The Application of Single Transferable Vote in Scottish Local Council Elections

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Single Transferable Vote (STV) is an electoral system that offers increased proportionality and constituent representation to government. In 2007 the Scottish government introduced STV to Scotland's local council elections. Prior to 2007 Single Member Plurality (SMP) was the electoral system that was used in Scottish local elections. This offers an opportunity for scholars to see if STV really has the ability to bring the constituents' views to the forefront. The approach was very simple: compare the work of numerous electoral academics with data and reports from the Scottish Government in Edinburgh, local councils and various governmental agencies. To the delight of its supporters, STV brought all of its promised benefits to Scottish society. STV brought about change to local government in the categories of political parties, voters and council control. Gone are disproportionate election results which led to increased competition within districts and improved independent representation. Lastly, to the surprise of many, the turn-out was higher and spoilage rate lower than the 2007 parliamentary elections meaning the population understood STV's intricacies. Prior to 2007, most local councils were dominated by one party however STV introduced more councils run by coalitions. This paper's findings contrast drastically with the distortions that levied on Scotland prior to 2007. Thanks to STV Scottish local government now represents the true views of the Scottish people.

Introduction

Prior to 2007, when the Scots went to the polls on Election Day to vote in their local elections they used the system called Single Member Plurality (SMP). In other words, the candidates that are "elected" are only done so with a plurality not a majority of the vote. Many have voiced complaints about this fact but the stability that comes with SMP has kept the system alive until 2007. It wasn't long before

Scotland began to see the distortions SMP was bringing to local government. When you look deeper into the issue you see that the stability of SMP is challenged considerably by the benefits of alternative *Electoral systems*. One type of those electoral formulas is the preferential systems, in particular, single transferable vote (STV). This system seeks to remedy some of the issues of SMP like disproportional results and misrepresentation to name a few. However, the literature and reality could be on two different wavelengths so the only way to see the true benefits of STV is to view it in action. One of the few countries that use STV is Scotland at the local level since 2007. Using Scotland's evolution from SMP the benefits of STV can be easily seen.

SUMMARY OF SYSTEM

Single Transferable Vote (STV) is a proportional electoral system that is widely favoured by academics but in actuality it is rarely used around the globe. Currently, only Ireland and Malta use it to elect their national parliament but it is mostly used for lower elections. Countries like Scotland and Australia use STV in concert with another electoral system to elect their officials. Regardless, the benefits of STV cannot be ignored. Here you have a system where electors stand a better chance at seeing their preferred candidate elected; unlike in single member plurality (SMP) or majoritarian systems, the voters have a choice between a number of politicians.[1]

Before we digress into the fundamentals of STV it is important to lay out the classical argument of why proportional systems (PR) have an advantage over SMP. In his famous 1954 piece, Maurice Duverger shows how SMP handicaps society. His theory and hypothesis argues that SMP discourages the formation of two or more parties, however; this break on party formation is absent in more proportional systems.[2] This concept is seen in Duverger's famous observation that:

> "The simple majority [by which he means plurality] single ballot encourages the two-party system; on the contrary the proportional representation favour multipartism"[3]

Later in 2006, William Clark and Matt Golder, revisit Duverger's hypothesis and through their testing find it very consistent with his findings.

> "It is easy to see that district magnitude influences not only how ethnic groups are transformed into electoral parties but also how votes are translated into legislative parties—the larger the district magnitude, the greater the effect of ethnic heterogeneity on the size of the party system."[4]

Both authors show us that a proportional system like STV leads to increased party formation and therefore with more parties having legislative representation the constituency representation increases. This benefit comes from increasing the district magnitude or the amount candidates that can be elected per district. These findings make a very positive case for proportional representation

however the UK has fought against proportional representation regardless of the recommendations of the Jenkins Commission. The Jenkins Commission is an Independent Commission on the Voting System was set up in December 1997, chaired by Lord Jenkins and with a remit to report within 12 months.[5] Its report in October 1998 it recommended a mixed system, of 80-85 per cent of the Commons to be elected by the Alternative Vote in individual constituencies due to the fact that most European counties have switched to proportional systems.[6] Liberal Democrats liked the motion of switching due to the fact it would increase their representation among the Labour and Conservative parties. After the 2010 elections, no party received a majority of the vote so the House of Commons was a "hung" parliament. Eventually, a deal was stuck between the Conservatives and Liberal democrats to form a coalition government. The coalition was made possible by a promise from the Conservatives to put forth an AV referendum in an attempt to reform the UK electoral system.[7] In February 2011, the UK government had determined that a referendum vote would take place in May 2011.[8] The referendum had a 41% turnout but the results were strikingly against change with only 32.1% in favour and 69.7% against the motion.[9] Clearly, the Jenkins Commission pushed for the referendum but the UK spoke clearly against the suggestion. However, STV was also mentioned within the commission but they criticized the system for, "its large constituencies, its complex counting system, and a tendency towards parochial politics."[10] Is this the case? Does STV promote close minded politics? Let's look at the fundamentals of the system and it remodelled Scotland's local government structure.

