parties should select their candidates long before polling day and insist that they become active in developing a personal profile in their prospective ward, even if that might create some tension between them. Another possibility is that the parties could devote greater effort to vote management by giving greater publicity to their recommendations as to the order in which they would like voters to place their candidates.

However, whether such measures will prove sufficiently effective in the context of local elections that do not necessarily generate widespread voter interest may be doubted. A more robust approach would be to redesign the ballot paper so that the order of the candidates differs randomly from one paper to the next. Such a system, known as Robson rotation (Robson, nd) would not stop voters simply placing candidates in the order in which they appear on the ballot paper but would largely neutralise its impact on which candidates secure election – the relative success of candidates would be determined by their popularity amongst those who were not simply guided by the order of the candidates on the ballot paper. What, however, would have to be guarded against is the risk that varying the order of the candidates might generate voter confusion and thus, perhaps, a higher incidence of (unintentional) rejected ballots.

Still, not all voters are presented with a choice of more than one candidate from their preferred party. Supporters of smaller parties, including the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats, typically are not. This is but one of the clear consequences of the fact that Scotland's STV

wards only elect three or four members. In such circumstances smaller parties have little hope of winning more than one seat at best and thus have little incentive to nominate more than one candidate. Meanwhile the high de facto threshold that a party has to pass in order to win just a single seat – as much as 20% even in a four member ward – certainly limits the proportionality of the system. As a result it is not one that necessarily produces coalition administrations. Indeed, while winning an overall majority of seats may be more difficult than under single member plurality, it is still perfectly possible for a party to secure an overall majority while winning considerably less than 50% of the first preference vote. The fears of those who felt that introducing proportional representation would result in a much more politically diverse and thus perhaps unstable system of local government have not been realised.

At the same time, however, one feature of Scottish local government that might have been thought at risk as a result of the introduction of STV, the presence of Independent councillors, appears to have survived the transition. Indeed, Independents won a record share of the vote in 2012. Whereas once such councillors were largely confined to rural Scotland, there is now at least one Independent councillor on every council in the country apart from Glasgow, Edinburgh and Stirling. Some voters may be reluctant to look at the candidate as well as the party, but it seems that for others personality still matters – and under STV reaps its reward.

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Appendix: Detailed Tables

Table A.1 Percentage Share of First Preference Vote by Council

Council	Con	Lab	LD	SNP	Grn	Ind	Oth
				% vote			
Aberdeen	9.7	29.7	15.1	31.3	2.5	11.2	0.6
Aberdeenshire	21.2	6.8	15.4	38.9	2.4	14.7	0.7
Angus	17.7	7.3	5.8	44.4	-	24.8	-
Argyll and Bute	15.5	4.6	11.4	29.7	0.2	38.4	0.1
Clackmannanshire	9.9	38.1	0.9	46.0	0.0	5.1	-
Dumfries and Galloway	26.6	29.3	4.0	19.5	1.8	18.1	0.7
Dundee	11.3	30.1	9.0	43.4	0.6	4.4	1.3
East Ayrshire	11.3	41.4	0.2	39.5	-	7.6	-
East Dunbartonshire	15.4	28.3	14.9	25.4	0.7	14.2	1.0
East Lothian	14.3	43.1	5.8	30.4	-	5.6	0.8
East Renfrewshire	29.7	31.1	3.4	19.8	0.8	14.9	0.2
Edinburgh	21.2	28.1	9.3	26.9	11.4	1.8	1.2
Falkirk	11.2	37.7	0.0	40.5	-	10.5	-
Fife	7.8	38.5	13.1	31.1	1.0	5.9	2.6
Glasgow	5.9	46.7	2.9	32.6	5.6	1.7	4.6
Highland	5.1	12.6	13.5	25.8	1.0	40.2	1.9
Inverclyde	10.1	44.2	7.9	25.4	-	11.4	0.9
Midlothian	8.5	39.5	3.7	39.4	4.5	3.7	0.7
Moray	17.5	9.2	0.7	39.4	2.8	28.8	1.6
Na h-Eileanan an Iar	-	4.6	-	23.8	-	71.6	-
North Ayrshire	9.3	31.4	1.6	35.6	-	19.0	3.1
North Lanarkshire	5.5	51.0	0.4	34.4	-	8.2	0.6
Orkney Islands	-	-	-	3.0	-	96.9	0.1
Perth and Kinross	25.2	11.7	12.9	40.3	1.0	9.0	-
Renfrewshire	9.1	47.6	4.4	35.3	-	1.6	2.1
Scottish Borders	23.2	6.3	16.5	20.7	0.4	22.7	10.1
Shetland Islands	-	-	-	1.9	-	96.9	1.2
South Ayrshire	31.5	25.0	0.7	29.3	-	13.5	-
South Lanarkshire	10.8	43.2	2.8	36.4	1.4	3.0	2.5
Stirling	19.9	28.6	5.5	37.2	5.8	2.1	0.9
West Dunbartonshire	4.2	46.6	-	30.3	-	13.1	5.7
West Lothian	8.8	38.1	0.4	40.4	-	5.3	7.0

