

# The local authority elections in Scotland 3 May 2007

## Introduction

### A triumph for Scotland's voters

The introduction of the Single Transferable Vote (STV) for Scottish local government was a change long campaigned for by the Electoral Reform Society along with numerous other civic and political groups. We are, on the whole, delighted with the result.

The repercussions of the elections on 3 May are continuing to emerge. There are some points, though, which are already apparent. The elections to Scotland's local authorities give us a positive story to tell about Scotland's voters wielding the power of STV for the first time.

It is important to recognise the significance of these Scottish local elections. This was the first time that STV had been used in a large-scale public election on the UK mainland. It was a new system and, to a certain extent, an experiment. This initial report from the Electoral Reform Society aims to present the first findings from that experiment accessibly yet comprehensively. An STV election – particularly this one, being the first – invites further analysis and comment and we will provide that in a comprehensive report in the summer. This initial report, however, contains the key lessons that can be learned from the results of the 3 May local elections.

Every council seat in Scotland was up for grabs – and this time, there was real competition for those seats. Voters in Scotland could choose between, on average, 7.4 candidates on their ballot paper, compared to 3.4 in the last set of council elections, under the old first past the post system. In Highland Council area voters had a choice – an actual election – where in many cases councillors had previously been the sole nomination for that ward and had been returned unopposed. In the central belt, where for so long Labour party dominance under first past the post had rendered a vote for any other candidate irrelevant even as it was cast, voters on 3 May had a real choice about who their councillors were to be, and non-Labour voters knew that their vote could make a difference. That trip to the polling station to have their say was no longer a futile expedition undertaken out of duty or habit rather than in any real hope that it would change

anything. This time, the preferences they expressed would have an impact on the result.

The move to the Single Transferable Vote (STV) gave voters more power than ever before in choosing their councillors. Scottish local government representation has changed substantially as a result; STV means that the choices voters make at the ballot box are now translated into council seats and council control. No longer are disproportionate majorities the norm across Scotland's councils. The plurality of political views of Scotland's voters is now reflected in the plurality of representation in Scotland's council chambers.

A cursory glance at the first table of our report yields a strong impression of Labour party losses. Where once the Labour party controlled far more councils than anyone else, it is now 'No Overall Control' emerging as by far the predominant result. Labour still control two councils, and groups of Independents, three, but in no other council did any party or group win a majority of the seats. Despite the impression of heavy Labour losses it is worth noting, however, that Labour is the only party to achieve a majority anywhere – a real achievement with a proportional voting system. It is important to recognise the distinction described in the report between changes brought about thanks to the introduction of STV and those resulting from political trends such as the decreasing support for the Labour party, unsurprising for a party so long in government.

The voters of Scotland took to STV with ease and enthusiasm. It is an intuitive system; ranking choices in order of preference is an everyday activity for most people, in any number of mundane contexts. In contrast to the widely reported problems with the Scottish Parliament election, the spoilage rate for local government ballot papers, using the new STV system, averaged only 2% across Scotland. Where the council has provided the information, it is also apparent that the vast majority of voters expressed more than one valid preference. Voters grasped the opportunity provided by STV to show several preferences to ensure that they got the councillors they wanted.

Scotland deserves its democratic successes to be recognised. The introduction of STV for Scottish local government has been a success for Scotland's voters. This success should be considered thoughtfully in the light of all else that has happened in the aftermath of the elections on 3 May. The positive as well as the negative lessons should be learned from those elections and the success of the STV election taken into account in deciding where to go from here. Using STV for Scottish Parliament elections could resolve many issues for Scotland's voters, politicians and political institutions.

This report provides an initial basis for that consideration. It is a comprehensive description of the results of the 3 May elections. We highlight clearly the key

points of those results and provide an accessible commentary to aid their interpretation.

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## Summary of Key Points

The 2007 STV elections produced 27 councils under no overall control.

It is important to distinguish between changes in Councils' political make-up that are a result of the change in voting system to STV, and those that are a product of voters changing their opinions.

Voters across Scotland were able to exercise more choice. In the Highlands this meant having the opportunity to vote for parties, while in Ayrshire it was the chance to elect Independents.

Despite a fall in the number of women put forward by political parties, the number of women councillors has dropped by only a tiny amount of 0.2% (or 6 female councillors).

STV delivered broadly proportional results in the elections to Scottish local authorities.

There are no longer any 'hopeless' seats. If Labour can win in Newton Mearns, and the Conservatives can win in Ravenscraig in the same election, there really can be no no-go areas.

Where there was a significant body of voters choosing a party, that party received representation in the council chamber. STV produced councils that reflected the choices made by local voters.

The 2007 council elections saw a massive increase in the amount of choice available to Scottish voters. The choice available to the average voter rose from 3.4 candidates in 2003 to 7.4 in 2007.

The rates of rejected ballots in the Scottish local elections are very comparable – and indeed somewhat lower than – the rates found in Northern Ireland local authority elections, where STV is also used.

The rate of ballot spoilage in the local government elections was considerably lower than in the Parliamentary election.

The evidence suggests that Scottish voters found it relatively easy to cast a valid STV vote.

Voters used the opportunities that STV gave them to rank candidates. Most voters in the two local authorities we have analysed used three or more preferences, which usually meant expressing preferences across party lines.

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# The Results

Who controls Scotland's councils?

How did the results differ from 2003?

How did the parties do?

Has the STV system helped or hindered women and young people?

Did the results really represent how people voted?

## Who controls Scotland's councils?

Table 1: Control of Scottish local authorities since 1995

	1995	1999	2003 FPTP	2003 STV	2007 STV
Aberdeen	Lab	Lab	NOC	NOC	NOC
Aberdeenshire	NOC	NOC	NOC	NOC	NOC
Angus	SNP	SNP	SNP	NOC	NOC
Argyll and Bute	Ind	Ind	Ind	<i>Ind</i>	NOC
Clackmannanshire	Lab	NOC	Lab	NOC	NOC
Dumfries/ Galloway	NOC	NOC	NOC	NOC	NOC
Dundee	Lab	NOC	NOC	NOC	NOC
East Ayrshire	Lab	Lab	Lab	<i>Lab</i>	NOC
East Dunbartonshire	Lab	NOC	NOC	NOC	NOC
East Lothian	Lab	Lab	Lab	NOC	NOC
East Renfrewshire	NOC	NOC	NOC	NOC	NOC
Edinburgh	Lab	Lab	Lab	NOC	NOC
Falkirk	Lab	NOC	NOC	NOC	NOC
Fife	Lab	Lab	NOC	NOC	NOC
Glasgow	Lab	Lab	Lab	<i>Lab</i>	Lab
Highland	Ind	Ind	Ind	<i>Ind</i>	NOC
Inverclyde	Lab	NOC	LD	<i>LD</i>	NOC
Midlothian	Lab	Lab	Lab	<i>Lab</i>	NOC
Moray	SNP	Ind	Ind	<i>Ind</i>	NOC
North Ayrshire	Lab	Lab	Lab	<i>Lab</i>	NOC
North Lanarkshire	Lab	Lab	Lab	<i>Lab</i>	Lab
Orkney	Ind	Ind	Ind	<i>Ind</i>	Ind
Perth and Kinross	SNP	NOC	NOC	NOC	NOC
Renfrewshire	Lab	Lab	Lab	NOC	NOC
Scottish Borders	Ind	NOC	NOC	NOC	NOC
Shetland	Ind	Ind	Ind	<i>Ind</i>	Ind
South Ayrshire	Lab	Lab	NOC	NOC	NOC
South Lanarkshire	Lab	Lab	Lab	<i>Lab</i>	NOC
Stirling	Lab	Lab	Lab	NOC	NOC
West Dunbartonshire	Lab	Lab	Lab	<i>Lab</i>	NOC
West Lothian	Lab	Lab	Lab	NOC	NOC
Western Isles	Ind	Ind	Ind	<i>Ind</i>	Ind
Labour	20	15	13	7	2
Lib Dem	0	0	1	1	0
SNP	3	1	1	0	0
Independent	6	6	6	6	3
NOC	3	10	11	18	27

The 2007 STV elections produced 27 councils under no overall control. The exceptions were the three Independent Island authorities, plus Glasgow and North Lanarkshire where Labour retained a majority. Labour also won exactly half the seats in Midlothian. No other party achieved a majority anywhere.

## How did the results differ from 2003?

Compared to the 2003 FPTP results, Labour lost Clackmannanshire, East Lothian, Edinburgh, Renfrewshire, Stirling and West Lothian and the SNP lost Angus (none of which would have been majority controlled under STV on the 2003 results). Labour also lost East Ayrshire, Midlothian, North Ayrshire, South Lanarkshire and West Dunbartonshire, and the Lib Dems lost Inverclyde, which would have been majority councils in 2003 under STV. The Conservatives also lost South Ayrshire, which they had controlled thanks to a by-election, and the Lib Dems lost their effective control over East Dunbartonshire.

Ever since the new local government structure was imposed in 1995, the major trend in Scottish local government has been for Labour to fall back from the high point reached in the 1995 elections, and for the number of councils under no overall control (NOC) to increase. In 1995 Labour controlled 20 out of 32 councils, which had fallen to 13 by the time of the last FPTP elections in 2003. Meanwhile, no other party had managed to replicate Labour's dominance, and the number of 'hung' councils under no overall control rose from only 3 in 1995 to 11 in 2003. Five mainly rural councils remained with Independent majorities all the way through from 1995 (or 1994 in the case of the Island councils) to 2003.

There were 13 councils in which a party (as opposed to Independents collectively) won a majority of votes cast in 1995. The SNP topped 50 per cent in Angus, and Labour managed this in Clackmannanshire, Dundee, East Ayrshire, East Lothian, Falkirk, Glasgow, Midlothian, North Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire, South Ayrshire, South Lanarkshire and West Dunbartonshire. Labour's dominance reflected the intense unpopularity of the Conservative government at the time, and the ascendancy of Labour as the party that was best placed to defeat the Conservatives.

By 2003 there was majority support for a party in only one local authority, namely Labour controlled North Lanarkshire, and all other council majorities depended on only a minority of votes cast. Labour ran Edinburgh on the basis of a little over one vote in four, with 27.4 per cent of the vote. Conservative popularity had not recovered much (outside the party's target council of South Ayrshire) but Labour's dominance was steadily eroded by the rise of the Liberal Democrats (Inverclyde) and the SNP (Renfrewshire, Dundee), and to some extent the growth of ex-Labour or anti-Labour independents in central belt authorities such as Falkirk.

The change to STV, comparing the real FPTP results with the notional STV results of 2003, would have translated this lack of majority support among the electorate into a larger number of councils under no overall control in 2003. The estimated results would have left Labour with seven councils (North Lanarkshire

plus East Ayrshire, Glasgow, Midlothian, North Ayrshire, South Lanarkshire and West Dunbartonshire where the party was either close to majority support or had a large lead over its nearest opponent) and the Lib Dems with one, Inverclyde.

Combined with a further erosion of Labour support among the Scottish electorate, and a lack of a big tide towards another party, The spread of councils under no overall control reflected the fact that no party polled a majority of first preference votes cast, although Labour fell only just short in North Lanarkshire. In contrast to 2003, it was rare for a party to score more than 40 per cent of first preferences. The only places where a party did this were:

- North Lanarkshire, Labour (49.3 per cent)
- Glasgow, Labour (43.3 per cent)
- East Ayrshire, Labour (41.9 per cent)

(Full data is not available yet from a few councils, and there may be more cases, probably including Labour in South Lanarkshire and, less likely, the Conservatives in South Ayrshire and the SNP in Dundee). In contrast, in 2003 there were 11 authorities (including North Lanarkshire) where Labour polled over 40 per cent, two where the SNP managed this and one each for the Conservatives and Lib Dems.

Part of the reason for the decrease in single-party dominance in local authority elections is in medium and long term political trends, as seen in the continuous slide in levels of support for the largest local parties since 1995 that has happened in Scotland and also in England. If FPTP had been retained, the likely outcome of the local elections would have been a situation where the ruling party in most of Scotland's councils had less than 40 per cent support from the local electorate. This situation would not be considered acceptable for the Scottish Parliament.