STV is a system where the voter has the opportunity to rank candidates. The ballot structure under STV is ordinal, meaning voters order their vote as a series of preferences for as many, or few, candidates as they want.[11] However, the crucial difference that separates STV from its close sibling, Alternative Vote (AV), is district magnitude. The formula of AV allows voters to rank their candidates but there is only one person elected per district (district magnitude =1) meaning there is a majority cut off. Alternatively, STV has a district magnitude of greater than one, meaning that multiple candidates are elected per district. Instead of needing a majority of votes cast, representatives elected under STV rules must meet a quota called the Droop quota.[12] The calculation for the Droop quota is quite simple. You take the total number of valid votes received and divide them by the number of seats available plus one. After that calculation is complete you add one to the final result. Here is an example of the calculation:

$$\text{Droop Quota} = \left(\frac{100}{1+1} \right) + 1 = 51 \text{ Votes}$$

So, in this example a candidate would need to receive at least 51 votes in order to gain a seat. As the number of seats available increases (greater district magnitude) the lower the number of votes required to be elected (for when the DM=3 see below).[13] As seen by my two examples the size of the quota has a huge impact on the proportionality brought on by STV.

$$\text{Droop Quota} = \left\lceil \frac{100}{3+1} \right\rceil + 1 = 25 \text{ Votes}$$

One of the hallmarks of STV is how it votes are "transferred". The voter's ability to rank their candidates is what makes the "transferring" possible. The first count under STV involves two things. First, if a candidate surpasses the quota then all their surplus votes are transferred according to the next preference. Second, if after round one not enough candidates have met the quota to fill all the seats, then the weakest candidate is eliminated and the votes that they received are transferred according to the second preference listed by the voter. The transfer of the surplus votes of winning candidates or the votes of eliminated candidates-based, in turn, on second, third, fourth preferences and so on- continues until such time as all the seats are filled.[14]

The transferring of votes not only allows for more views to be represented but it also tells us a lot about the electorate. By studying the way in which votes are transferred between candidates we can learn much about the relationships between candidates, links between parties and the coalition preferences of voters.[15] Another important area of STV relates back to the district magnitude. Analysis of the STV system tend to highlight the balance which has to be struck between district magnitude and maintaining a size of a constituency which is manageable both for voters and politicians.

In short, there is a trade-off in the use of STV. The constituency needs to be large enough to produce as proportional a result as possible (that is, to give candidates from all parties a fair chance, but it must not be so large that it makes the voters' job of choosing between candidates impossible. It is generally accepted that the optimal size for STV constituencies is at least five seats[16]

STV's functionality can be represented by a scale: on one side you have proportionality and on the opposite side is voter-politician link. A higher district magnitude represents greater proportionality and a lower voter-politician link; lower district magnitude promotes less proportionality but a closer relationship between constituents and their representatives. This is the real benefit of STV. Countries that use this system have the power to control proportionality and the voter-politician link; something that would be impossible in SMP and other proportional systems.

Overall, STV gives voters a great scope to choose between candidates on personal as well as party grounds. The very low spoiled ballot rate associated with STV disproves the popular belief that the ballot is misunderstood by most voters.[17] However, the best benefit of STV is how it increases constituency representation. With a district magnitude that is greater than one more parties are represented which leads to better representation of the citizenry.

STV IN SCOTLAND

The STV electoral system for council elections was introduced by the Local Governance (Scotland) Act

passed by the Scottish Parliament in 2004.[18] Prior to 2004, the FPTP system was used and it allowed for a very disproportional result. From 2003 to 2004 the Scottish Parliament was run by a collation government between Labour and the Liberal Democrats. This led many to believe that the switch to STV was the price that the Liberal Democrats demanded for their continuing the coalition arrangement with Labour in 2003.[19] These beliefs are confirmed because the 2004 Governance bill was meant to "widen the access to local government."[20] The introduction of STV appears in part one of the bill, as defined by Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe):

> Part One of the Local Governance (Scotland) Bill sets out the structure of the single transferable vote (STV) system proposed by the Scottish Executive. Section One of the Bill establishes that each local government ward will elect either three or four members per ward. The area of wards and the number of councillors per ward (i.e. three or four) will be determined by a Statutory Instrument, via the negative procedure, following a review of the electoral arrangements by the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland (LGBCS).[21]

The use of three member wards proves that Scotland leans towards a proportional government that has a high emphasis on constituency representation. The act also sought to provide severance packages for those who did not want to stand for election under the new system. Three levels of payments were provided: £10,000 for councillors with at least four years and up to ten years of service, £15,000 for councillors with more than ten but less than fifteen years of service and £20,000 for councillors with fifteen year or more.[22] In total 434 Councillors, or 35.5% of all Councillors, applied for a severance payment prior to the 2007 elections.[23]

However, due to the nature of STV, the Labour party that felt very threatened by the system. Ever since the new local government structure was enacted in 1995, the major trend in Scottish local government has been for Labour to fall back from the highpoint reached in the 1995 elections, and for the number of councils under no overall control (NOC) to increase.[24] Labour knew the purpose of STV is to allow wider access to local government so their fear was that with its introduction their council control would deteriorate even faster now. A comment by the Scottish Executive, regardless of their concerns, shows how local councils would benefit from a switch from First Past the Post (FPTP) to STV.

> STV allows for a result, which is broadly reflective of the views of the community. It is a system, which would result in most votes counting and in the views of the community being broadly reflected in the council chamber. Labour Campaign for Electoral Reform (LCER) recognises the importance to local government of a strong link between the

councillor and the ward s/he represents. We believe that this is still possible under STV. Multi-member wards could allow for whole communities to be included in one ward instead of the artificial break-up of communities which happens in many places under the present system[25]

As we know STV requires multi-member electoral districts so implementing the system would require a complete redrawing of the ward boundaries.[26] The creation of three and four member wards resulted in the reduction in the number of wards from 1,222 single member wards to 353 multimember wards.[27] Out of those 353 wards, 190 elected three councillors and 153 elected four councillors, this keep the councillor total at 1,222.[28] The introduction of STV to Scottish society brought along another electoral innovation: electronic voting.[29] Vote counting in the Scottish Parliamentary elections has traditionally been done by hand. However, due to the nature of STV computerized counting would make the vote counting process much easier. Regardless of the criticism that this decision received the system worked fairly smoothly in most cases and initial results were announced reasonably quickly after counting began.[30] Overall, the introduction of STV to Scottish local council elections involved a radical re-evaluation of local politics. The impact of STV can be seen by looking at the reaction of the political parties, voters and local government establishment.