- Did not contest any seats

Source: ERS Dataset of 2012 Results

Table A.2 Percentage Share of Seats by Council

Council	Con	Lab	LD	SNP	Grn	Ind	Oth
				% seats			
Aberdeen	7.0	39.5	11.6	34.9	0.0	7.0	0.0
Aberdeenshire	20.6	2.9	17.6	41.2	1.5	16.2	0.0
Angus	13.8	3.4	3.4	51.7	-	27.6	-
Argyll and Bute	11.1	0.0	11.1	36.1	0.0	41.7	0.0
Clackmannanshire	5.6	44.4	0.0	44.4	0.0	5.6	-
Dumfries and Galloway	29.8	31.9	2.1	21.3	0.0	14.9	0.0
Dundee	3.4	34.5	3.4	55.2	0.0	3.4	0.0
East Ayrshire	6.3	43.8	0.0	46.9	-	3.1	-
East Dunbartonshire	8.3	33.3	12.5	33.3	0.0	12.5	0.0
East Lothian	13.0	43.5	0.0	39.1	-	4.3	0.0
East Renfrewshire	30.0	40.0	0.0	20.0	0.0	10.0	0.0
Edinburgh	19.0	34.5	5.2	31.0	10.3	0.0	0.0
Falkirk	6.3	43.8	0.0	40.6	-	9.4	-
Fife	3.8	44.9	12.8	33.3	0.0	5.1	0.0
Glasgow	1.3	55.7	1.3	34.2	6.3	0.0	1.3
Highland	0.0	10.0	18.8	27.5	0.0	43.8	0.0
Inverclyde	5.0	50.0	10.0	30.0	-	5.0	0.0
Midlothian	0.0	44.4	0.0	44.4	5.6	5.6	0.0
Moray	11.5	11.5	0.0	38.5	0.0	38.5	0.0
Na h-Eileanan an Iar	-	9.7	-	22.6	-	67.7	-
North Ayrshire	3.3	36.7	0.0	40.0	-	20.0	0.0
North Lanarkshire	0.0	58.6	0.0	37.1	-	4.3	0.0
Orkney Islands	-	-	-	0.0	-	100.0	0.0
Perth and Kinross	24.4	9.8	12.2	43.9	0.0	9.8	-
Renfrewshire	2.5	55.0	2.5	37.5	-	2.5	0.0
Scottish Borders	29.4	0.0	17.6	26.5	0.0	20.6	5.9
Shetland Islands	-	-	-	0.0	-	100.0	0.0
South Ayrshire	33.3	30.0	0.0	30.0	-	6.7	-
South Lanarkshire	4.5	49.3	1.5	41.8	0.0	3.0	0.0
Stirling	18.2	36.4	0.0	40.9	4.5	0.0	0.0
West Dunbartonshire	0.0	54.5	-	27.3	-	13.6	4.5
West Lothian	3.0	48.5	0.0	45.5	-	3.0	0.0

- Did not contest any seats

Source: ERS Dataset of 2012 Results

Table A.3 Political Control of Scotland's Councils after 2012 Election

Council	Political Control
Aberdeen	LAB/CON/IND Coalition
Aberdeenshire	CON/LIB DEM/IND Coalition
Angus	SNP Majority
Argyll and Bute	SNP/ IND Coalition
Clackmannanshire	SNP Minority
Dumfries and Galloway	CON/SNP Coalition
Dundee City	SNP Majority
East Ayrshire	SNP/CON Coalition
East Dunbartonshire	LAB/LIB DEM/CON Coalition
East Lothian	LAB/CON Coalition
East Renfrewshire	LABOUR/SNP/IND Coalition
Edinburgh	LAB/SNP Coalition
Falkirk	LAB/CON/IND Coalition
Fife	LABOUR Minority
Glasgow	LABOUR Majority
Highland	SNP/LIB DEM/LAB Coalition
Inverclyde	LABOUR Minority
Midlothian	SNP & One IND Coalition
Moray	CON/IND Coalition
Na h-Eileanan an Iar	INDEPENDENT
North Ayrshire	SNP Minority
North Lanarkshire	LABOUR Majority
Orkney Islands	INDEPENDENT
Perth and Kinross	SNP Minority
Renfrewshire	LABOUR Majority
Scottish Borders	SNP/IND/LIB DEM Coalition
Shetland Islands	INDEPENDENT
South Ayrshire	CON Minority in p/ship with LAB
South Lanarkshire	LABOUR Minority
Stirling	LAB/CON Coalition
West Dunbartonshire	LABOUR Majority
West Lothian	LABOUR Minority

Source: COSLA

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