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THE DISTRICT COUNCIL ELECTIONS OF MAY 1977

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In the relatively short tim that has elapsed since the fundamental reform of the structure of local government in Britain[1] there has been a marked increase in the interest shown in local elections by national politicians, newspapers and television, political commentators, political scientists and, even the voters. This increased interest is, to a large extent, a consequence of the reaction of the major political parties to the new structure. The creation of new authorities frequently involved the combination of urban with rural areas and this meant that partisan local politics — long the rule in urban local authorities — spread more widely into areas where previously they had been non-partisan. This extension of party competition has meant that local elections have taken on the appearance of mini general elections and they have, accordingly, attracted more attention.

For the press and the politicians local elections are important in two main ways· Firstly, they do determine who is to control the local authorities and, since the latter administer a variety of important services, employ large numbers of people, and raise and spend a great deal of money, this is clearly important, especially if it is thought that a controlling party can significantly affect the policy of a local authority. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly for national politicians, local election results are now widely employed as indicators of the current popularity of the national parties amongst the electorate. It is evident that voting in local elections is not, on the whole, a product of reactions to purely local issues and candidates. Rather it reflects the electorate's feelings about the national

government, national issues, events and personalities. For that reason, local election results can be regarded, with necessary caution, as mid-term tests of the state of opinion on the performance of governments. They have an advantage over opinion polls in that they involve more people and measure actual votes rather than hypothetical voting intentions. Moreover, they reflect variations in opinion in different parts of the country. In the absence of parliamentary by-elections, and in view of the fluidity of the political situation, it has been difficult to assess the mood of the Scottish electorate. Other reliable indicators of the levels of party support have been eagerly sought. In the weeks before this year's district electious the press were anxious to see if there was any electoral reaction to the government's failure, in February, to get its Devolution Bill through the House of Commons. If so, who would benefit by it? There was also interest in the Liberals' performance in the first election since the beginning of their pact with the government. Most of all attention was focused on the S.N.P. Would they succeed, as they had done in 1967 - 8, in making sweeping gains?

Local election results have also attracted the attention of political scientists. For those interested in parties, electoral systems and voting behaviour, local elections provide a massive, and as yet largely untapped, accumulation of data. The regularity with which local elections are held, the large number, small size and diversity of the electoral units, and the variety of patterns of party competition all help to make local election results a potentially rich source of data for developing and testing hypotheses relating to parties and voting behaviour.

This chapter reflects these different levels of interest.. We are concerned here with elections to the 53 district councils in Scotland.[2] The first elections to these authorities, which constitute the lower tier of local government in Scotland, were held in 1974. Councillors elected then, retired in 1977 when the second round of elections took place. Parts II, III and IV consist of an analysis of patterns of participation and of support for the parties, and in Part V we try to formulate some general notions about the effects of partisanship in local politics and the nature of the party systems found in Scottish local authorities.

II

For the purpose of analysis, and on the basis of the first set of elections, we have divided the Scottish districts into two

categories, partisan and non-partisan. It is clear that while party competition has been extended and is the main feature of the elections in most districts, in others local politics remain predominantly, indeed overwhelmingly, non-partisan. Nineteen districts can be allocated clearly to the non-partisan category. This group comprises all eight districts in the Highland Region and all four in Dumfries and Galloway; Moray, Banff and Buchan, and Kincardine and Deeside in Grampian; Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale, and Roxburgh in the Borders; and Argyll and Bute in Strathclyde. These districts together contain about 13% of the Scottish electorate. The first elections in them were dominated by Independents who comprised 81% of the candidates, took 81% of the votes and gained 89% of the seats. The remaining 34 districts are allocated to the partisan category. This is not to say that in all of them party competition is equally developed. In a few, such as Gordon, Angus and North-East Fife, there remains a strong Independent tradition but there are enough party candidatures to justify their description as 'partisan'.

In what follows we treat these categories of district separately, and, since it is upon the partisan districts that most attention is centred, these will be dealt with at rather greater length than the non-partisan districts.