THE POLITICAL PARTIES

A logical assumption associated with the introduction of STV would be that more candidates would run for office because their chances of election would be higher under STV than FPTP. However, this assumption was misplaced because Scotland saw a decrease in the number of candidates put forward for election. In 2003 a new record was established for the number of candidates put forward- almost 4,200 for the 1,222 council seats at stake.[31] Then in 2007, while the number of council seats remained the same, the number of candidates fell to 2,067.[32]

Why would this happen in a system where the district magnitude is higher, which offers a candidate more opportunities for election? Experts have associated the decrease in candidates as a direct effect to the introduction of STV. Parties knew that it was unlikely that they were going to win all the seats in a particular ward. Therefore, they had to consider carefully how many candidates to "field" which reduced the amount of candidates running.[33] The purpose of this is to prevent first preference votes being divided among too many candidates.[34] A second reason is that parties now could force a ward contest with only one candidate, even in areas of weak support.[35] This differs considerably from 2003 where they would need three or four candidates.[36] These observations did not apply to independent candidates because STV offered a strategic reason to field candidates in their case. The elections of 2007 saw an increase in independent candidates by sixty-three compared to 2003.[37] Not taking in account areas where all candidates were independents (island councils). This

Table 1: Number of Candidates in Council Elections 2003-2007

Party	2003	2007	% Change
Conservatives	798	379	-419
Labour	920	521	-399
Lib Dem	676	331	-345
SNP	696	437	-532
Independent	488	551	+63
SSP	315	126	-189
Solidarity	0	83	+83
Green	1	100	+99
Others	28	79	+51

Source: David Denver and Hugh Bochel

trend of increasing small party candidate density was continued by all (except the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP)). Table 1 shows the number of candidates fielded from each party.

Before I cover the impact that STV had on each individual party I want to look at two important topics: incumbents and women candidates. Overall, the introduction of STV came with a sharp decline in the amount of incumbents seeking election. In 2003, 84% of incumbents defended their seats; in 2007 only 62% fought for their seats.[38] This decline was in response to two outcomes. First, since most parties strategically did not put forth a full slate of candidates due to STV means that fewer incumbents would stand. [39] Secondly, incumbents found it very easy not to run in 2007 with the severance package or "golden goodbyes" introduced by the 2004 Scotland Bill.[40] Scotland's STV had an unfortunate outcome on the amount of women standing for election in 2007. Critics claim that STV increased the amount of women elected but we did not see this in Scotland. In 2003, 27.7%

of all candidates were women but in 2007 there were only 22.5%.[41] This slight decrease is associated with the fact that parties were looking for fewer candidates than before. Additionally, it tells us that choosing between male and female candidates did not play a big role in the candidate selection.[42] However, in 2003 only 21.8% of the 27.7% were elected.[43] This means that there was a significant difference between the proportion of women standing for election and those elected. In 2007, the proportion was much closed with 21.6% of the 22.5% getting elected so under STV rules women stood a better chance at being elected.[44] This demonstrates that under STV women candidates are just as popular as men, therefore; if parties select more women candidates their representation would increase.

The 2007 local election saw similar party support trends as the national election. Labour's share of the vote continues to decline while the Conservative, Liberal Democrat, Scottish National Party and independents saw various forms of changes. The SNP was the party that benefitted most from the

switch to STV. The party's pattern of fairly spread out support (25% in most wards) did nothing for them under FPTP however it was perfect under STV.[45] SNP now has representation in every council except Orkney and Shetland, making it the party with the widest reach of councillors.[46] The 2007 election's effect on Labour was the exact opposite. For years Labour enjoyed over-representation and 2007 forced them to undergo a large downsizing. Labour's vote share decreased by only 4.7% but STV forced Labour to work with other parties because coalition governments were the norm.[47]

The Conservatives on the other hand were rather successful in 2007. With a net gain of 20 seats (some in weak areas) the Conservative party used STV to its fullest.[48] The idea of having a Conservative representative for Motherwell South and Ravenscraig would have been completely unknown in 2003.[49] The Liberal democrats on the other hand fell back to their 1999 level of 13% of the vote.[50] Their losses can be attributed to the bad electoral performance in two councils they ran before May 2007.[51] However, they did become the largest party in Edinburgh and co-operated with the SNP in several councils.[52] Support for Independents increased slightly due to the increase in independent candidates. Overall, STV gave independents the ability to run more candidates and therefore more councillors.