Another reason for the decline is the increased choice available in 2007 under STV. Voters had a wider range of candidates from which to choose than they did in 2003, and were also not constrained by considerations of tactical voting. Edinburgh voters, for instance, who had already showed considerable Green support in Scottish Parliament elections in 1999 and 2003, had the option of voting Green for the city council which they did not have in 2003.

There being quite so many councils now under no overall control, it may be worth distinguishing between the different configurations of no overall control and how these shifted between 2003 and 2007.

Table 2: Largest party on Scottish local authorities 2003 and 2007

	2003 FPTP		2003 STV		2007 STV	
	Control	Largest	Control	Largest	Control	Largest
Aberdeen	NOC	LD	NOC	LD	NOC	LD
Aberdeenshire	NOC	LD	NOC	LD	NOC	LD
Angus	SNP	SNP	NOC	SNP	NOC	SNP
Argyll and Bute	Ind	Ind	Ind	Ind	NOC	Ind
Clackmannanshire	Lab	Lab	NOC	SNP	NOC	Lab
Dumfries/ Galloway	NOC	Lab	NOC	Con	NOC	Con
Dundee	NOC	SNP	NOC	SNP	NOC	SNP
East Ayrshire	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab	NOC	Lab SNP
East Dunbartonshire	NOC	LD	NOC	LD Lab	NOC	SNP
East Lothian	Lab	Lab	NOC	Lab	NOC	Lab SNP
East Renfrewshire	NOC	Lab	NOC	Lab	NOC	Con Lab
Edinburgh	Lab	Lab	NOC	Lab	NOC	LD
Falkirk	NOC	Lab	NOC	Lab	NOC	Lab
Fife	NOC	Lab	NOC	Lab	NOC	Lab
Glasgow	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab
Highland	Ind	Ind	Ind	Ind	NOC	Ind
Inverclyde	LD	LD	LD	LD	NOC	Lab
Midlothian	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab	NOC	Lab
Moray	Ind	Ind	Ind	Ind	NOC	Ind
North Ayrshire	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab	NOC	Lab
North Lanarkshire	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab
Orkney	Ind	Ind	Ind	Ind	Ind	Ind
Perth and Kinross	NOC	SNP	NOC	SNP	NOC	SNP
Renfrewshire	Lab	Lab	NOC	SNP	NOC	Lab
Scottish Borders	NOC	Ind	NOC	Ind	NOC	Con
Shetland	Ind	Ind	Ind	Ind	Ind	Ind
South Ayrshire	NOC	Lab Con	NOC	Con	NOC	Con
South Lanarkshire	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab	NOC	Lab
Stirling	Lab	Lab	NOC	Lab	NOC	Lab
West Dunbartonshire	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab	NOC	Lab
West Lothian	Lab	Lab	NOC	Lab	NOC	Lab
Western Isles	Ind	Ind	Ind	Ind	Ind	Ind

## How did the parties do?

There were dramatic changes even since the 2003 notional STV results in two councils where the administrations had been mired in controversy, namely East Lothian and Inverclyde, showing that under STV it is possible for voters to signal a clear rejection of a local or national government.

Table 3: Council administrations before and after 2007 elections.

	Pre-election	Post-election
Aberdeen	LD-Con coalition	LD-SNP coalition
Aberdeenshire	LD-Ind coalition	LD-Con coalition
Angus	SNP majority	
Argyll and Bute	Independent majority	Ind-SNP coalition
Clackmannanshire	Labour majority	
Dumfries/ Galloway	Labour minority	<i>No agreement as yet</i>
Dundee	Lab-LD coalition	<i>No agreement as yet</i>
East Ayrshire	Labour majority	
East Dunbartonshire	Lib Dem casting vote	SNP minority
East Lothian	Labour majority	SNP-LD coalition
East Renfrewshire	Lab-LD coalition	
Edinburgh	Labour majority	LD-SNP coalition
Falkirk	SNP-Ind coalition	
Fife	Labour minority	SNP-LD coalition
Glasgow	Labour majority	Labour majority
Highland	Independent majority	Ind-SNP coalition
Inverclyde	LD majority	
Midlothian	Labour majority	
Moray	Independent majority	Ind-Con coalition
North Ayrshire	Labour majority	Labour minority
North Lanarkshire	Labour majority	Labour majority
Orkney	Independent majority	Independent majority
Perth and Kinross	SNP-LD-Ind coalition	SNP-LD coalition
Renfrewshire	Labour majority	SNP-LD coalition
Scottish Borders	Ind-Con coalition	Con-Ind-LD coalition
Shetland	Independent majority	Independent majority
South Ayrshire	Conservative majority*	
South Lanarkshire	Labour majority	
Stirling	Labour majority	
W Dunbartonshire	Labour minority*	
West Lothian	Labour majority	SNP-Con-Ind coalition
Western Isles	Independent majority	Independent majority

\*Changes in status between 2003 and 2007.

## Councillors

Table 4: Seats won by each party on each local authority in 2003 and 2007.

	2003 results FPTP					2007 results STV				
	C	L	LD	SNP	OTH	C	L	LD	SNP	OTH
Aberdeen	3	14	20	6	0	5	10	15	12	1
Aberdeenshire	11	0	28	18	11	14	0	24	22	8
Angus	2	1	3	17	6	5	2	3	13	6
Argyll and Bute	3	0	8	3	22	3	0	7	10	16
Clackmannanshire	1	10	0	6	1	1	8	1	7	1
Dumfries/ Galloway	11	14	5	5	12	18	14	3	10	2
Dundee	5	10	2	11	1	3	10	2	13	1
East Ayrshire	1	23	0	8	0	3	14	0	14	1
East Dunbartonshire	3	9	12	0	0	5	6	3	8	2
East Lothian	4	17	1	1	0	2	7	6	7	1
East Renfrewshire	7	8	3	0	2	7	7	1	3	2
Edinburgh	13	30	15	0	0	11	15	17	12	3
Falkirk	2	14	0	9	7	2	14	0	13	3
Fife	2	36	23	11	6	5	24	21	23	5
Glasgow	1	71	3	3	1	1	45	5	22	6
Highland	0	8	9	6	57	0	7	21	17	35
Inverclyde	0	6	13	0	1	1	9	4	5	1
Midlothian	0	15	2	0	1	0	9	3	6	0
Moray	1	5	1	3	16	3	2	0	9	12
North Ayrshire	4	21	0	3	2	3	12	2	8	5
North Lanarkshire	0	54	0	13	3	1	40	1	23	5
Orkney	0	0	0	0	21	0	0	0	0	21
Perth and Kinross	10	5	9	15	2	12	3	8	18	0
Renfrewshire	1	21	3	15	0	2	17	4	17	0
Scottish Borders	10	0	8	1	15	11	0	10	6	7
Shetland	0	0	5	0	17	0	0	0	0	22
South Ayrshire	15	15	0	0	0	12	9	0	8	1
South Lanarkshire	2	51	2	9	3	8	30	2	24	3
Stirling	10	12	0	0	0	4	8	3	7	0
West Dunbartonshire	0	17	0	3	2	0	10	0	9	3
West Lothian	1	18	0	12	1	1	14	0	13	4
Western Isles	0	4	0	3	24	0	2	0	4	25
<b>SEATS</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>509</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>348</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>363</b>	<b>202</b>
<b>CHANGE</b>						<b>+</b> <b>20</b>	<b>-</b> <b>161</b>	<b>-</b> <b>9</b>	<b>+</b> <b>182</b>	<b>-</b> <b>32</b>

Compared to the FPTP result in 2003, therefore, the SNP made strong national net gains, very much at Labour's expense. The Conservatives also advanced a little, and Independents and Lib Dems slipped back.

However, the contrast between these results conflates two separate sources of change – the new electoral system and changes in what voters chose to do in 2003 and 2007. The ERS estimates of what would have happened under STV in 2003 are reproduced below, to show the extent to which there was a real change in party fortunes among the electorate in 2007. The results (see next Table 5, this and next page) still show a clear national pattern of the SNP making gains from Labour. The table two pages on (Table 6) summarises the net changes for each council between 2003 and 2007, using both the actual FPTP result and the model STV result as baselines.

Table 5: STV results for local elections, model 2003 and actual 2007.

	STV model result 2003					STV actual result 2007				
	Con	Lab	LD	SN P	Oth	Con	Lab	LD	SN P	Oth
Aberdeen City	5	10	18	10	0	5	10	15	12	1
Aberdeenshire	13	0	27	20	8	14	0	24	22	8
Angus	4	4	3	12	6	5	2	3	13	6
Argyll and Bute	5	0	7	4	20	3	0	7	10	16
Clackmannan- shire	1	8	0	9	0	1	8	1	7	1
Dumfries and Galloway	14	13	5	4	11	18	14	3	10	2
Dundee City	3	10	2	13	1	3	10	2	13	1
East Ayrshire	1	18	0	13	0	3	14	0	14	1
East Dunbartonshire	4	9	9	2	0	5	6	3	8	2
East Lothian	4	10	3	6	0	2	7	6	7	1
East Renfrewshire	6	9	4	0	1	7	7	1	3	2
Edinburgh City	14	20	16	8	0	11	15	17	12	3
Falkirk	2	14	0	11	5	2	14	0	13	3

	STV model result 2003					STV actual result 2007				
	Con	Lab	LD	SN P	Oth	Con	Lab	LD	SN P	Oth
Fife	6	28	22	17	5	5	24	21	23	5
Glasgow City	1	47	3	22	6	1	45	5	22	6
Inverclyde	0	7	11	1	1	1	9	4	5	1
Midlothian	0	10	2	6	0	0	9	3	6	0
Moray	1	3	0	7	15	3	2	0	9	12
North Ayrshire	4	16	0	9	1	3	12	2	8	5
North Lanarkshire	0	45	0	23	2	1	40	1	23	5
Perth and Kinross	12	3	9	16	1	12	3	8	18	0
Renfrewshire	1	16	3	20	0	2	17	4	17	0
Scottish Borders	11	0	9	2	12	11	0	10	6	7
South Ayrshire	13	10	0	7	0	12	9	0	8	1
South Lanarkshire	4	37	2	21	3	8	30	2	24	3
Stirling	4	10	1	7	0	4	8	3	7	0
West Dunbartonshire	0	12	0	8	2	0	10	0	9	3
West Lothian	1	16	1	14	0	1	14	0	13	4
<b>Scotland (28/32)*</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>385</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>339</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>342</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>CHANGE</b>						<b>+9</b>	<b>-46</b>	<b>-12</b>	<b>+50</b>	<b>-1</b>

\*Results in Highland, Orkney, Shetland and Western Isles were not modelled because there were too many non-party and uncontested wards.

Table 6: Changes in seats 2003 to 2007 using both baselines.