III

PARTISAN DISTRICTS

(i) *Participation in Elections*

Elections have, as one of their functions, the provision of a means whereby citizens can participate in politics by choosing rulers or representatives and/or by standing for elective positions. Local elections have in the past been notorious, however, for a low level of participation on the part of the electorate. But if electors are to participate as electors, groups or individuals must offer themselves for election, and so in this brief analysis we will look first at candidatures and then at the turnout of electors·

Table 1 shows the number of party and independent candidates in the 816 wards of partisan districts, and the number who were unopposed, in the 1974 and 1977 elections.

TABLE 1

CANDIDATES IN PARTISAN DISTRICTS IN 1974 AND 1977

	1974		1977	
	Number	Of Whom Unopposed	Number	Of Whom Unopposed
Con.	518	21	531	39
Lab.	709	66	686	36
Lib	144	—	129	1
SNP	254	—	432	3
Comm	127	—	90	—
Ind	206	11	129	14
Others	66	—	94	—
Total	2024	98	2091	93

Although our evidence for the years before 1974 is incomplete, it is clear that the first elections for the new districts witnessed a major increase in party candidatures. In our view this in itself contributed to a dramatic decline in the number of unopposed returns. In the 1972 burgh elections 38% of the seats in Scotland were uncontested, but in 1974 only 12% of those in partisan districts were taken without a contest. This level was maintained in 1977 when 11.4% of the seats went uncontested.

Parties, unlike Independent candidates, have an incentive to contest seats that seem to be hopeless for them. By forcing an election they can keep their flag flying in weak areas, test their levels of support for parliamentary purposes, and also tie down their opponents' resources to some extent. There will, of course, be cases in which parties are unable to find suitable candidates, feel that even a token fight is not worth the effort, have no organisation on the ground, or consciously decide to concentrate their resources in more promising wards. For these sorts of reasons there will continue to be some unopposed returns.

The weakness of the Conservative Party in parts of Kirkcaldy, East Lothian, Monklands, Motherwell, and Cumnock and Doon Valley probably accounts for the concentration of unopposed Labour returns in these districts (35 in 1974, 19 in 1977) while Labour weakness may help explain the uncontested Conservative and Independent victories in Gordon, Angus, Perth and

Kinross, North-East Fife, Berwickshire, Eastwood and parts of Kyle and Carrick (25 in 1974, 44 in 1977). On the other hand, the pattern of no contests in Aberdeen, where Labour took nine seats unopposed in 1974 and five in 1977, suggests conscious policy on the part of the other major parties locally.

It is worth noting, however, that decisions about which wards to leave uncontested seem, on the whole, to be quite sensible. Of the 98 wards which were uncontested in 1974, 30 were again left with only one candidate in 1977. Of the 68 others, 53 were retained after a contest by the party which had previously held them and 15 seats changed hands in 1977. Independents lost two and Labour 13, of which eight were taken by the SNP, one by the Conservatives, one by an Independent, two by the breakaway Scottish Labour Party and one by an Independent Labour candidate. In retrospect, selective challenges by Conservatives on unopposed Independents and by SNP on Labour, might have paid further dividends.

Looking at the number of candidates put forward by the parties in the two elections, three features of the figures given in Table 1 merit comment. First there is the increase in the number of Conservative candidates. The increase is not great, but the fact that it has taken place is significant. For a long time the Conservative Party in Scotland played no part in local politics, being content to leave the task of opposing the Labour Party to local groups of "Moderates", "Progressives", "Ratepayers", Independents and so on. Clearly, however, the Conservatives are now taking local elections more seriously and gradually entering the local political arena as a party.

The decline of Independent candidates is also noteworthy. This is partly due to former Independents now aligning themselves with the Conservatives and very occasionally with other parties, and partly because some Independent councillors in the old system of local government tried to win seats against party opposition in 1974, failed, and did not stand again. Whatever the reason, though, it seems that our categorisation of these districts as "partisan" on the basis of the 1974 results was justified in 1977. In 1974 Independents constituted 10.2% of all candidates; in 1977 this fell to 6.2%. The 1977 elections in these districts were even more party-dominated than they had been in 1974.