Despite the fact that the level of support for the parties changed in 2003 to 2007, the relative strength of the parties across authorities were quite similar.[53] This suggests that there was a strong continuity in the geography of party support. The performance of a party under FPTP seemed to continue under STV. Scotland saw Labour losing support, the SNP gaining support and the other parties support changing slightly both nationally and locally. Yes, STV brought about considerable structural changes to Scottish local elections which the parties had to adapt to. Additionally, it opened up the ballot to more Independent candidates. However, it is difficult to know whether the introduction of STV made any substantial difference to the matters of party support.[54]

Overall, in 2007 there were about 1,600 fewer candidates put forward when compared to the 2003 election. The decrease in the amount of candidates put forward was regarded by many academics as an "unforeseen" consequence of STV. Sadly, this "unforeseen" side-effect affected the belief that STV introduces more women to politics. But we cannot say that Scottish society is against women councillors because the election ratio increased in 2007. The real change will come from the party's ability to put forth more women. However, the increase in independent candidates running coupled with a decrease in incumbents seeking re-election validates Farrell's belief that STV opens up competition within the election. Additionally, the idea of "hopeless seats" does not exist anymore (this was shown by the Conservatives ability to win in Ravenscraig).[55] Aside from these changes, since we know the local council results were similar to those of the Scottish Parliament the effect STV had on voting patterns is debatable. But STV did bring something that FPTP

never could produce. For the first time in Scottish history no ward was left uncontested.[56] This fact alone is enough to say that democracy in Scotland has improved.

VOTERS

It is very important to note that the local council elections were held on the same day as the Scottish Parliament elections. This introduced some considerable concern to officials when it came to predicting the turnout rates for each election.[57] Many predicted that the local elections would suffer due to this. However, they turned out to be completely wrong. The valid turnout for the 2007 local elections was 52.8% across Scotland as a whole compared to a turnout of 51.7% on the constituency vote and 52.4% on the regional vote[58] at the 2007 Scottish Parliament elections.[59] More importantly the turnout in the last FPTP council election was 49.6%.[60] Therefore when you compare the 2003's turnout to 2007s, Farrell's belief that proportional representation encourages more voter participation is validated.

The concern that the Scottish Parliament elections would interfere with turnout also raised concerns about the voter's ability to cast valid votes. The coinciding elections could cause further confusion with STV because MSPs are elected by the additional member system which is an entirely different electoral system.[61] Additionally, the unfamiliarity of either the multi-candidate seats or preference voting in public elections could also lead to a large number of invalid votes.[62] Nevertheless, given the unfamiliarity with STV, the average spoilage rate of 1.83% did not seem like an unreasonable figure.[63] To

give some comparison, STV has been use in Ireland since the 1920s and in the 2007 Irish general elections that spoilage rate was 0.99% so Scottish voters did well for their first run with STV.[64] The highest rates of rejected STV ballots were in the most deprived areas of urban Scotland, particularly the East End of Glasgow where 4% of the vote was spoiled.[65] Additionally, the rates of spoilage for the STV ballot were also considerably lower than in either part of the Scottish Parliament ballot, particularly the constituency vote. The rates in 2007 were an astonishing 4.2% for the constituency vote and 2.9% for the regional vote.[66] According to Ron Gould of the *2007 Scottish Elections Review*:
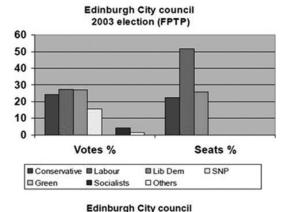
> There is very little evidence to support the argument that the simultaneous local government election using STV contributed substantially to the higher rejection rates in the Scottish parliamentary election.... There was some cross-contamination of voting systems in the way voters marked their ballot papers but the degree to which this occurred was perhaps to be expected with the introduction of a very different voting system for the local election. So the problem of rejected ballot papers in the 2007 Scottish local government elections is less of a concern than in the parliamentary elections.[67]
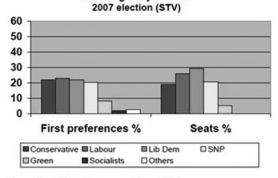
While a spoilage rate of 1.83% is not perfect it is comparable with the experience in Northern Ireland and therefore not bad at all for a new electoral

system. However, it is important to note that the 2007 elections cast more valid votes than the 2003 FPTP elections. In 2007 there were 177,817 more valid votes casts which correlates to a 9.5% increase over the 2003 elections.[68] Once again, we see that Scotland's transfer to STV brought about positive change that the population caught onto very easily.

Now, the real question that must be answered is: did STV bring more representation to more voters? First, STV did a wonderful job at removing the distortions between the votes received and seats obtained relationship. Evidence of this can be seen in this example. The Midlothian Conservatives received representation with 10.4% of the first preference.[69] Where in 2003 the SNP received 24.4% of the vote in the same authority and won no seats.[70] On the same plane, the sack of the Labour party shows that STV ended the situation where a party can win a majority of seats on a very small share of the vote. Figure 1 shows the benefits of STV by looking at the Edinburgh Council results in 2003 and 2007.

As Figure 1 shows the results in 2003 were very biased towards Labour regardless of how much support that the other parties received. The results in 2007, however, are much more proportional. For the most part if you got about 5% of the vote you received a proportional amount of seats. SVT brought a voice to those parts of the Scottish electorate that were denied representation in 2003. Also, it is important to note that in 2007 unlike 2003 the Green party put forth candidates and saw a return on their investment. This occurrence would never have happened under FPTP.

Source: Scottish Local Government Report 2007

Figure 1: Edinburgh City Council Results 2003-2007

Another positive aspect that was associated with STV is the increased choice that was available to voters. In the 2007 elections there were 2,600 candidates competing for 353 multi-member wards. The choice available for the average voter was 7.4 candidates as compared to 3.4 in 2003.[71] Additionally, in 2003 the Scottish voter saw 61 wards where there was no opposition at all.[72] This changed in 2007 to no ward experiencing unopposed returns.[73] The increased choice and competition is enough to say that STV greatly benefited the Scottish voter.