	Change from 2003 actual FPTP result					Change from 2003 model STV result				
	Con	Lab	LD	SN P	Oth	Con	Lab	LD	SN P	Oth
Aberdeen City	+2	-4	-5	+6	+1			-3	+2	+1
Aberdeenshire	+2		-1	+2	-3	+1		-3	+2	
Angus	+3	+1		-4		+1	-2		+1	
Argyll and Bute			-1	+7	-6	-2			+6	-4
Clack'shire		-2	+1	+1				+1	-2	+1
Dumfries & G	+7		-2	+5	-10	+4	+1	-2	+6	-9
Dundee City	-2			+2						
East Ayrshire	+2	-9		+6	+1	+2	-4		+1	+1
E Dun'shire	+2	-3	-9	+8	+2	+1	-3	-6	+6	+2
East Lothian	-2	-10	+5	+6	+1	-2	-3	+3	+1	+1
E Renfrewshire		-1	-2	+3		+1	-2	-3	+3	+1
Edinburgh City	-2	-15	+2	+12	+3	-3	-5	+1	+4	+3
Falkirk				+4	-4				+2	-2
Fife	+3	-12	-2	+12	-1	-1	-4	-1	+6	
Glasgow City		-26	+2	+19	+5		-2	+2		
Highland		-1	+12	+11	-22					
Inverclyde	+1	+3	-9	+5		+1	+2	-7	+4	
Midlothian		-6	+1	+6	-1		-1	+1		
Moray	+2	-3	-1	+6	-4	+2	-1		+2	-3
North Ayrshire	-1	-9	+2	+5	+3	-1	-4	+2	-1	+4
N Lanarkshire	+1	-14	+1	+10	+2	+1	-5	+1		+3
Orkney										
Perth & Kinross	+2	-2	-1	+3	-2			-1	+2	-1
Renfrewshire	+1	-4	+1	+2		+1	+1	+1	-3	
Sc. Borders	+1		+2	+5	-8			+1	+4	-5
Shetland			-5		+5					
South Ayrshire	-3	-6		+8	+1	-1	-1		+1	+1
S Lanarkshire	+6	-21		+15		+4	-7		+3	
Stirling	-6	-4	+3	+7			-2	+2		
W Dun'shire		-7		+6	+1		-2		+1	+1
West Lothian		-4		+1	+3		-2	-1	-1	+4
Western Isles		-2		+1	+1					

Some of the most dramatic apparent changes since 2003 are almost entirely a correction to the previously very unrepresentative results of council elections, such as Labour winning 71 out of 79 seats in Glasgow on 47.6 per cent of the vote in 2003. Labour's losses in Glasgow, comparing with the notional STV result in 2003, are in fact quite minor. In Renfrewshire Labour actually did a little better in 2007 than it would have done under STV in 2003, despite being a few seats

down on the actual FPTP result. In several authorities Labour made large losses both because of the system change and falling support, such as North Ayrshire, Stirling and South Lanarkshire. But the general pattern was for attrition of Labour strength from both sources.

### ***The Scottish National Party***

The SNP was the principal party to benefit from the change in electoral system. Before 2007 the party polled reasonably well in elections across most of the central belt of Scotland, but its supporters were grossly under-represented on most councils. The problem was that its support was spread fairly evenly, with about 25 per cent of the vote everywhere rather than having enough concentrated support to win wards under FPTP. In a few councils, such as Clackmannanshire, Falkirk, West Lothian and Renfrewshire, its vote was high enough to gain significant representation, but the usual pattern in 2003 was for only a handful if SNP councillors, if any, to represent a substantial share of the vote.

In 2007 this pattern of support was enough to win one seat in most multi-member wards across Scotland, transforming the SNP's representation. In most areas, the party's vote did not rise enough between 2003 and 2007 to have won many more FPTP seats had that system remained. There were only three or four Glasgow wards, for instance, that would have switched from Labour to SNP. The SNP could not have expected to gain more than five seats in South Lanarkshire and Labour would have remained comfortably in control despite the party's falling vote.

Table 7: STV corrects the under-representation of SNP voters

	2003					2007		
	Vote %	FPTP actual		STV model		Vote %FP	Seats	Seats %
		Seats	Seats %	Seats	Seats %			
East Ayrshire	35.3	8	25.0	13	40.6	38.1	14	43.8
E Dunbartonshire	11.3	0	0	2	8.3	18.4	8	33.3
East Lothian	19.2	1	4.3	6	26.1	28.1	7	30.4
Edinburgh City	15.6	0	0	8	13.8	20.3	12	20.7
Glasgow City	20.5	3	3.8	22	27.8	24.6	22	27.8
Inverclyde	15.3	0	0	1	5.0	21.5	5	25.0
Midlothian	24.4	0	0	6	33.3	33.4	6	33.3
North Ayrshire	28.2	3	10.0	9	30.0	29.9	8	26.7
North Lanarkshire	32.6	11	15.7	23	32.9	32.1	23	32.9
Stirling	21.3	0	0	7	31.8	29.2	7	31.8
W Dunbartonshire	33.6	3	13.6	8	36.4	34.1	9	40.9

The SNP now has representation in every council in Scotland except Orkney and Shetland, making it the party with the widest reach of councillors (represented on 30 councils, to 27 with Labour councillors, 26 with Conservatives and 24 with Liberal Democrats). It narrowly became the party with the most councillors in Scotland. The SNP's prospects in future depend on its performance running not only the Scottish Executive but also its exercise, in coalition, of civic power in many local authorities, now including Renfrewshire, Aberdeen, Highland and Edinburgh. It will also need to re-examine its candidate strategy for the next local elections in the light of the seats it missed gaining through not standing sufficient candidates in 2007.

### ***Labour***

The 2007 elections were painful for Labour. The party had enjoyed over-representation in many Scottish councils for decades and had to undergo a large downsizing in one election. The damage was compounded by the adverse national climate in 2007, and by the willingness of other parties to co-operate and form administrations that exclude the Labour Party.

However, having suffered these results in 2007 Labour remains a strong force on many local authorities in Scotland, with majority control in two powerful councils (Glasgow and North Lanarkshire) and in four years' time may well be in a position to move forward again. The party could reasonably hope to recover the five councils it might have won under STV in 2003, and also develop strategies to broaden its appeal in other areas and run councils based on mass support from local electors rather than a trick of the FPTP electoral system.

Even in 2007 there were some local successes for Labour. The party now has a councillor in Newton Mearns South, an affluent ward in East Renfrewshire, and in East Sutherland and Edderton in Highland – in terms of acreage, at least, Labour gained a lot of territory in the 2007 local elections. The party now has footholds in the sorts of area where it never had a chance before, and future STV elections may see Labour expanding further into new areas.

### ***Conservatives***

Across Scotland, the STV elections saw a small Conservative advance, with a net gain of 20 seats from the FPTP results and 9 from the STV model results in 2003. STV allowed the Conservatives to gain representation in some areas which have been almost entirely barren. The idea of the Tories having a representative for Motherwell South and Ravenscraig on North Lanarkshire council, for instance, is unfamiliar, but that is a reflection of the minority Conservative vote that has always existed in Scotland's industrial heartland and the campaigning efforts of its candidates (and, in this case, the failure of the SNP to put up enough candidates). In both North Lanarkshire and Inverclyde they won seats on councils which had no Conservative representation in 2003. The Conservatives also made something of a breakthrough in South Lanarkshire by returning a group of 8 councillors compared to 2 in 2003, and advanced in

Dumfries and Galloway. They lost out, however, in areas where they had previously relied on small areas of strong support to return knots of councillors, such as the rural parts of Stirling and The Ferry in Dundee. One of the consequences of STV is taking each party out of its previous comfort zones in searching out support.

### ***Liberal Democrats***

The Lib Dems had a disappointing set of local elections, emerging slightly below their 2003 level of representation on both FPTP and STV comparisons. Most of the net losses can be accounted for by particularly bad electoral performances in two councils they ran before May 2007, East Dunbartonshire and Inverclyde. They did, however, become narrowly the largest party in Edinburgh and broke new ground with gains in four councils – Clackmannanshire, North Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire and Stirling. They have also co-operated with the SNP in forming several local administrations.

### ***Greens***

The Green Party did not poll as well as it might have hoped because of the concentration of Parliamentary votes around the SNP and Labour. However, STV allowed it a fair chance of winning seats on local councils for the first time and the party was able to establish itself in Scotland's two largest cities, with 3 councillors in Edinburgh and a surprisingly large group of 5 councillors in Glasgow. Green candidates, if they survived the early stages of the count, often did well in attracting preferences transferred from other candidates.

### ***Socialists***

The Scottish Socialist Party polled relatively well in 2003 under FPTP in some areas, notably Glasgow, although it did not receive many seats. Had its vote remained intact in 2007 it could have looked forward to substantial representation in Glasgow and a voice in some other councils. The split between the SSP and Solidarity and the fall in their combined vote meant that 2007 was not a good election for them. The damage was compounded by the unwillingness of SSP and Solidarity voters to give the other left-wing party their second preferences – only about a quarter of their voters did so. Solidarity won a single seat in Glasgow and the SSP a seat in West Dunbartonshire.

### ***Independents and Others***

Several smaller parties stood in the council elections, including the Scottish Senior Citizens' Unity Party, the Scottish Unionist Party, UKIP and the BNP, but these did not win enough votes to gain any seats. The newly-formed Borders Party did win two seats, and three hospital campaigners were elected in West Lothian.

Independent candidates fell back in several of the rural councils in which they had previously been strong, with three councils alone (Borders, Dumfries and Galloway and Highland) accounting for 42 net losses since the 2003 elections. In

some of these areas Independents were facing competition from party candidates for the first time and while many voters did still want Independents, others chose party representatives. In Highland the Independent vote share fell from over 70 per cent to just over 40 per cent. In many wards there was electoral competition for the first time in a local election in many years.

However, these losses went alongside greater opportunities opening up for non-party candidates in councils that had previously been highly party political including Clackmannanshire, North Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire and – a council which had previously been an exclusive two-party fight between Labour and Conservative – South Ayrshire.

**Voters across Scotland were able to exercise more choice. In the Highlands this meant having the opportunity to vote for parties, while in Ayrshire it was the chance to elect Independents.**

Has the STV system helped or hindered women and young people?

### WOMEN ON SCOTTISH COUNCILS AND THE IMPACT OF STV

Despite a fall in the number of women put forward by political parties, the number of women councillors has dropped by only a tiny amount of 0.2% (or 6 female councillors).

Table 8

	% Women Candidates	% Women Elected
2003	27.7	21.8
2007	22.5	21.6

In 2003, there was a significant difference between the proportion of women standing and the proportion of women elected. In 2007, the figures were much closer. This means that women who made it onto the ballot paper in the 2003 First-Past-the-Post election were less likely to be elected than men, while in 2007, women were elected at the same rate as men.

It demonstrates that the system does not disadvantage women, that women candidates are just as popular with voters as men and suggests that if parties were to select greater numbers of women, the women's representation on Scottish councils would increase.

In 2003, the difference between the proportion of female candidates and female councillors can partly be explained by the fact that women are more likely to be put forward in unwinnable seats or as paper candidates, which does nothing to boost women's representation.

It is disappointing that parties did not select more women in 2007, and that an opportunity to make a significant improvement in gender balance in representation in Scottish local government was lost – Scotland has lagged behind for several election cycles. Despite the effort to create a greater turnover of councillors by offering severance payments for retirees in 2007, incumbency remained a strong factor particularly in the Labour Party where a bit over 500 incumbents had to be squeezed into 380 seats even if there were no further losses. Despite this, the number of women on Scottish councils remained stable in 2007. STV sets up incentives for parties to respond to the pressures from the electorate, and eliminates the 'safe seat' which has been a drag on changing the composition of councils. There is a further opportunity for the parties that will be in the ascendant in each local authority at the next elections in 2011 to make major improvements.

#### ***Party Differences***

In 2007, those parties which selected the most female candidates also returned the most women.

Table 9: women candidates and councillors 2003 and 2007

Party	2003 Candidates*	2003 councillors**	2007 candidates	2007 councillors
Conservatives	32	23	24.6	23.8
Labour	26	19	19.3	17.5
Liberal Democrats	37	33	30.9	31.3
SNP	25	25	21.5	21.2
Others/Independents	n/a	15	20.8	19.3
Scotland Total	28	21.8	22.5	21.6

\* Figures from Prof David Denver, *Glasgow Herald* 3 May 2007

[http://election.theherald.co.uk/homepage/electionnews/display.var.1372185.0.no\\_cosy\\_deals\\_sn\\_p\\_warns\\_councillors.php](http://election.theherald.co.uk/homepage/electionnews/display.var.1372185.0.no_cosy_deals_sn_p_warns_councillors.php)

\*\* *Cosla report* Scotland's Councillors 2003 (published December 2003)

Labour selected the lowest proportion of women of all the main parties and ended up with an even lower proportion of women councillors, slipping behind independents and others. As the party stood to lose councillors in this election, they did not do enough to make sure that women did not disproportionately lose out, despite pleas by the central party and advocates such as Margaret Curran MSP.

The Liberal Democrats also lost a handful of seats with a small net loss of women councillors. However, they were starting from a significantly higher level of women's representation while Labour already had ground to make up prior to this election. For the Lib Dems, women were slightly more likely to win a seat once chosen as party candidates.