The most striking feature of Table 1 is, however, the marked rise in the number of SNP candidates. In 1974 the SNP con

tested less than one-third of the wards concerned, whereas in 1977 they contested more than half. The SNP made a major effort to secure control of a number of districts and in the run-up to the elections there was much talk of their attack on Labour's "industrial heartland" in the West of Scotland. Like the other major parties, the SNP no doubt consider control of district councils as desirable in itself, but they also regard local election success as a useful springboard towards their major aim, the winning of Scottish seats in a General Election. In terms of numbers the increased SNP candidates were most noticeable in Edinburgh (up by 25), Glasgow (up by 20), Renfrew, and Cunninghame (both up by 17). Somewhat surprisingly they failed to make any substantial challenge in Aberdeen where they had only four candidates, and in Dundee they had none.

We mentioned in our introduction that "even" electors seemed more interested in local elections since reorganisation. One piece of evidence in support of this is that turnout in contested divisions in partisan districts in 1974, at 51.4%, was markedly greater than local turnout had been under the old system. In the years 1970-72 turnout had averaged only 43.0%. In 1977 there was a drop compared with 1974, but turnout remained relatively high at 48.3%. It may be that the relative infrequency with which local elections now come round helps explain the increased participation of the electorate but we would be more inclined to stress the effect of the greater stimulus to vote provided by the existence of overt party competition. This is not, unfortunately, a point which we have the space to develop here.

As in 1974, there was considerable variation in turnout across districts, ranging from 62.4% in Stirling to 36.2% in Aberdeen. At ward level, variations in turnout were even greater, and these differences provide considerable scope for analysis. Does turnout vary with the marginality of the ward, and its social composition? What are the effects on turnout of "interventions" and "withdrawals" by candidates of the various parties? We do not have the space to explore these problems here. Rather we must confine ourselves to a brief discussion of turnout at district level.

Turnout, as we have seen, declined overall from 51.4% in 1974 to 48.3% in 1977 and it declined in all but 6 of the 34 districts. The exceptions were the rather unusual case of Berwickshire where there were only 5 contested wards in 1974 and 4 in

1977 (an increase of 3.6%) and Stirling, Motherwell, Kirmarnock and Loudon, East Kilbride and Midlothian (increases of 4.6% 3.6%, 1.1%, 0.1% and 0.1% respectively). On the other hand the decline in turnout was unusually marked in Gordon (—11.7%), East Lothian (—11.4%), Kyle and Carrick (—8.0%), Perth and Kinross (—7.8%), Falkirk (—7.8%) and Aberdeen (—7.1%).

We attempted to account for these variations in the way turnout changes by relating them to changes in the numbers of candidates put forward by the parties but found no significant relationship. Similarly there are only weak correlations between changes in turnout and changes in the level of support for the main parties. The correlation between the change in the Conservative share of the vote and the change in turnout was .445 indicating that the Conservatives did best where turnout dropped least. The correlation with changes in Labour share of the vote was, perhaps surprisingly, negative (—.337) indicating that Labour lost most where turnout dropped least. (The correlation coefficient for changes in the SNP vote is not statistically significant.). The pattern of turnout across districts in the two elections was very similar. In both 1974 and 1977 turnout was higher in Strathclyde and the Central Region than in the rest of Scotland; in both years turnout was somewhat lower in the four cities than in the country as a whole and turnout tended to be slightly higher in districts in which the Conservatives or the SNP were the largest party in terms of seats won than in those where Labour won most seats.

The similarity of the turnout pattern in the two elections is best illustrated by the fact that there was a correlation of 0.784 between district turnouts in 1974 and 1977. If we use the regression equation upon which this figure is based to "predict" the 1977 turnout for each district on the basis of its 1974 turnout, and compare these "predictions" with the actual turnout, some interesting patterns emerge. Districts in Grampian, Tayside and Lothian tended to have turnouts lower than predicted. The main residuals (actual minus predicted turnout) for districts in these regions were —6.2, —2.6, and —2.0. On the other hand, districts in Strathclyde tended to have turnouts higher than predicted (mean residual +1.0). This suggests that the variations in turnout change were largely regional and may have been due to a regional factor such as the state of the weather on polling day.

(ii) The Distribution of Support for the Parties

Participation in elections is, perhaps, largely a matter of academic interest. For politicians, observers and the public what matters most is who win seats, and trends in party support. Table 2 shows the shares of the vote received and the number of seats won by each of the major political groupings in the Scottish District Elections in 1974 and 1977.