All this being said did Scottish voters see a large majority of their first preferences get elected? The share of the first preference is only a rough guide to how many voters got what they wanted in the election.[74] Up to 2003, a low

proportion of Scottish voters actually getting the person they voted for. In 2003, 52% of Scottish voters contributed to electing a winning candidate.[75] However, under STV in 2007, 74 % of Scottish voters saw their first choice get elected.[76] There is the assumption that elected officials will do their best to represent their all constituents to the best of their ability. But people like to be represented by someone that they personally support. Given that STV allows more voters' first preferences to be represented two arguments against the system are disproven. First, it is clear that STV does not reduce elections to a lowest common denominator contest for second preferences.[77] In reality it is better than FPTP at representing peoples' true interests and offers a wider range of candidates. Second, STV actually strengthens the link between constituent and councillor by giving a much larger proportion of people who are represented by someone they voted for.[78]

One of the principal parts of STV is its ability to transfer votes so if Scotland really understood STV voters would take advantage of this aspect. The data collected across most wards within each local authority suggests that the median voter used three preferences.[79] This fact also gave light to a very important observation: voters crossed party lines. Party lines must have been crossed due to the fact that parties limited the number of candidates that ran in each ward and each voter made about three choices. Data suggests that at least one preference crossed party lines, even in the hardest fought councils such as West Lothian.[80] What we can take from this is that under STV the average voter

is less likely to use party affiliation as a limitation on choice. This fact alone proves that STV promotes cross party support as Farrell suggested. Evidence of cross-party support is seen with the increase in coalition governments after 2007. Knowing that councils are made up of some combination of Conservative, Liberal Democrat, Labour and the SNP councillors is a feat that could not be possible with FPTP. The realization that coalition governments have become the norm under STV forces parties to work together. Electoral scholar, Benjamin Reilly, believes that proportional systems like STV promote "centripetalism" or compromising politics.[81] One of the goals of a centripetal political system is to have an "arena of bargaining" or an environment where political actors of different groups have the incentive to come together and compromise.[82] Political systems that promote centripetalism present a complex and diverse range of policy options to the electorate. This quote from the Scottish Reform Societies Working with STV proves that STV has introduced "centripetalism" to the local government structure of Scotland:

> There is little evidence of councillors coming into conflict with one another on a huge scale and/or not working together– members are very keen to be seen to be collegiate. There is also little evidence that work is being duplicated or officers are not handling having three or four councillors in each ward perfectly effectively.[83]

So, we now know that Scottish voters took advantage of transferring votes

Table 2: Effects of Vote Transfers on Election Results

Party	Elected with initial quota	Elected by Transfers	Total Elected	Elected by transfers %
Conservative	58	85	143	59.4
Labour	130	218	348	62.6
Lib Dem	36	130	166	78.3
SNP	201	162	363	44.6
Others	60	142	202	70.3
Scotland	485	747	1,222	60.3

Source: Electoral Reform Society

but did the transferring really effect the election? Data collected by the Electoral Reform Society suggest that vote transfers had a huge effect on the election results. Just over 60% of all Scottish councillors were elected thanks to transferred preferences from eliminated candidates or the surpluses of elected candidates. Table 2 shows this effect.

Overall, the results of the 2007 election suggests that in twenty-nine out of the thirty-two local council areas there was at least one ward in which a candidate overtook another during the count (the exceptions ere Falkirk, Midlothian and South Ayrshire). Meaning that in most council areas councillors elected were not the top three or four candidates when the first preferences were totalled. In such cases, one candidate further behind in the first stage of the count has overtaken one or more candidates to win election by the end of the count.[84,85] This evidence suggests that Scottish voters understood the importance of the preferential voting aspect of STV. Additionally, Scotland truly embraced STV when most voters casted a lower preference that crossed party lines. Lastly, Scotland's embrace of preferential voting removed the issue of "split votes" from local politics. Due to the increased choice of candidates,

once one is eliminated the voters for the failed candidate are able to transfer their preferences to a colleague of similar affiliation.[86]

STV generally was a very positive experience for the Scottish voters however there were a few very minor issues. The first issue stems from the idea of "alphabetical voting". When the 2007 elections were finished there were complaints made by defeated councillors that the STV system had favoured candidates placed need the top of the ballot paper.[87] Their belief is that voters are more likely to give their first preference to those candidates who come first on the ballot. Sadly, the "A" candidates do have an advantage with those voters who are considered partisan. Many believe that a partisan voter, who does not regard the difference between their party's candidates as important, will tend to rank them in the easiest way: 1, 2, 3 from the top.[88] Table 3 supports this statement by showing the trend across all major parties was that the higher you were on the ballot the more first preference votes you got.

There have been many proposed solutions to preventing alphabetical voting. They include presenting each candidate in a random order, rotating the order of each candidate in each ward and party groupings.[89] The most

Table 3: Alphabetical Voting in Three Candidate Wards

	Con	Lab	Lib Dem	SNP	Total
Highest placed candidate received most first preferences	75.0%	64.9%	66.7%	80.0%	67.3%
Middle placed candidate received most first preferences	0.0	8.1%	0.0	0.0	6.1%
Lowest placed candidate received most first preferences	25.0%	27.0%	33.3%	20.0%	26.5%
Number of candidates Selected (N)	4	37	3	5	49

Source: David Denver and Hugh Bochel

feasible method would be the "Robson Rotation" version which uses sixty permutations of candidate orderings.[90] However, this method has been rejected by the electoral commission because it would make the counting process even more volatile than it already is.[91] The electoral commission has established that the ballot is an issue which is why they are undergoing an effort to reform the ballot for the May 2012 elections.[92] In the end the ballot design should be whatever most accurately represents the voter's views not what the politicians think is best.