The SNP also saw the proportion of their councillors who are women fall, though the number rose significantly from 46 to 77. The Conservatives have close to the same number of councillors and the same proportion of women.

The biggest increase in the proportion of women councillors is in the 'Independent/Other' category. While the overall number of independents fell, the proportion of women increased. This is due in small part to parties like the Greens winning seats for the first time under STV (electing 2 women out of 5 in Glasgow and 2 out of 3 councillors in Edinburgh for example). In other councils, female independents have attracted enough support in first preferences and transfers to win seats.

### **Council by Council Figures**

With an overall fall of 6 in the number of female councillors, there were some variations between councils. Scotland's two largest cities reflect this: Glasgow lost 4 women while Edinburgh gained 5. In the Highlands and Islands too, the picture is mixed: Highland and Orkney councils saw a net loss of one woman

each, while Western Isles (up 2) and Shetland (up 3) returned more women. Stirling is down 3 women, while neighbouring Perth and Kinross is up 4.

The key pattern was that where women were selected by parties who were gaining votes and seats, women's representation improved. Where women were squeezed out by parties losing seats or by parties that were set to make gains, women's representation decreased.

Table 10: Biggest gains in women's representation

Council	% Increase (and net increase in women)
Shetland	13.6% (+3)
Midlothian	11.1% (+2)
Perth & Kinross	9.8% (+4)
Edinburgh	8.6% (+5)
Argyll & Bute	8.3% (+3)

Table 11: Biggest falls in women's representation

Council	% Drop (and net decrease)
Stirling	13.6% (-3)
Dundee	10.3% (-3)
West Dunbartonshire	9.1% (-2)
Borders	8.8% (-2)
East Dunbartonshire	8.3% (-2)

Table 12:

Council	Net Change in Women councillors
Aberdeen	-2
Aberdeenshire	1
Angus	0
Argyll & Bute	3
Borders	-3
Clackmannanshire	0
Dumfries & Galloway	-3
Dundee	-3
East Ayrshire	-2
East Dunbartonshire	-2
East Lothian	0
East Renfrewshire	1
Edinburgh	5
Falkirk	-2
Fife	-2
Glasgow	-4
Highland	-1
Inverclyde	-1

Midlothian	2
Moray	0
North Ayrshire	0
North Lanarkshire	1
Orkney	-1
Perth & Kinross	4
Renfrewshire	0
Shetland	3
South Ayrshire	3
South Lanarkshire	1
Stirling	-3
West Dunbartonshire	-2
West Lothian	-1
Western Isles	2
<b>Scotland</b>	<b>-6</b>

## YOUNG PEOPLE

It is too early for systematic work on how STV has affected representation of young people, ethnic minorities and other previously under-represented groups.

However, the openness of STV to the efforts of individual candidates has created an opportunity for hard work to cut out the previous process of first fighting 'hopeless' wards before graduating to a better prospect. It also means that more or less wherever in the country one lives, it is not a completely hopeless prospect to campaign. If Labour can win in Newton Mearns, and the Conservatives can win in Ravenscraig in the same election, there really can be no no-go areas.

The SNP's new leadership team in Aberdeen City has drawn considerable attention already, with an 18-year old Deputy Provost (John West) and three other councillors aged under 26 running education, licensing and employment appeals. Giving these councillors leadership positions was a choice for the SNP's council group in Aberdeen, but electing young people to the council was achieved under STV.

## Did the results really represent how people voted?

Table 13: Party shares of first preference votes and council seats.

	First preference share 2007 %					Seats share 2007 %				
	Con	Lab	LD	SNP	Oth	Con	Lab	LD	SNP	Oth
Aberdeen City	14.1	24.6	26.9	29.5	3.4	11.6	23.3	34.9	27.9	2.3
Aberdeenshire	20.8	5.4	25.5	34.2	13.9	20.6	0	35.3	32.4	11.8
Angus	18.4	11.9	8.7	38.6	22.3	17.2	6.9	10.3	44.8	20.7
Argyll and Bute	15.7	3.7	19.2	23.7	37.8	8.3	0	19.4	27.8	44.4
Clackmannanshire	10.8	37.8	5.2	38.1	8.1	5.6	44.4	5.6	38.9	5.6
Dumfries/Galloway	31.8	28.1	8.5	19.1	12.7	38.3	29.8	6.4	21.3	4.3
Dundee City						10.3	34.5	6.9	44.8	3.4
East Ayrshire	13.0	41.9	0	38.1	8.1	9.4	43.8	0	43.8	3.1
E Dunbartonshire	21.6	26.2	18.1	18.4	15.8	20.8	25.0	12.5	33.3	8.3
East Lothian	17.1	32.1	15.2	28.1	7.5	8.7	30.4	26.1	30.4	4.3
East Renfrewshire	34.3	27.8	10.2	16.0	11.8	35.0	35.0	5.0	15.0	10.0
Edinburgh City	22.1	22.9	22.0	20.3	12.7	19.0	25.9	29.3	20.7	5.2
Falkirk	13.5	36.1	0.8	35.2	14.5	6.3	43.8	0	40.6	9.4
Fife	10.6	28.7	22.4	27.8	10.6	6.4	30.8	26.9	29.5	6.4
Glasgow City	7.6	43.3	8.2	24.6	16.3	1.3	57.0	6.3	27.8	7.6
Highland	6.9	11.2	18.8	20.3	43.0	0.0	8.8	26.3	21.3	43.8
Inverclyde	8.6	37.9	20.3	21.5	11.7	5.0	45.0	20.0	25.0	5.0
Midlothian	10.1	36.8	12.5	33.4	7.1	0	50.0	16.7	33.3	0
Moray	16.0	8.8	0.9	35.6	38.7	11.5	7.7	0	34.6	46.2
North Ayrshire	13.6	31.9	4.8	29.9	19.7	10.0	40.0	6.7	26.7	16.7

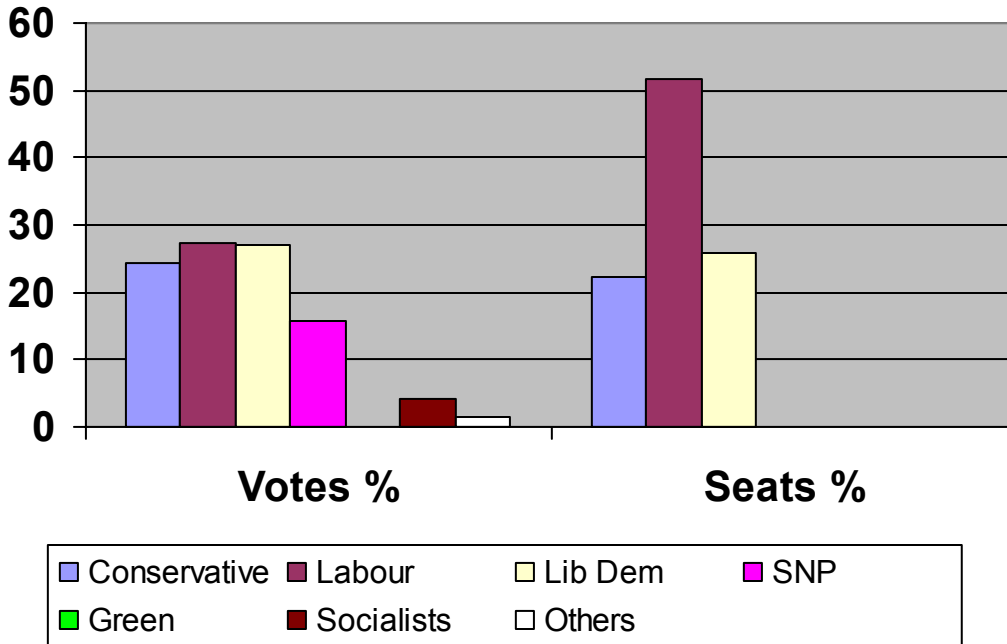
North Lanarkshire	7.5	49.3	1.8	32.1	9.3	1.4	57.1	1.4	32.9	7.1
Orkney	0.8	0	0	0	99.2	0	0	0	0	100
Perth and Kinross	28.1	8.5	19.7	37.2	6.5	29.3	7.3	19.5	43.9	0
Renfrewshire	11.5	36.8	9.7	35.4	6.6	5.0	42.5	10.0	42.5	0
Scottish Borders	26.8	1.9	24.9	18.8	27.9	32.4	0	29.4	17.6	20.6
Shetland	1.5	0	3.0	0	95.5	0	0	0	0	100
South Ayrshire						40.0	30.0	0	26.7	3.3
South Lanarkshire						11.9	44.8	3.0	35.8	4.5
Stirling	25.3	28.2	11.5	29.2	5.7	18.2	36.4	13.6	31.8	0
W Dunbartonshire	7.6	35.2	0	34.1	23.3	0	45.5	0	40.9	13.6
West Lothian	9.4	36.6	5.1	36.3	12.5	3.1	43.8	0	40.6	12.5
Western Isles	0	6.7	2.5	12.2	78.7	0	6.5	0	12.9	80.6

STV delivered broadly proportional results in the elections to Scottish local authorities. Except in the Island authorities, where Independents stood against each other, there were no cases where a majority of first preference votes went to a single category of candidates. The lack of councils where there was a majority for any one point of view is reflected in the fact that no overall majority exists in 27 out of the 32 councils.

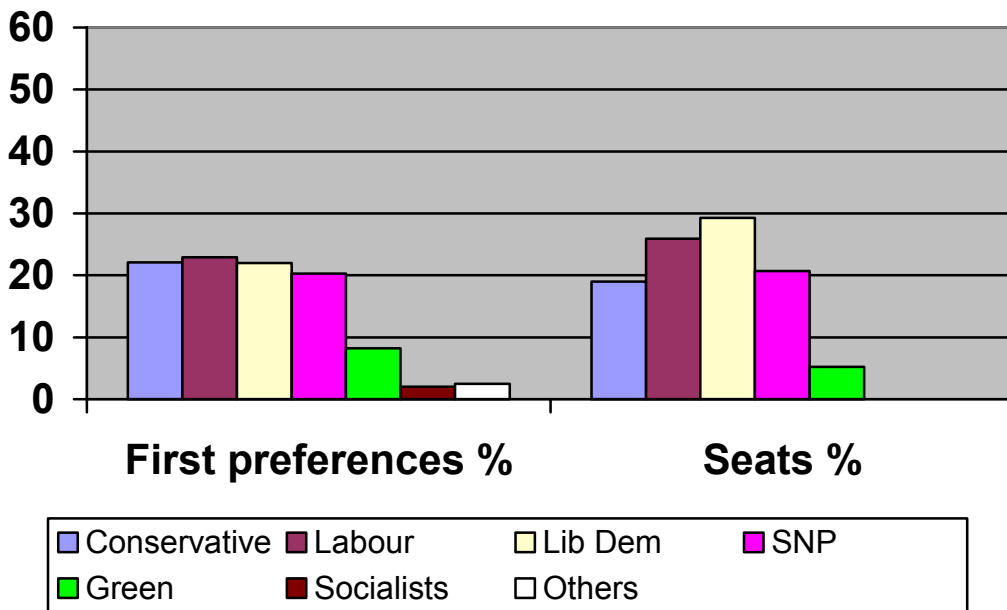
Where there was a significant body of voters choosing a party, that party received representation in the council chamber. The Midlothian Conservatives, who received 10.4 per cent of first preferences, were the largest unrepresented party. In contrast in 2003 the SNP won 24.4 per cent of the vote in the same authority and won no seats. STV has put such extreme distortions in the relationship of seats to votes to an end.

STV has also ended the egregious situation where a party can win a majority of seats on a very small share of the vote, as Labour managed in Edinburgh when less than 28 per cent of the vote sufficed to maintain overall control in 2003. STV has also prevented parties from winning overall control in authorities despite being outpolled by another party, as in Renfrewshire in 2003. The following pages are graphic illustrations of some of the ways in which STV has worked for Scottish voters in 2007.