TABLE 2

PARTY SUPPORT IN PARTISAN DISTRICTS IN 1974 AND 1977

	Votes		Seats	
	1974	1977	1974	1977
	%	%	N	N
Con	28.8	29.0	230	269
Lab	41.4	33.6	417	287
Lib	5.4	4.2	15	28
SNP	13.4	25.4	56	156
Comm	1.0	0.8	—	2
Ind	7.5	4.4	82	54
Others	2.4	2.7	15	20
	99.9	100.1	815	816

Before we discuss the trends in support for the main parties it is worth pointing out again the increasingly partisan character of elections in these districts. Given the decline in Independent candidates, the diminished share of the votes received by Independents is not surprising. More striking is the extent to which they also lost seats — a drop of 28 to only 6.6% of the total in these districts.

The main feature of the 1977 elections in partisan districts was, however, the turnover in seats among the major parties with the SNP making a net gain of 100, the Conservatives 39 and the Liberals 13, and Labour losing 130 net. Despite this, Labour remain the largest party in terms of both seats and votes in these districts of Scotland.

The turnover of seats did, however, have major consequences in terms of party control of the 34 district councils. After the 1974 election, Labour had clear control of 17 districts, the Conservatives five and the SNP one, with no party having overall control in the remaining 11 districts. The position now is that

in only 18 districts is there a party with an overall majority. The Conservatives control eight (Angus, Bearsden and Milngavie, Berwickshire, Eastwood, Edinburgh, North-East Fife, Kyle and Carrick, and Perth and Kinross), the SNP four (Clackmannan, Cumbernauld and Kilsyth, East Kilbride, and Falkirk). the Liberals one (Inverclyde) and Labour a mere five (Cumnock and Doon Valley, Dunfermline, East Lothian, Monklands, and Motherwell). In some of the remaining districts it is possible that one or other of the parties will find sympathetic allies to enable them to have a majority, while in others the divided nature of the opposition will enable the largest party to have virtual control.

It is noteworthy that Labour in Scotland now control only mining and heavily-industrialised strongholds, having lost formerly solid Labour towns such as Kilmarnock and Clydebank, and that they do not hold power in any of the four cities.

Clearly in the 1977 elections there was a considerable movement amongst the voters away from Labour and towards the SNP and, to a lesser extent, towards the Conservatives. If "swing" is calculated on the basis of the figures shown in Table 2 then between 1974 and 1977 there was a swing of 4% from Labour to the Conservatives and of 10% from Labour to the SNP. Swing is, however, a measure that is most appropriate to a clear two-party contest. In Scotland as a whole there is obviously three-party competition, and a clearer measure of changes in party support is the increase or decrease in votes received by each party as a percentage of the votes each received in the previous election. This measure is less parsimonious than swing but has some advantages in that it reflects changes in turnout and does not measure a party's performance relative to other parties. It simply indicates the extent of change in the votes a party receives no matter the source of additional votes or the destination of lost votes.

In these terms, the change in the SNP vote between 1974 and 1977 was +83.5% as compared with a slight decline in the Conservative vote (—2.4%) and a major drop in Labour support (—21.3%). (The Liberals, as can be seen from Table 2 were reduced to near insignificance in terms of popular support in spite of their winning more seats, and will not be discussed at any length here). Given their dismal showing in the General Elections of 1974 and the way in which some observers had practically written them off in Scotland, the Conservative per-

formance was very creditable. The SNP yet again hit the headlines in Scotland with a major increase in votes though, as we shall see, this was in part simply a consequence of the increased number of candidates they put forward.

The setback suffered by Labour was not altogether unexpected. The 1974 elections were held at a good time for them. The Labour Government which had been elected in February 1974 was still enjoying its "honeymoon" with the electorate. The Gallup poll results for April 1974 showed that Labour nationally had a lead of 16% in popular support over the Conservatives and, so far, this has been the peak of the present government's popularity. In the run up to 1977 elections, however, Labour was much less popular nationally and the Gallup poll for April showed a state of opinion almost exactly the reverse of 1974 with the Conservatives having a lead of 15.5%. In Scotland, after the General Election of October 1974 when the SNP took over from the Conservatives as the second largest party in Scotland in terms of votes, opinion polls regularly showed the three parties running about equal, though there were minor fluctuations from time to time. The government's unpopularity was reflected in a series of parliamentary by-elections in which Labour support plummeted. None of these was in Scotland, but here the move away from Labour was evidenced in a series of local government by-elections in some of which Labour lost spectacularly to the SNP. The extent of this "mid-term" swing can be seen if we compare the results of the by-elections with the results in the same wards in 1974 and 1977. There were 37 by-elections in which such comparisons are possible (i.e. which were contested on all three occasions and in which party candidates stood) and the share of votes obtained by the four main parties when the results in these wards are aggregated is shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3