Experts agree that reforming the Scottish local elections with STV delivered increased choice and representation to most voters. The facts and figures show that the turnout and valid vote count were better than the 2007 Scottish parliamentary election. You cannot deny that STV has given vot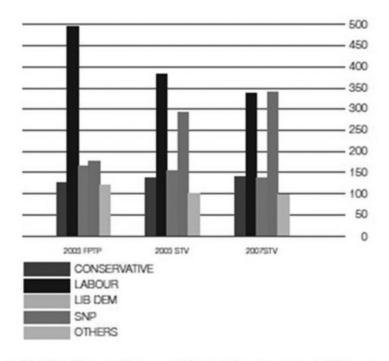ers benefits that FPTP could have never delivered. The ballot design issues are more political than actual electoral performance. Ultimately, STV accomplished its goal of creating a better link better the voters and elected officials.

COUNCIL CONTROL AND CONCLUSION

After the 2003 local elections Labour had majority party control in thirteen out of the thirty-two local council areas.[93] This result however was not uncommon because after the 1995 local elections Labour controlled twenty out of the thirty-two councils.[94] Regardless of the decrease, FPTP created an environment where Labour could clearly capture a majority of the seats in most councils. The scene after the 2007 elections was radically different from the past two elections. The 2007 elections produced a political landscape made up of twenty-seven councils run under a coalition or minority government and only five

local authorities obtained a majority government (three Independent island authorities and Labour's Glasgow and North Lanarkshire).[95] Thanks to STV introduction Scottish local government became a kaleidoscopic pattern of party alignments with each party in office in most authorities.[96] Additionally, STV's introduction reinforced the social trend of Labour gradually losing power to the SNP. This is seen by the fact that Labour control of councils have fallen from twenty in 1995, thirteen in 2003 and now two in 2007. If STV had been introduced in 2003 Labour's undemocratic dominance could have been countered earlier. The Scottish Electoral Reform Society proved this by running the 2003 election under STV's rules. The pattern of Labour losing support to the SNP was very clear as Figure 2 shows.

Many are convinced that if FPTP was retained most of Scotland's councils would be run by a party that received less than 40% of the vote. In 2003, it was very rare that a party received more than 40% of the vote the only three exceptions were North Lanarkshire (49.3), Glasgow (43.3) and East Ayrshire (41.9).[97] Overall, STV did a great job in reducing the disparity between seats and votes for the major parties from 18.2% to 7.5% in 2007.[98] As mentioned in the beginning STV did a great job at bringing fresh faces to sit

Note: results in Highland, Shetland, Orkney and Western Isles were not modelled because of too many non-party candidates and uncontested wards.

Source: Electoral Reform Society

Figure 2: 2003 Seat Distribution Using STV

on the Scottish Councils. In 2003, 76% of those who won council seats were already incumbents; in 2007 the figure was only 51%. A quote from the Electoral Reform Society sums up STV's effect on Scotland.

That impact can only be described as positive. Gone are the disproportionate majorities and uncompetitive elections that are products of the old first past the post system. In their place are multi-party councils representing a range of political opinion in proportion to public support. There are 27 councils now under no overall control. Several combinations of parties and independents are combining to form in coalitions...[99]

Scotland has proven that STV is a system that brings the power back to the voters. The competition has increased and every candidate had the satisfaction of knowing that they were a preferred candidate because there were no unopposed wards. STV is a system which gives parties an incentive to fight every election and a candidate to fight for every vote.[100] Even though the number of women candidates decreased they were elected in greater proportions thanks to STV. This proves the STV does not bar women from getting elected but it is up to the parties to field more female candidates. Their decreasing numbers correlate to the overall decrease in candidates running in the 2007 election. The proportionality of STV has caused parties to act strategically by fielding fewer candidates so they do not dilute their support. In regards to voting patterns, the local elections followed the national trend of decreasing Labour's control to the benefit of the other parties. One of the biggest benefits that STV

brought to Scotland was in regard to turnout and casting valid votes. Knowing that a turnout of 52.8% comes with a spoilage rate of 1.8% (a 9.5% increase in valid votes since 2003) means that STV increased voter enthusiasm. Also, since the turnout and spoilage rate were less than the parliamentary elections, the assumption that voters won't understand STV is proven false.

The STV system receives its praise because it is a preferential system. Since the Scottish voter had an average of three preferences means that they adopted the system to its fullest. Additionally, statistics show that most voters crossed party lines which validate the assumption that STV promotes cross party cooperation. The cross-party cooperation is further seen in 2007 with how twenty-seven out of the thirty-two councils were coalition or minority governments. The only hang up with STV was the ballot structure but this issue is being discussed as this paper is being written. However, most of the complaints about the ballot structure came from the parties not from the voter's lack of understanding. The goal of any electoral system is to improve democracy. This task involves introducing more "politics" to the country's political system (fewer safe seats and one party administrations etc.), not designing a system for the convenience of politicians and converting the preferences of voter's into as accurate a representation as possible.[101] So, was the Jenkins Commission right? Does STV bring nothing but a confusion ballot and oversized constituencies? Scotland's case proved these assumptions as inaccurate. Scotland showed us the

STV creates open-minded not parochial politics. Scotland should pride itself in being one of the few examples of a true democracy.

Notes

If interested please refer to my blog http://suri2011scotland.blogspot.com/ where I have posted my prediction and analysis of the upcoming local election in May of this year.