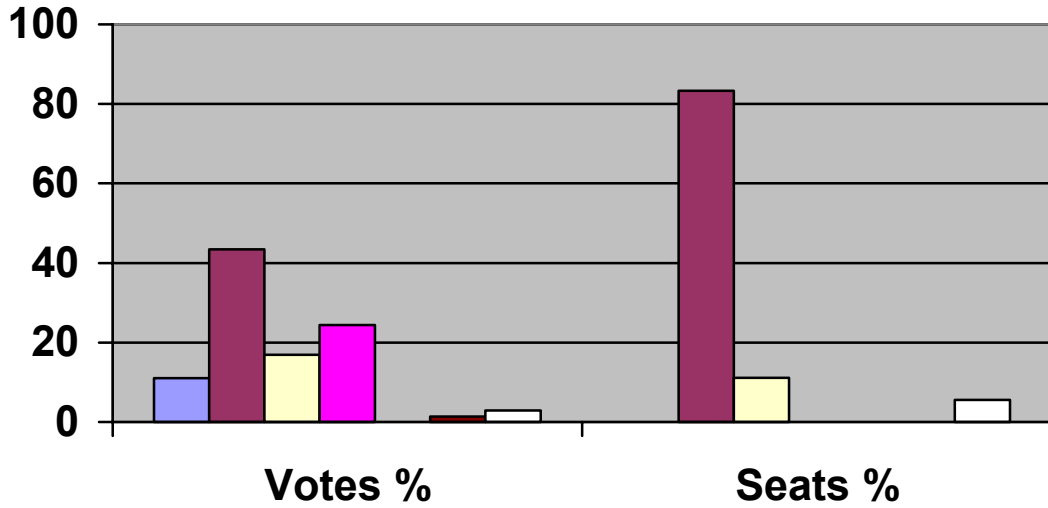
### Edinburgh City council 2003 election (FPTP)



### Edinburgh City council 2007 election (STV)

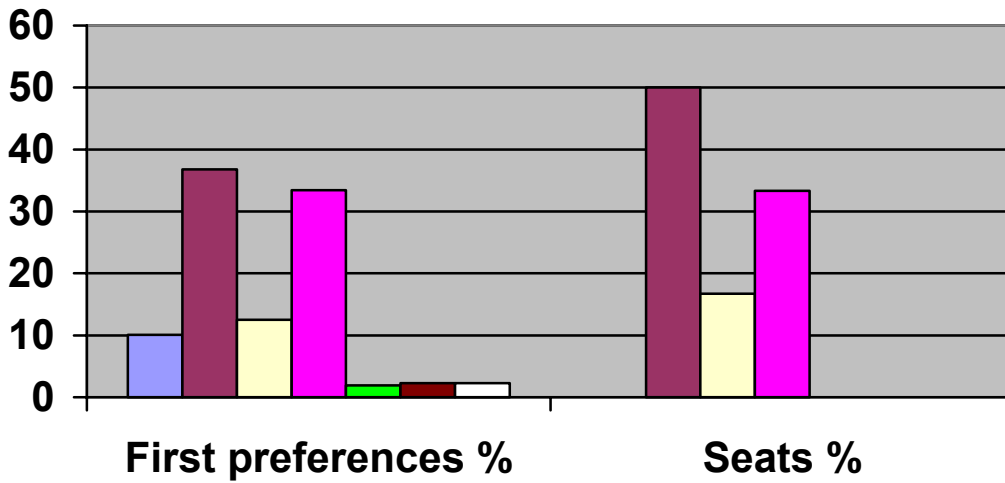


### Midlothian council 2003 election (FPTP)



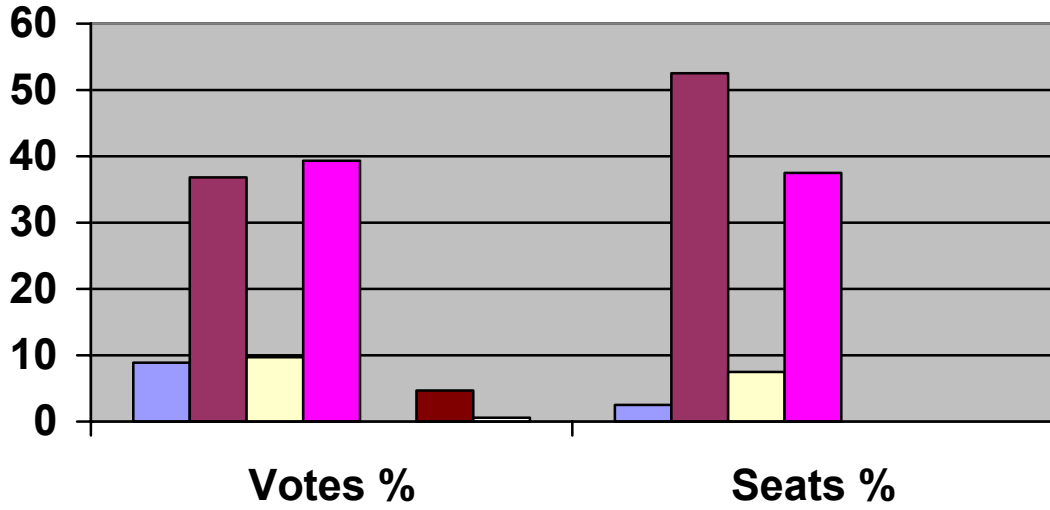
■ Conservative ■ Labour ■ Lib Dem ■ SNP ■ Green ■ Socialists ■ Others

### Midlothian council 2007 election (STV)



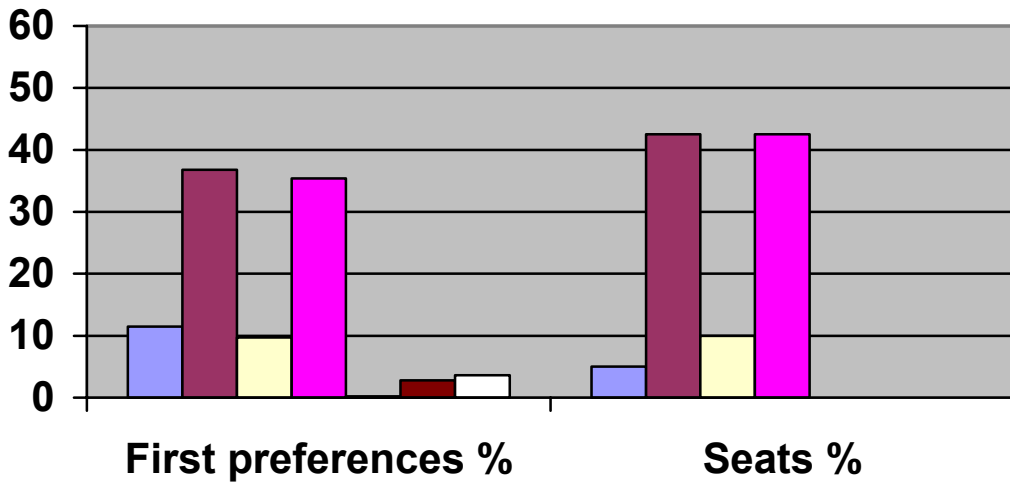
■ Conservative ■ Labour ■ Lib Dem ■ SNP  
■ Green ■ Socialists ■ Others

### Renfrewshire council 2003 election (FPTP)



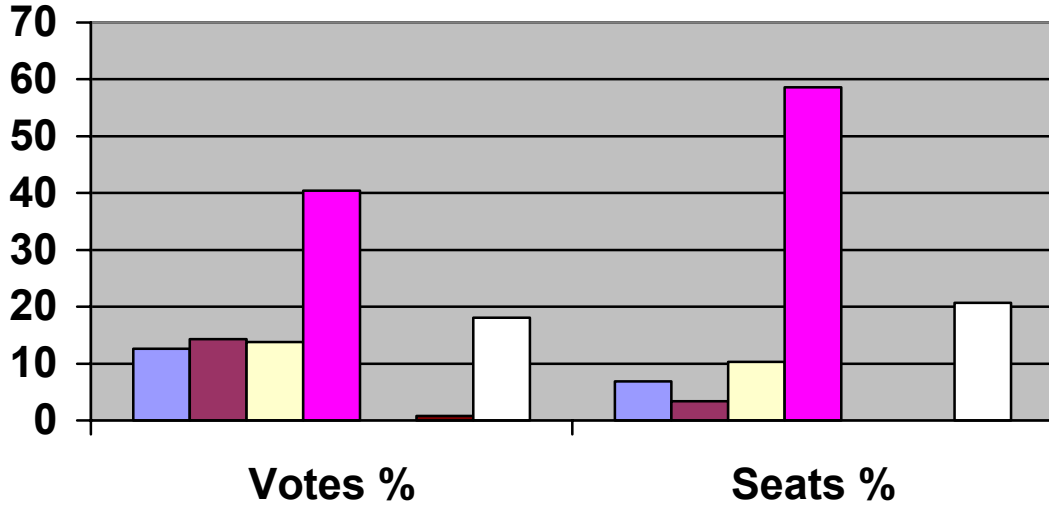
■ Conservative ■ Labour ■ Lib Dem ■ SNP ■ Green ■ Socialists ■ Others

### Renfrewshire council 2007 election (STV)



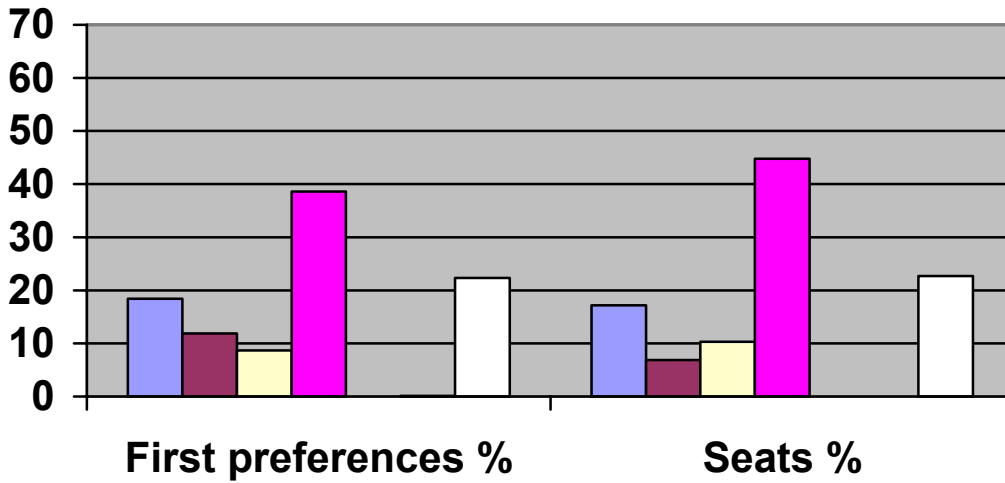
■ Conservative ■ Labour ■ Lib Dem ■ SNP  
■ Green ■ Socialists ■ Others

### Angus council 2003 election (FPTP)



■ Conservative ■ Labour ■ Lib Dem ■ SNP ■ Green ■ Socialists ■ Others

### Angus council 2007 election (STV)



■ Conservative ■ Labour ■ Lib Dem ■ SNP  
■ Green ■ Socialists ■ Others

STV is broadly rather than exactly proportional to party strength in first preferences.

First preferences are not equivalent to FPTP votes. STV means that voters contribute more information about their choices than is possible under other systems. Take, for instance, two voters whose first choice is Green. Mr A. is hostile to Labour and chooses the Lib Dems and SNP as their next preferences and ranks Labour towards the bottom of their list of preferences if at all. Ms B. is friendlier to Labour, and votes Green first and Labour second.

Looking at first preferences only means that one assumes that the ‘votes’ of these people express the same political choice. If there are a lot more people who think like Mr A., as opposed to Ms B., then an STV election result will reflect this fact. FPTP would not, unless people felt forced to abandon their true party leaning and vote tactically.