RESULTS OF DISTRICT BY-ELECTIONS (37 WARDS): PARTISAN DISTRICTS IN 1974 AND 1977

	1974	By-elections	1977
	%	%	%
Con	35.5	32.0	39.7
Lab	38.8	25.9	27.8
Lib	10.3	9.7	4.5
SNP	15.4	32.4	28.0

Rather like parliamentary by-elections, local by-elections generally show a pronounced swing against the government and then something of a recovery when the next 'general election' comes round. The process is not nearly so marked, of course, but there was a small recovery by Labour in these wards in 1977 as compared with their by-election performance and a slight drop in the SNP vote — though it was still well above the 1974 level.

In analysing trends in party support great care has to be taken. There is a tendency for observers to view the distribution of votes amongst the parties as an expression of popular opinion as if every elector were offered the choice of voting for each of the competing parties. But of course this is not the case. The parties put forward varying numbers of candidates and this is bound to affect their shares of the votes. Again, a party's candidate can only obtain votes if he is opposed, and so the patterns of unopposed returns must be borne in mind.

These problems make it difficult to be precise about the real extent of the SNP's advance. We have seen that the SNP vote rose by 83.5% but this is clearly associated with the increase in SNP candidates. The most spectacular increases in the SNP vote came in districts where there were big rises in the numbers of SNP candidates. Thus if we separate out the 11 districts where the SNP fought half or more of the seats in 1974 and where consequently there was less scope for increasing votes simply by putting forward more candidates, the change in SNP votes was +32.1%. In the other 23 districts, candidates increased from 60 to 207 and votes by 322.4%.

We can attempt to be more specific about the effects of increased SNP candidatures by correlating the change in the percentage of candidates who stood for the SNP in each district with the change in the share of the votes obtained by the SNP. This yields a correlation coefficient of .877 which means that about three-quarters of the variation in the changes in the SNP's share of the vote is accounted for simply by variations in the number of candidates put forward ($r^2 = .769$).

A more realistic indication of trends in party support can be made by looking at wards in which the choice of major party candidates was the same in both 1974 and 1977. Ignoring all candidates other than Conservative, Labour and SNP three kinds of contest can be considered, viz. Conservative v Labour

v SNP; Conservative v Labour; and Labour v SNP. These are considered in Tables 4 - 6.

TABLE 4

PARTISAN DISTRICTS

SHARE OF VOTES IN WARDS CONTESTED BY CON, LAB AND SNP IN 1974 AND 1977 (81)

	Share of Votes		Change in Votes
	1974	1977	
	%	%	%
Con	31.9	34.6	+ 7.1
Lab	40.7	31.1	−24.5
SNP	27.4	34.3	+23.9

In these wards contested by all three parties it is clear (Table 4) that Labour was predominant in 1974 but lost a quarter of their votes in 1977 to end in third place slightly behind the other two parties. The increase in SNP support, by 23.9% is a more realistic assessment of the movement in their favour since favour than the overall figure of over 80% given above.

TABLE 5

PARTISAN DISTRICTS

SHARE OF VOTES IN WARDS CONTESTED BY LAB AND CON IN 1974 AND 1977 (135)

	Share of Votes		Change in Votes
	1974	1977	
	%	%	%
Con	54.5	60.3	+ 1.7
Lab	45.5	39.7	−19.8

Where there was no SNP candidates on either occasion (Table 5) the movement away from Labour was rather less. Indeed the figures for share of vote show a swing of only 5.8% directly from Labour to Conservative which is really a rather good performance by Labour given the favourable circumstances of the 1974 elections and the current difficulties of the government.