Endnotes

[1]David M. Farrell. *Electoral systems*. (New York: Palgrave Press), pp. 121

[2]William R Clark and Matt Golder (2006), *Rehabilitating Duverger's Theory*, Comparative Political Studies . Vol. 39, No.6, pp.681-682.

[3]*Ibid.*

[4]*Ibid.*

[5]Oonagh Gay (1998). *House of Commons: Voting Systems: The Jenkins Report* (House of Commons Library: London), pp. 3.

[6]Oonagh Gay (1998). *House of Commons: Voting Systems: The Jenkins Report* (House of Commons Library: London), pp. 3

[7]David Cameron and Nick Clegg (2010). *The Coalition* (HM Government: London), pp. 27

[8]*BBC News*: Politics (2011). Referendum on voting system goes ahead after Lords vote. *BBC News*. Received from: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-12485084

[9]Ross Hawkins (2011). Vote 2011: UK rejects alternative vote. *BBC News*. Received from: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics -13297573

[10]Oonagh Gay (1998). *House of Commons: Voting Systems: The Jenkins Report* (House of Commons Library: London), pp. 73

[11]David M. Farrell. *Electoral systems*. (New York: Palgrave Press), pp. 127

[12]David M. Farrell. *Electoral systems*. (New York: Palgrave Press), pp. 127

[13]*Ibid*,130.

[14]David M. Farrell. *Electoral systems*. (New York: Palgrave Press), pp. 131

[15]*Ibid*, 135.

[16]*Ibid*, 142.

[17]David M. Farrell. *Electoral systems*. (New York: Palgrave Press), pp. 151

[18]David Denver and Hugh Bochel (2007), *A Quiet Revolution: STV and the Scottish Council Elections of 2007*, Scottish Affairs. Vol. 61, No.1, pp.1.

[19]*Ibid*,2.

[20]Stephen Herbert (2003). *Local Governance (Scotland) Bill SPICe Briefing 03/96*. (Scottish Parliament Information Centre: Edinburgh), pp. 1.

[21]*Ibid*,8.

[22]Stephen Herbert (2003). *Local Governance (Scotland) Bill SPICe Briefing 03/96*. (Scottish Parliament Information Centre: Edinburgh), pp. 3.

[23]*Ibid.*

[24]Lewis Baston (2007). *Local Authority Elections in Scotland*. (Electoral Reform Society Scotland: Glasgow), pp. 9.

[25]Stephen Herbert (2003). *Local Governance (Scotland) Bill SPICe Briefing 03/96*. (Scottish Parliament Information Centre: Edinburgh), pp.10.

[26]In Scotland the ward is the building block of the 73 constituencies (some wards are spilt though). Then the 73 constituencies make up then 32 council areas.

[27]David Denver and Hugh Bochel (2007), *A Quiet Revolution: STV and the Scottish Council Elections of 2007*, Scottish Affairs. Vol. 61, No.1, pp.2.

[28]Stephen Herbert (2007). *Local government elections of 2007 SPICe Briefing 08/12*. (Scottish Parliament Information Centre: Edinburgh), pp.5.

[29]David Denver and Hugh Bochel (2007), *A Quiet Revolution: STV and the Scottish Council Elections of 2007*, Scottish Affairs. Vol. 61, No.1, pp.2.

[30]*Ibid.*

[31]*Ibid.*

[32]Stephen Herbert (2007). *Local government elections of 2007 SPICe Briefing 08/12*. (Scottish Parliament Information Centre: Edinburgh), pp. 3.

[33]Stephen Herbert (2007). *Local government elections of 2007 SPICe Briefing 08/12*. (Scottish Parliament Information Centre: Edinburgh), pp. 3.

[34]David Denver and Hugh Bochel (2007), *A Quiet Revolution: STV and the Scottish Council Elections of 2007*, Scottish Affairs. Vol. 61, No.1, pp.3.

[35]*Ibid.*

[36]*Ibid.*

[37]Stephen Herbert (2007). *Local government elections of 2007 SPICe Briefing 08/12.* (Scottish Parliament Information Centre: Edinburgh), pp. 7.

[38]David Denver and Hugh Bochel (2007), *A Quiet Revolution: STV and the Scottish Council Elections of 2007*, Scottish Affairs. Vol. 61, No.1, pp.4.

[39]*Ibid.*

[40]*Ibid.*

[41]Amy Rodger (2007). *The Local Authority Elections in Scotland 3 May 2007.* (Electoral Reform Society Scotland: Glasgow), pp.21.

[42]David Denver and Hugh Bochel (2007), *A Quiet Revolution: STV and the Scottish Council Elections of 2007*, Scottish Affairs. Vol. 61, No.1, pp.5.

[43]Amy Rodger (2007). *The Local Authority Elections in Scotland 3 May 2007.* (Electoral Reform Society Scotland: Glasgow), pp.21.

[44]*Ibid.*

[45]Amy Rodger (2007). *The Local Authority Elections in Scotland 3 May 2007.* (Electoral Reform Society Scotland: Glasgow), pp.17.

[46]*Ibid*,18.

[47]*Ibid.*

[48]*Ibid.*

[49]*Ibid.*

[50]David Denver and Hugh Bochel (2007), *A Quiet Revolution: STV and the Scottish Council Elections of 2007*, Scottish Affairs. Vol. 61, No.1, pp.8.

[51]Amy Rodger (2007). *The Local Authority Elections in Scotland 3 May 2007.* (Electoral Reform Society Scotland: Glasgow), pp.19.