Parties and candidates vary in the extent to which they attract transfers, and this affects their share of seats. In some cases, parties (notably the SNP) did not stand enough candidates to get a proportional number of seats – simply put, you can’t win a seat if you don’t put up a candidate. Also, the largest party – particularly when the smaller parties represent very different alternative views – tends to enjoy something of a winner’s bonus. This helped Labour in Glasgow, where voters for other parties – Conservatives, Lib Dems, Greens, Socialists and others – often would not support each other’s candidates against Labour.

Another limiting factor on proportionality is that STV involves voting in wards. Differences in the distribution of the vote, and turnout, can make a difference in any electoral system where voters are divided into districts, but much less so in STV than in FPTP. However, there are a couple of authorities where the way in which the wards were drawn up seems to have affected the proportionality of the overall result. The SNP in East Dunbartonshire had around 20 per cent in each ward – enough for one seat per ward with transfers in 3-member wards but if there had been 4-member wards there was only enough support for a single SNP seat in each of those.

Table 14: East Dunbartonshire using 3 and 4 member wards

	First preferences	3-member seats		4-member seats (est)	
	%		%		%
Con	21.6	5	20.8	5	15.6
Lab	26.2	6	25.0	9	28.1
LD	18.1	3	12.5	7	21.9
SNP	18.4	8	33.3	8	25.0
Ind/ Oth	15.8	2	8.3	3	9.4

In Midlothian Labour benefited from a three-member ward pattern, winning half the seats with 36.8 per cent of first preferences. In three of the six wards Labour

had just short of 50 per cent of the vote and won two seats in each. In two others, Labour had around 25 per cent and won one seat. In the other, Midlothian East, Labour ended up with 34.3 per cent of the vote, which was nowhere near enough to win a second seat. The Conservatives had just over 10 per cent of the vote in Midlothian, which was not enough to gain representation on the council although they would have stood a chance had there been four-member seats.

Three member wards produce significantly less proportional results than a mixture of three and four member wards, or a mainly four-member pattern.

**STV produced councils that reflected the choices made by local voters.**

# The voter's eye view

Was there a greater choice of candidates?

Did people record valid votes?

Did people make use of preferential voting?

## Was there a greater choice of candidates?

The 2007 council elections saw a massive increase in the amount of choice available to Scottish voters.

In the 2003 elections 4,195 candidates stood in 1,222 wards. The average elector, therefore, had a choice from among 3.4 candidates (which was, incidentally, more than in most of England at the same elections). In 61 wards there was no competition at all, because a candidate was unopposed.

In 2007 there were 2,599 candidates for 353 multi-member wards. The choice available for the average elector was therefore 7.4 candidates – more than double the spread available in 2003 and far in excess of what was offered in England in 2007. There were no unopposed returns at all.

Table 15: Choice of candidates in 2003 and 2007

	Choice of candidates in 2003 FPTP					Choice of candidates in 2007 STV				
	4Pty	Oth	Total	Ward	Ave	4Pty	Oth	Total	Ward	Ave
Aberdeen City	171	21	192	43	<b>4.5</b>	71	18	89	13	<b>6.8</b>
Aberdeenshire	183	30	213	68	<b>3.1</b>	89	35	124	19	<b>6.5</b>
Angus	99	18	117	29	<b>4.0</b>	40	14	54	8	<b>6.8</b>
Argyll and Bute	59	50	109	36	<b>3.0</b>	45	33	78	11	<b>7.1</b>
Clackmannanshire	43	6	49	18	<b>2.7</b>	28	4	32	5	<b>6.4</b>
Dumfries and Galloway	116	26	142	47	<b>3.0</b>	69	22	91	13	<b>7.0</b>
Dundee City	109	22	131	29	<b>4.5</b>	50	20	70	8	<b>8.8</b>
East Ayrshire	96	12	108	32	<b>3.4</b>	46	12	58	9	<b>6.4</b>
East Dunbartonshire	89	9	98	24	<b>4.1</b>	39	20	59	8	<b>7.4</b>
East Lothian	91	8	99	23	<b>4.3</b>	35	8	43	7	<b>6.1</b>
East Renfrewshire	70	8	78	20	<b>3.9</b>	32	9	41	6	<b>6.8</b>
Edinburgh City	232	49	281	58	<b>4.8</b>	84	71	155	17	<b>9.1</b>
Falkirk	75	22	97	32	<b>3.0</b>	39	23	62	9	<b>6.9</b>
Fife	253	37	290	78	<b>3.7</b>	122	41	163	23	<b>7.1</b>
Glasgow City	256	86	342	79	<b>4.3</b>	118	90	208	21	<b>9.9</b>
Highland	56	114	170	80	<b>2.1</b>	89	94	183	22	<b>8.3</b>
Inverclyde	71	7	78	20	<b>3.9</b>	35	12	47	6	<b>7.8</b>
Midlothian	72	6	78	18	<b>4.3</b>	27	17	44	6	<b>7.3</b>
Moray	48	30	78	26	<b>3.0</b>	23	29	52	8	<b>6.5</b>
North Ayrshire	90	13	103	30	<b>3.4</b>	47	20	67	8	<b>8.4</b>

	Choice of candidates in 2003 FPTP					Choice of candidates in 2007 STV				
	4Pty	Oth	Total	Ward	Ave	4Pty	Oth	Total	Ward	Ave
North Lanarkshire	168	28	196	70	<b>2.8</b>	98	32	130	20	<b>6.5</b>
Orkney	0	37	37	21	<b>1.8</b>	1	43	44	6	<b>7.3</b>
Perth & Kinross	140	5	145	41	<b>3.5</b>	58	14	72	12	<b>6.0</b>
Renfrewshire	131	24	155	40	<b>3.9</b>	67	25	92	11	<b>8.4</b>
Scottish Borders	70	29	99	34	<b>2.9</b>	41	31	72	11	<b>6.5</b>
Shetland	13	25	38	22	<b>1.7</b>	3	47	50	7	<b>7.1</b>
South Ayrshire	90	13	103	30	<b>3.4</b>	38	11	49	8	<b>6.1</b>
South Lanarkshire	212	26	238	67	<b>3.6</b>	102	50	152	20	<b>7.6</b>
Stirling	84	3	87	22	<b>4.0</b>	36	7	43	7	<b>6.1</b>
West Dunbartonshire	47	20	67	22	<b>3.0</b>	30	21	51	6	<b>8.5</b>
West Lothian	115	13	128	32	<b>4.0</b>	52	20	72	9	<b>8.0</b>
Western Isles	14	35	49	31	<b>1.6</b>	12	40	52	9	<b>5.8</b>
<b>SCOTLAND</b>	<b>3363</b>	<b>832</b>	<b>4195</b>	<b>1222</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>1666</b>	<b>933</b>	<b>2599</b>	<b>353</b>	<b>7.4</b>

In the more rural authorities the extension of choice was dramatic – from an average of fewer than 2 candidates in Orkney and Shetland in 2003 to over 7 in 2007. In these authorities, and in Highland and Western Isles, a larger total number of candidates stood in 2007 than in 2003, despite the reduction in the number of wards. In many of these areas, the real novelty of 2007 was having a contested election at all.

In the big cities there was also an extension of competition, with the big four parties, smaller parties and independents often managing complete or nearly complete coverage. Electoral competition between the big parties was often strong in previous elections, but here the range of choice increased. While the total number of major party candidates fell sharply in Edinburgh and Glasgow, the number of Independent and minor party candidates rose because they would not be squeezed out by tactical voting any more. The average Glasgow voter could choose among nearly 10 candidates, and in Edinburgh the average was just over 9.

There was more choice in every authority.

**STV therefore succeeded in broadening the range of choice to Scottish voters and opening up the electoral process to a greater range of candidates.**

## Did people record valid votes?

Some critics have tried to argue that STV is somehow too complicated for voters to understand. The Scottish local authority elections were a stern test of how well the electorate could adjust to the introduction of STV and how much they were able to cast valid and effective votes under the system. There were considerable difficulties in the transition, including:

- The STV local elections taking place on the same day as the Scottish Parliament elections, which use a completely different system (Mixed Member Proportional, known in Scotland as AMS), and the need for voters to comprehend both systems.
- A major redesign of the Scottish Parliament ballot paper, reversing what had been known in the previous two elections as ‘first’ and ‘second’ votes and placing both on a single ballot paper.
- The well-known problem of voter confusion regarding the Scottish Parliament ballot could well have led voters to become flustered or irritated and therefore disinclined to go on and record a valid local election vote.
- The main attention of the political parties being on the Scottish Parliament election in which voting with an X rather than 1,2,3... is required – campaign messages centred around these concerns.
- The unfamiliarity of either multi-candidate seats or preference voting in public elections in Scotland, which might have led unwary voters to record an ‘X’ by the name of each candidate they support and therefore invalidate their vote.

With all these factors, it might have been expected that a very high rate of rejected votes (colloquially, ‘spoilage’) would be recorded in the STV count, particularly given the concurrent problems with the Scottish Parliament voting. However, the reality was very different. While there was an increase in spoilage in every authority except one (Scottish Borders), it was relatively modest in scale, particularly in rural areas.

Table 16: Rejected ballots in local authority elections 2003 and 2007

	Spoil 2003	Spoil 2007	Change
Aberdeen City	0.37%	1.74%	1.37%
Aberdeenshire	0.84%	1.51%	0.67%
Angus	0.94%	1.98%	1.04%
Argyll & Bute	1.26%	1.50%	0.24%
Clackmannanshire	0.96%	2.24%	1.28%
Dumfries/Galloway	0.83%	1.62%	0.79%
Dundee	0.57%	2.51%	1.94%
East Ayrshire	0.52%	2.45%	1.93%
E Dunbartonshire	0.78%	1.12%	0.34%

	Spoil 2003	Spoil 2007	Change
East Lothian	0.56%	1.42%	0.86%
East Renfrewshire	0.63%	1.27%	0.64%
Edinburgh	0.57%	1.27%	0.70%
Falkirk	0.83%	2.16%	1.33%
Fife	0.76%	1.54%	0.77%
Glasgow	0.81%	2.34%	1.53%
Highland	1.49%	1.75%	0.25%
Inverclyde	0.59%	1.96%	1.37%
Midlothian	0.50%	1.37%	0.87%
Moray	1.34%	1.65%	0.30%
North Ayrshire	0.76%	2.08%	1.32%
North Lanarkshire	1.02%	2.24%	1.22%
Orkney	0.98%	1.71%	0.73%
Perth & Kinross	0.68%	1.77%	1.08%
Renfrewshire	0.71%	2.38%	1.67%
Scottish Borders	1.38%	1.37%	-0.01%
Shetland	1.17%	1.18%	0.01%
South Ayrshire	0.53%	1.79%	1.26%
South Lanarkshire	0.69%	1.96%	1.27%
Stirling	0.54%	1.52%	0.98%
W Dunbartonshire	1.44%	2.74%	1.30%
West Lothian	0.45%	1.99%	1.54%
Western Isles	1.14%	2.22%	1.08%
<b>SCOTLAND</b>	<b>0.78%</b>	<b>1.85%</b>	<b>1.07%</b>