Again we see in Labour *versus* SNP contests (Table 6) a relatively small swing (4.7% Labour to SNP) and relatively small changes in votes. This highlights the extent to which aggregate figures are distorted by different patterns of candidature.

TABLE 6

PARTISAN DISTRICTS

SHARE OF VOTES IN WARDS CONTESTED BY LAB AND SNP IN 1974 AND 1977 (80)

	Share of Votes		Change in Votes
	1974	1977	
	%	%	%
Lab	52.2	47.3	− 9.5
SNP	47.8	52.7	+10.3

The movements between the SNP, the Conservatives and Labour were similar whether the ward was previously held by the Conservatives or Labour. The figures in Table 7 show the pattern of change in Labour and Conservative seats separately.

TABLE 7

PARTISAN DISTRICTS

SHARE OF VOTES IN CON AND LAB HELD WARDS CONTESTED BY CON, LAB AND SNP IN 1974 AND 1977

	Conservative Wards (22)				Labour Wards (49)		
	Share of Votes		Change in Votes		Share of Votes		Change in Votes
	1974	1977			1974	1977	
	%	%	%		%	%	%
Con	53.7	56.9	+ 9.4	Con	23.2	24.5	− 0.2
Lab	23.3	16.8	−24.3	Lab	49.0	38.4	−26.0
SNP	23.0	27.1	+23.3	SNP	27.8	37.1	+26.2

The SNP advanced by about the same amount in both cases though there was a tendency for Labour to lose less heavily and the Conservatives to gain more in Conservative-held wards.

The problems associated with variations in the number of candidates put forward make it very difficult to undertake any very extensive analysis of trends in party support in the individual districts. It is clear, however, that the distribution of support across districts in 1977 was very similar to the pattern of 1974. In the case of the three main parties the correlations between the share of the vote they received in each district in 1974 and the share obtained in 1977 were strong. For the Conservatives the correlation coefficient was +.871, for Labour +.926 and for the SNP +.856. In other words, where each party did comparatively well last time it did so again; where

each lagged in 1974 it did comparatively poorly in 1977. Deviations between the share of the vote "predicted" for each party on the basis of its 1974 performance and the actual percentage received can be explained almost entirely in terms of changes in candidatures. Thus the four districts which "deviated" most strongly to the SNP were (in order) Cunninghame, Dumbarton, Kilmarnock, and Renfrew: the SNP contested only 11.6% of the seats in these in 1974 but 64.2% in 1977. On the other hand, the districts where the SNP did less well than would have been expected were Dundee (where they had no candidates in 1977), Dunfermline, Berwickshire and North-East Fife and here they actually decreased their candidatures from 16 in 1974 to 13 in 1977. Moreover all of these districts also appear as strongly "deviant" in terms of either the Labour or Conservative share of the vote.

IV

NON-PARTISAN DISTRICTS

As we noted at the outset, there are 19 Scottish Districts in which parties play relatively little or no part in local government. While political or general public interest in these may be slight it is important that they be given some consideration here in order that our review of the District Elections may be complete.

(i) Participation in the Elections

As before, we begin by looking at the number of candidates put forward and the incidence of uncontested elections (Table 8).

TABLE 8

CANDIDATES IN NON-PARTISAN DISTRICTS IN 1974 AND 1977

	1974		1977	
	Number	Of Whom Unopposed	Number	Of Whom Unopposed
Con	21	2	12	2
Lab	44	7	33	6
Lib	4	1	7	2
SNP	15	4	33	4
Ind	439	110	392	140
Others	14	—	3	—
Total	537	124	480	154

There was, generally, a decline in electoral competition in these districts. The total number of candidates dropped by over 10% and there was, in contrast to the partisan districts, a marked increase in unopposed returns. There was no contest in more than half the 301 wards. This lends support to our argument that party competition minimises uncontested elections. There was increase in the number of SNP candidates, but a decline in the number of Labour and Conservative candidates suggesting that these parties may have tested the water, as it were, in 1974 and got scalded.

Even where the electorate did have the opportunity to vote, their participation declined sharply as compared with 1974. Turnout then was 50.6% — which was little different from the turnout in partisan districts — but in 1977 it dropped to 42.5%, significantly lower than in partisan districts. Again we interpret this as evidence of the importance of political parties in sustaining interest and in mobilising the electorate.