[52]*Ibid.*

[53]David Denver and Hugh Bochel (2007), *A Quiet Revolution: STV and the Scottish Council Elections of 2007*, Scottish Affairs. Vol. 61, No.1, pp.10.

[54]*Ibid*,6.

[55] "Hopeless seats" are seats that are considered impossible for some parties to obtain. However, with the introduction of STV the idea of a seat being hopeless has disappeared.

[56]David Denver and Hugh Bochel (2007), *A Quiet Revolution: STV and the Scottish Council Elections of 2007*, Scottish Affairs. Vol. 61, No.1, pp.4.

[57]Due to this concern the elections have been separated and staggered so they are a year apart.

[58]The Electoral system that is used in the Scottish Parliament elections is the Additional Member system. In this system the voter's ballot is split into two so the voter has two votes: a constituency vote and a regional vote. The constituency vote is run under FPTP where the regional vote is conducted using closed list proportional representation.

[59]Stephen Herbert (2007). *Local government elections of 2007 SPICe Briefing 08/12.* (Scottish Parliament Information Centre: Edinburgh), pp. 7.

[60]David Denver and Hugh Bochel (2007), *A Quiet Revolution: STV and the Scottish Council Elections of 2007*, Scottish Affairs. Vol. 61, No.1, pp.7.

[61]Lewis Baston (2007). *Local Authority Elections in Scotland.* (Electoral Reform Society Scotland: Glasgow), pp. 83.

[62]Lewis Baston (2007). *Local Authority Elections in Scotland.* (Electoral Reform Society Scotland: Glasgow), pp. 83.

[63]David Denver and Hugh Bochel (2007), *A Quiet Revolution: STV and the Scottish Council Elections of 2007*, Scottish Affairs. Vol. 61, No.1, pp.6.

[64]*Ibid.*

[65]Lewis Baston (2007). *Local Authority Elections in Scotland.* (Electoral Reform Society Scotland: Glasgow), pp. 84.

[66]Mark Sandford (2011). *House of Commons: 2011 Scottish Parliament Elections* (House of Commons Library: London), pp. 8.

[67]Lewis Baston (2007). *Local Authority Elections in Scotland.* (Electoral Reform Society Scotland: Glasgow), pp. 84-85.

[68]Stephen Herbert (2007). *Local government elections of 2007 SPICe Briefing 08/12.* (Scottish Parliament Information Centre: Edinburgh), pp. 41.

[69]Stephen Herbert (2007). *Local government elections of 2007 SPICe Briefing 08/12.* (Scottish Parliament Information Centre: Edinburgh), pp. 26.

[70]*Ibid.*

[71]Lewis Baston (2007). *Local Authority Elections in Scotland.* (Electoral Reform Society Scotland: Glasgow), pp. 65.

[72]Lewis Baston (2007). *Local Authority Elections in Scotland.* (Electoral Reform Society Scotland: Glasgow), pp. 65.

[73]*Ibid.*

[74]*Ibid*, 68.

[75]*Ibid.*

[76]*Ibid.*

[77]*Ibid.*

[78]*Ibid.*

[79]*Ibid*, 69.

[80]Lewis Baston (2007). *Local Authority Elections in Scotland.* (Electoral Reform Society Scotland: Glasgow), pp. 70.

[81]Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, *Electoral systems and Democracy,*(Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 2006), pp. 30.

[82]*Ibid.*

[83]Martian Steven (2007). *Working with STV: An Electoral Reform Society Report for Councillors and Parties.* (Electoral Reform Society Scotland: Glasgow), pp. 13.

[84]Lewis Baston (2007). *Local Authority Elections in Scotland.* (Electoral Reform Society Scotland: Glasgow), pp. 77.

[85]*Ibid.*

[86]Amy Rodger (2007). *The Local Authority Elections in Scotland 3 May 2007.* (Electoral Reform Society Scotland: Glasgow), pp.45.

[87]David Denver and Hugh Bochel (2007), *A Quiet Revolution: STV and the Scottish Council Elections of 2007*, <u>Scottish Affairs</u>. Vol. 61, No.1, pp.10.

[88]Lewis Baston (2007). *Local Authority Elections in Scotland.* (Electoral Reform Society Scotland: Glasgow), pp. 91.

[89]*Ibid*,92.

[90]*Ibid*,93.

[91]*Ibid.*

[92]Chris Martin, Lorraine Murray, Steve Treano and Vannessa Chan (2011). *Testing of the Ballot Paper for the 2012 Local Government Elections in Scotland.* (The Scottish Government: Edinburgh), pp.3.

[93]Amy Rodger (2007). *The Local Authority Elections in Scotland 3 May 2007.* (Electoral Reform Society Scotland: Glasgow), pp.9.

[94]*Ibid.*

[95]*Ibid.*

[96]Lewis Baston (2007). *Local Authority Elections in Scotland.* (Electoral Reform Society Scotland: Glasgow), pp. 22.

[97]Amy Rodger (2007). *The Local Authority Elections in Scotland 3 May 2007.* (Electoral Reform Society Scotland: Glasgow), pp.9.

[98]David Denver and Hugh Bochel (2007), *A Quiet Revolution: STV and the Scottish Council Elections of 2007*, <u>Scottish Affairs</u>. Vol. 61, No.1, pp.13.

[99]Amy Rodger (2007). *The Local Authority Elections in Scotland 3 May 2007.* (Electoral Reform Society Scotland: Glasgow), pp.50.

[100]*Ibid.*

[101]Martian Steven (2007). *Working with STV: An Electoral Reform Society Report for Councillors and Parties.* (Electoral Reform Society Scotland: Glasgow), pp. 14

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