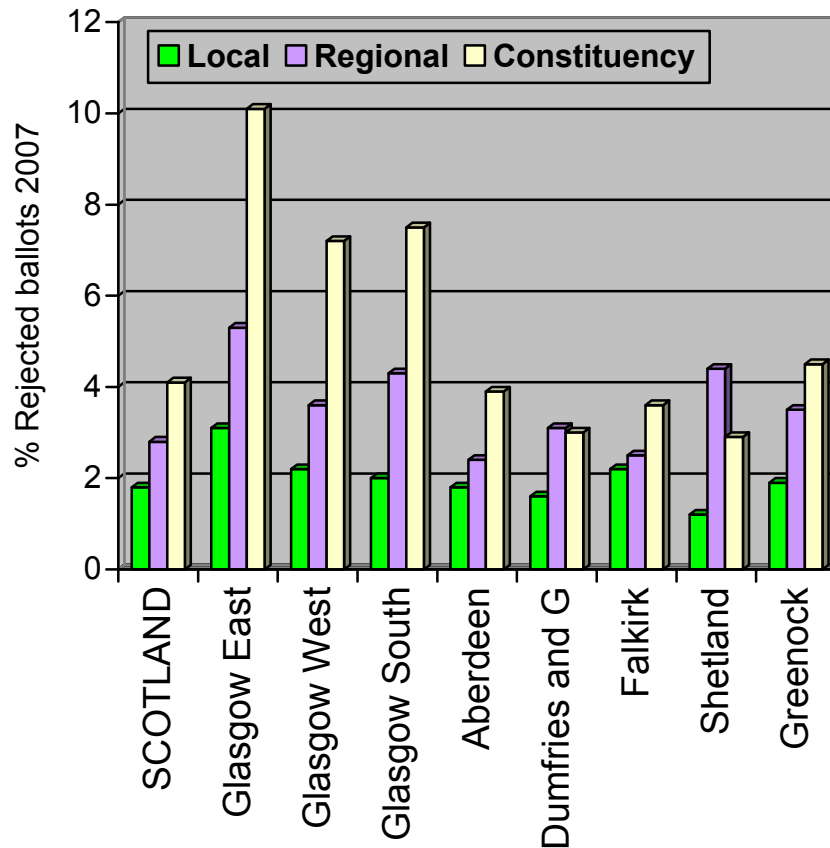
The highest rates of rejected STV ballots were in the most deprived areas of urban Scotland, particularly the East End of Glasgow (4.0 per cent in Calton ward, 4.2 per cent in Springburn ward being the only recorded cases exceeding 4 per cent spoilage). While accidental spoilage is regrettable, the numbers involved in the STV election were not particularly large. The rates of rejected ballots in the Scottish local elections are very comparable – and indeed somewhat lower than – the rates found in Northern Ireland local authority elections. In 2001 and 2005, when local authority elections in Northern Ireland were on the same day as the Westminster elections, were 2.41 per cent and 2.05 per cent respectively. When STV was introduced in Northern Ireland in 1973, on its own and accompanied by a strong public information campaign, the rates of spoilage were 1.7 per cent for the local elections and 2.4 per cent for the Assembly.

Rates of spoilage for the STV ballot were also considerably lower than in either part of the Scottish Parliament ballot, particularly the constituency vote which was subject to an unprecedented high rate of spoilage, greatly in excess of what was recorded in 1999 or 2003. The following table compares several areas in which a comparison can be made between local and parliamentary voting.

Table 17: Selective comparison of rejected local and Parliamentary ballots

	Local government		Parliament (regional)		Parliament (constituency)	
	Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate
<b>Comparable constituencies</b>						
Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross	482	1.8%	759	3.3%	867	3.7%
Eastwood	549	1.3%	1,107	2.6%	990	2.3%
Greenock and Inverclyde	474	1.9%	838	3.5%	1,099	4.5%
Orkney	150	1.7%	370	4.1%	285	3.2%
Shetland	119	1.2%	442	4.4%	294	2.9%
Western Isles	310	2.2	575	4.1%	446	3.2%
<b>Comparable areas</b>						
Aberdeen City	1,370	1.8%	1,891	2.4%	3,088	3.9%
Dumfries and Galloway	1,067	1.6%	2,014	3.1%	1,983	3.0%
Falkirk	1,326	2.2%	1,536	2.5%	2,176	3.6%
Midlothian and Borders	1,152	1.4%	2,598	3.1%	3,062	3.6%
Paisley and Renfrewshire	1,870	2.4%	2,539	3.2%	2,738	3.4%
West Lothian	1,319	2.0%	1,987	3.0%	3,356	5.1%
<b>Approximately comparable constituencies</b>						
Ross, Skye and Inverness West	596	1.8%	753	2.3%	1,419	4.3%
Inverness East, Nairn, Lochaber	621	1.6%	895	2.2%	1,249	3.1%
<b>Approximately comparable areas</b>						
Glasgow East	1,502	3.1%	2,909	5.3%	5,587	10.1%
Glasgow West	1,662	2.2%	2,406	3.6%	4,808	7.2%
Glasgow South	1,341	2.0%	2,883	4.3%	5,043	7.5%

## Rates of spoilage in the 2007 elections



### Definitions

Glasgow East: Baillieston, Shettleston, Springburn for Parliament; Wards 9 and 17 to 21 for local government.

Glasgow West: Anniesland, Kelvin, Maryhill for Parliament; Wards 10 to 16 for local government.

Glasgow South: Cathcart, Govan, Pollok; Wards 1 to 8 for local government.

Greenock and Inverclyde: Parliament constituency; Inverclyde council wards 2 to 6.

Paisley and Renfrewshire: Paisley North, Paisley South, West Renfrewshire for Parliament; Renfrewshire council area plus ward 1 of Inverclyde council.

Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross constituency; Highland council wards 1 to 5, 7 and 8.

Ross, Skye and Inverness West constituency; Highland council wards 6 and 9 to 14.

Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber constituency; Highland council wards 15 to 22.

Midlothian and Borders: Midlothian, Roxburgh and Berwickshire, Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale; Midlothian and Scottish Borders councils.

Reduction of accidental spoilage will be a primary concern of the Electoral Commission review of the Scottish Parliament elections, and there is also room for thinking about how the much lower total of spoiled ballots for the local elections might be further reduced. Reducing the load of 'how to' information

voters have to absorb in advance of the elections by staging local and parliamentary elections on different days might well reduce spoilage for both elections, as would familiarity. It is noteworthy that the spoilage rate for the Scottish Parliament election has risen at each election since 1999.

The increase in party competition (no seats going uncontested) and the increase in turnout resulted in a general increase in the number of valid votes in the local government elections.

Table 18: Valid votes in the 2003 and 2007 local elections

	Valid votes 2003	Valid votes 2007	Change	Change %
Aberdeen City	76399	77369	970	1.3%
Aberdeenshire	83550	95944	12394	14.8%
Angus	41999	44723	2724	6.5%
Argyll & Bute	36582	40186	3604	9.9%
Clackmannanshire	19164	20157	993	5.2%
Dumfries/Galloway	60657	64727	4070	6.7%
Dundee	51832	52047	215	0.4%
East Ayrshire	47713	47091	-622	-1.3%
E Dunbartonshire	46709	49839	3130	6.7%
East Lothian	37109	42091	4982	13.4%
East Renfrewshire	38800	42516	3716	9.6%
Edinburgh	178333	193006	14673	8.2%
Falkirk	52259	59953	7694	14.7%
Fife	125374	139347	13973	11.1%
Glasgow	183522	188018	4496	2.4%
Highland	65196	95452	30256	46.4%
Inverclyde	32710	31542	-1168	-3.6%

	Valid votes 2003	Valid votes 2007	Change	Change %
Midlothian	30437	34106	3669	12.1%
Moray	28554	33534	4980	17.4%
North Ayrshire	51377	53721	2344	4.6%
North Lanarkshire	111847	120631	8784	7.9%
Orkney	5075	8637	3562	70.2%
Perth & Kinross	56853	62538	5685	10.0%
Renfrewshire	66624	70273	3649	5.5%
Scottish Borders	40159	48783	8624	21.5%
Shetland	5647	9968	4321	76.5%
South Ayrshire	49798	48976	-822	-1.7%
South Lanarkshire	114883	124199	9316	8.1%
Stirling	36207	39419	3212	8.9%
W Dunbartonshire	35133	36103	970	2.8%
West Lothian	58335	65041	6706	11.5%
Western Isles	6953	13670	6717	96.6%
<b>SCOTLAND</b>	<b>1875790</b>	<b>2053607</b>	<b>177817</b>	<b>9.5%</b>

There were particularly large increases in valid votes cast in the most rural local authorities – Western Isles, Shetland, Orkney and Highland, where there were fewer uncontested elections and - in Highland – more political party candidates standing. There was a significant increase across nearly all of the authorities, urban and rural, and only three councils where there was a slight decline.

**There were 177,817 more valid votes cast in the STV elections in 2007 than there were in the FPTP elections in 2003. This is a 9.5 per cent increase over the previous election.**

**The rate of ballot spoilage in the local government elections was considerably lower than in the Parliamentary election.**

**The evidence suggests that Scottish voters found it relatively easy to cast a valid STV vote.**

## Did people make use of preferential voting?

Another thing that some opponents of reform sometimes claim is that while people might be able to cast a valid vote, they can't understand how preference voting works and would treat STV voting a bit like a FPTP ballot by marking only one choice.

While some voters chose only a single candidate (as they are entitled) the vast majority (86.2 per cent in West Lothian, 76.3 per cent in Glasgow) took the opportunity of recording more than one preference.

Table 19: Number of preferences used by voters in Glasgow and West Lothian

% of voters recording...	Glasgow	West Lothian
One preference and no more	23.7	13.8
Two preferences and no more	18.7	33.4
Three preferences and no more	29.0	23.7
Four preferences and no more	15.2	14.9
Five or more preferences	13.4	14.1

The median number of preferences given in Glasgow was therefore 3 (as it was in every ward in the city except Calton and Springburn, two relatively deprived three-member wards). Three preferences was also the modal choice in Glasgow city as a whole. There were only two wards (Govan and Shettleston) where fewer than a quarter of voters used more than three preferences, and that only narrowly. In Hillhead ward, nearly two in five (38.9 per cent) did so.

There was a slight variation in the pattern between 3 and 4 member wards in Glasgow, with more people (59.3 per cent) using three or more preferences in large wards than in smaller wards (50.8 per cent).

Table 20: Preferences used by ward size in Glasgow

% of Glasgow voters recording...	In 3-member wards	In 4-member wards
One preference and no more	24.8	23.5
Two preferences and no more	24.4	17.2
Three preferences and no more	22.5	30.6
Four preferences and no more	14.4	15.5
Five or more preferences	13.9	13.2

A factor influencing the extent to which voters used their preferences in Glasgow was the range of choice offered by the Labour Party, the most popular party in the city and – with the exceptions of the Lib Dems in Hillhead and the SNP in Baillieston – the only party offering more than one candidate in a ward.

Table 21: Preference usage and Labour candidates in Glasgow

% of Glasgow voters recording...	With 2 Labour candidates	With 3 Labour candidates
One preference and no more	23.3	24.1
Two preferences and no more	22.7	15.5
Three preferences and no more	22.9	33.2
Four preferences and no more	15.9	14.9
Five or more preferences	15.2	12.3

In the Pollokshields ward, where there was only one Labour candidate, 30.6 per cent of voters used only one preference, the largest proportion in the city.

This evidence suggests (without completely proving) that the Labour Party was broadly successful in informing its supporters across the city that they should cast their top preferences for all their candidates.

In West Lothian, the pattern of more than one party running two candidates was much more common than in Glasgow – in six out of nine wards there were two Labour and two SNP candidates. This is reflected in a higher proportion of voters choosing to only mark two preferences and fewer choosing only a single preference. People voting only for the SNP would have marked only one choice in nearly all of Glasgow, but two in nearly all of West Lothian. But even in this council where competition between the two major parties was intense, the majority of voters still chose to use three or more preferences, even though this would always involve crossing party lines.

Table 22: Preferences by ward size in West Lothian

% of West Lothian voters recording...	In 3-member wards	In 4-member wards
One preference and no more	16.1	12.3
Two preferences and no more	31.6	34.7
Three preferences and no more	25.2	22.8
Four preferences and no more	14.3	15.3
Five or more preferences	12.8	14.9

**Voters used the opportunities that STV gave them to rank candidates. Most voters in these two local authorities used three or more preferences, which usually meant expressing preferences across party lines.**

# Early lessons for the political parties

The Electoral Reform Society will be producing more detailed research analysing how voters and parties used STV in the local elections. STV produces a great deal of information about what voters want, which the political parties and election analysts will no doubt consider as well.

Some initial findings can be made as a result of looking at the parties' experience in Glasgow.

Under STV the political parties have to decide how many candidates they want to put forward for each ward. The smaller parties, including the big four political parties where they are locally in the minority like the Conservatives in Glasgow or Labour in Aberdeenshire, will usually only put up one candidate. Larger parties will often hope to elect more than one candidate, and the more candidates that they stand the greater the chance of gaining support and electing their supporters to local councils. If a party has nearly two quotas' worth of support (i.e. nearly 40 per cent in a four-member ward, or 50 per cent in a three-member ward) it should hope to get 2 seats. If the candidates are attractive to voters, and remain in the count to receive transfers when other candidates are elected or eliminated, it is possible that the party can be generously rewarded. For instance, if a party has 48 per cent of the vote in a four-member ward this is 2.4 quotas' worth. If the party runs three candidates and they all receive more or less 0.8 quotas' worth of votes (16 per cent) the chance are that all three will be elected. The worst that can happen is that it will be two out of three.

There is no such thing as a 'split vote' in STV because of the preferential voting system – if a party stands two candidates and one is eliminated, then the voters for the failed candidate are able to transfer their preferences to the colleague from the same party. The problem for the parties is that not all voters use their lower preferences (and in advance of the Scottish elections the extent of this could only be conjectured), and that some voters who do will decide to give those preferences across party lines. Every time a candidate is eliminated (or a surplus redistributed) some votes will, from the party's point of view, 'leak' away.

The elections in Glasgow were a major test of two different approaches to nominating candidates.

The SNP had a very cautious strategy, with one candidate in every ward except the Baillieston ward where two candidates stood.

Labour, on the other hand, was less cautious and offered a wider spread of candidates. This reflected the party's greater existing number of councillors and greater electoral support in 2003, but also that when in doubt Labour ran three rather than two candidates in several wards.

The results of the 2007 election in Glasgow show that Labour's candidate strategy was more successful in maximising the party's representation for its vote than the SNP's candidate strategy.

**Labour did not lose out on any Glasgow seats because of running too many candidates.**

There are several examples of parties running more candidates than they 'should have' in particular wards. In the Hillhead ward of Glasgow, there were two Lib Dem candidates but the party only had 0.92 quotas' worth of first preferences. The party still claimed the one seat which its share of the vote would have suggested. In Leith ward in Edinburgh, Labour was only just over a single quota (1.09) but ran two candidates. One Labour candidate was elected – the party did not suffer from its decision to run two candidates. It may even have benefited from the extra campaigning energy that having another candidate in the field involved – having two candidates working the ward probably mobilised more Labour voters than a single candidate could have done.

Labour's strategy in Glasgow, and examples such as Leith in Edinburgh, shows that there was sufficient understanding of the system and party loyalty among Scottish voters to make it advantageous rather than a risk to give them a greater choice of candidate. In wards where Labour first preferences were transferred and there were still Labour candidates to receive those votes, 60 per cent or more of those votes flowed to the party's other candidates, around 20-25 per cent tended to become non-transferable and 10-20 per cent went to other parties.

The findings suggest, for Labour, a fairly consistent flow of 60 per cent of the vote to running mates. This will of course vary depending on the relations between the candidates, the campaign techniques, and the personal reputation of candidates in the election. For instance, a popular Labour candidate can win personal support that does not stay with Labour, which would cause the in-house transfer rate to fall – but this is not a bad thing for the party because it reflects support that would otherwise be unavailable. Similarly, popular candidates of other parties might exert an unusual attraction for Labour second preferences.

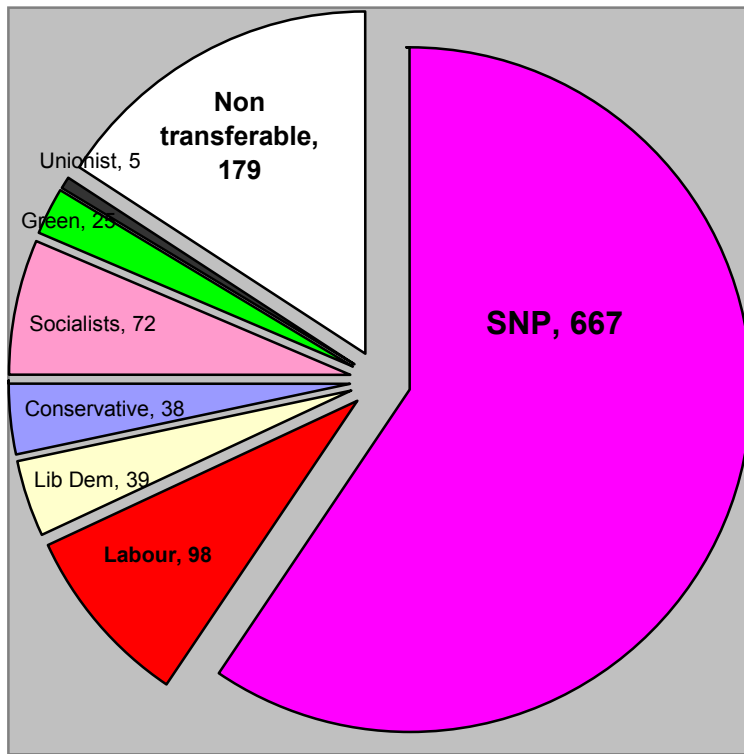
There were two other cases in Glasgow where there was the opportunity for an in-house transfer – the Lib Dems in Hillhead and the SNP in Baillieston. In Hillhead, the Lib Dem transfers were only 51.5 per cent to the running mate (18.8 per cent non transferable and 24.5 per cent to Labour) but even with this weak transfer and less than a full quota of votes, the Lib Dems still won a seat. Running several candidates does have risks in some cases – in the East Ayrshire council ward of Doon Valley Labour ran three candidates, had enough votes to elect two but were unlucky with their transfers and only ended up with one. But the evidence from most areas studied so far suggests that erring on the side of giving voters a choice is the better option.

**The SNP could almost certainly have won three more seats if it had chosen to stand more candidates.**

The SNP’s decision to run only one candidate in most wards was, it is now clear, unduly cautious. The evidence is the success of other parties in winning their fair share of representation while running extra candidates, and what happened in the one ward where the SNP did stand two candidates – Baillieston, a working class ward on the eastern side of Glasgow.

After the count of first preferences, two candidates had polled more votes than the quota and were therefore elected. SNP leader John Mason polled 3,199 votes, over half as many votes again as the quota (2,076 votes), while his running mate David McDonald only had 250. Labour councillor Jim Coleman also comfortably cleared the quota. The second count therefore distributed Mason’s quota.

Baillieston ward: John Mason’s surplus



Mason’s transferred votes boosted McDonald into contention for the second seat. The majority (59 per cent) of Mason’s supporters gave their second preference to McDonald, although some ‘leaked’ to rival parties, particularly Labour. These may have been personal supporters of Mason, a well-known councillor, or people who split their ticket for other reasons. Some of the votes for other candidates,

particularly the minor parties, may have transferred again later in the count back to McDonald. Only 16% of votes were non-transferable. Instead of piling up uselessly for Mason, his surplus votes were crucial for the rest of the election. They ensured that his colleague was elected. SNP supporters did not have to vote tactically or play guessing games about how much individual support each candidate had in order to make sure that both were elected.

In the ERS modelling of the 2003 elections, we identified Govan as a ward where the SNP had a relatively high share of the vote and could elect two candidates even on the 2003 vote share. Despite this, they only nominated one candidate, Allison Hunter. Hunter was duly elected on the first count. Her 2,694 votes amounted to 1.4 quotas (28.2 per cent of the vote).

Labour had 48.3 per cent of the vote, distributed evenly between three candidates (each of whom worked a different geographical area within Govan) and did not elect anyone at the first count. None of the other parties polled particularly well and as votes transferred they were progressively eliminated, leaving Labour's three candidates to be elected all at once on the last count, stage 9.

Hunter's big surplus did not have an SNP candidate to go to, and as a result there was a high level of non-transferred votes (36 per cent) – many of whom would be SNP loyalists unwilling to lend any form of support to another party. Of the SNP transfers, 151 votes ended up with the Labour candidates although the largest individual packet went to the candidate of Solidarity (107.6 votes).

The SNP almost certainly missed out on a second seat in Govan – their caution, and the even spread of Labour's votes between the three candidates, produced an extra Labour seat. A similar story can be told about other wards such as Canal and Southside Central, and possibly others such as Maryhill/ Kelvin, Craigton, Greater Pollok and North East.

In North Lanarkshire there were similar cases, including Airdrie South and Motherwell South & Ravenscraig where single SNP candidates polled nearly twice as many votes than they needed to be elected.

As well as missing opportunities in 2007, under-nomination means that other parties can claim seats, like the Greens in Canal and Southside Central wards in Glasgow, Labour in Govan and Lib Dems and Conservatives elsewhere. These candidates will be incumbent councillors in four years' time with all the advantages that produces. The incumbent SNP councillors in these wards may well not be keen to see extra SNP candidates appearing on the ballot. The SNP in particular will find it hard to make further gains in four years' time.

**Parties should not be afraid of an ambitious but calculated candidate strategy.**

# Conclusions

## Conclusions

This report has described the political changes that have taken place in Scottish local government as a result of changing to the Single Transferable Vote (STV). We have tried to distinguish these from changes that are a result of political trends and people's opinions, in order to properly assess the impact of a voting system on our government.

### Proportionality and Control

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 some cases, coalitions, and in other cases, looser understandings between political groups or minority administrations with more or less formal support from those outwith the ruling group.

The Labour Party and Independent groups are the only ones to have majority control on any council. Their majorities have far greater legitimacy now than they ever did under the old first past the post system, being based on proportional results that reflect votes cast. The minorities are also noteworthy – in some cases, political groups have emerged where previously a party had no representation at all. Where there was a significant body of voters choosing a party, that party received representation in the council chamber. STV produced councils that reflected the choices made by local voters.

### Choice for Voters

Competition for votes increased. In contrast to previous elections, no councillor in Scotland was elected unopposed; every councillor has the satisfaction of knowing that they had to compete for their mandate and emerge as a preferred choice. Voters across Scotland were able to choose between a far greater range of candidates on their ballot paper than in previous elections, including independents and parties which had never before put up candidates in their area, as well as familiar faces and usual suspects. STV is a system which gives parties an incentive to fight every election and a candidate to fight for every vote. Therefore every voter, rightly, becomes a far more valued part of the electoral process.

Women were elected in greater proportions than the number of women candidates would have suggested, showing that with STV, the most important thing that can happen to increase women's representation is that women are allowed onto the ballot paper. The political parties need to note that unless women are selected, they can not be elected. A voting system in itself is not

going to either hinder or help much in broadening the demographic range of our councillors unless that simple fact is acted upon.

### **Casting Valid Votes**

At an average of 2% across Scotland, the rate of ballot paper spoilage is comparable with STV elections elsewhere. Indeed, it is slightly better than the last local government elections in Northern Ireland, another occasion on which voters were asked to use two systems on one day, marking an 'X' for one but numbers to choose their councillors.

The contrast between voters' successful use of STV on its first outing, with the problems that surrounded the Scottish parliament election are inescapable. While the concept of having 'two votes' for the Scottish Parliament elections has been interpreted differently in different elections since 1999, the use of preferences is intuitive.

Preference voting uses a concept that ties in with processes that people use in their daily lives – when the shop does not have your preferred type of bread, for example, you pick the next best thing, and if that too is unavailable, the next. So, confronted in the ballot box with the requirement to rank candidates in preference order, voters were unfazed. Indeed, they seized the opportunity – the figures we have available indicate that around three quarters of voters expressed more than one preference. This is a very good rate for the first election in which voters had the opportunity to do so.

STV is a voter-centred system and our campaign for its introduction was about giving real power and representation to Scotland's voters that was simply not there with the old first past the post system. The use of that power both in and between elections is something that will develop over the years, as voters and councillors respond to the politics of STV. However, we can already conclude that voters can use STV, that voters use the opportunities STV offers to express several preferences, and that STV produces fair, broadly proportional results.

That is as much as is usually asked of any electoral system, and we would submit, therefore, that STV fits the bill beyond local government in Scotland. In particular, in light of the problems that there were with the Scottish Parliament elections, we would urge that STV is introduced for future elections to the Scottish Parliament, to give voters maximum choice, fair representation and a system they can and want to use.