(ii) The Distribution of Party Support

Table 9 shows the votes and seats gained in the two elections by the various parties.[5] Some inroads were made by

TABLE 9

PARTY SUPPORT IN NON-PARTISAN DISTRICTS IN 1974 AND 1977

	Votes		Seats	
	1974	1977	1974	1977
	%	%	N	N
Con	6.2	4.4	11	8
Lab	7.3	6.2	11	12
Lib	0.7	1.5	2	3
SNP	1.9	9.0	6	14
Ind	81.6	78.2	263	264
Others	2.3	0.6	2	—
Total	100.0	99.9	295	301

the SNP but again the overwhelming impression the data gives is of continuing Independent dominance of these districts. Only six of the districts are "purely" non-partisan in the sense that no party candidate stood in either 1974 or 1977 (these are Sutherland, Ross and Cromarty, Skye and Lochalsh, Badenoch and Strathspey, Stewartry, and Annandale and Eskdale). There are signs of limited party activity developing in others, most

notably Lochaber, Inverness, Moray and Nithsdale, but we would think that politics in these districts will continue to be of the non-political variety until the Conservative Party extends further its growing interest in Scottish local politics.

V

The part that should be played in local government by political parties is a subject that has been much debated. The debate arises from two conflicting views of how local authorities ought to be run, which we may term the "consensus" view and the "party government" view. The consensus approach assumes that local politics is basically a question of local affairs. Candidates should be supported on the basis of their personal qualities and characteristics and once elected should represent local communities, not a party viewpoint. This, we would suggest is the view of local government that prevails in our non-partisan districts. Clearly, however, it is a minority view restricted to rural and peripheral areas of Scotland. The party government view suggests that local issues are matters over which there is and should be overt partisan conflict. Candidates should stand as party representatives, not on their merits as individuals, and parties seek to control authorities in order to implement their own distinctive policies. By its proponents this system is seen as the best way of combining efficiency with responsible local government. The parties simplify and structure the choices presented to the voters, carry out on their behalf the task of making policy and regulating the work of local officials, and periodically may be removed or retained in office when they have to defend their record in elections.

This has long been the dominant conception in local politics in highly urbanised areas where the size of the population makes the non-partisan system, based as it is on electors' personal knowledge of the candidates, inappropriate. But the reform of local government removed local councils from numerous small burghs which had a non-partisan tradition and in the enlarged districts the party government view seems very quickly to have taken root. The party government model best describes 34 of the Scottish districts containing almost 90% of the Scottish electorate. This accounts for the rapid decline in votes and seats won by Independent candidates and we also suggested in our analysis that party competition helps to explain the infrequency of uncontested returns and the relatively high turnout in partisan

districts. One other consequence of the dominance of party politics at local level is that we now have a series of local party systems in Scottish Local Government. It is worth trying to describe these in a little detail.

There are two major problems in doing this. The first is that most categorisations of party systems use a series of elections —say four or five — as the basis for their analysis while we have experienced only two sets of district elections in Scotland. For that reason our descriptions must be tentative, though the fact that one of the elections favoured the Labour Party while the other favoured the other parties does give us more confidence. The second problem relates to Independents and assorted other candidates who describe themselves in a variety of ways. To overcome this we have treated Independents and "Others" each as a separate party for the purpose of our analysis.

Dr W. Rae[6] has suggested a number of variables which may be used to describe party systems. Perhaps the most interesting of these is his index of "fractionalisation". This measures the extent to which support is dispersed or concentrated among contesting parties and in doing so takes account both of the number of parties involved and the relative equality of their support. The index yields values between 0 and 1 (though these extreme values are never actually encountered in democratic societies since they indicate on the one hand that every elector chose the same party and on the other that all electors chose a different party). The lower the score the greater is the concentration, the higher the score the greater the fractionalisation. Thus a system in which there are two parties, one with 90% support and one with 10% has a score of .18; a two-party system where both have 50% have a score of .50 and a three-party system in which all three are equally supported scores .67.

Party systems and the extent of fractionalisation can be considered either at the level of voter support or in terms of seats won. We shall look at each of these in turn.

The mean of the index in vote fractionalisation in the partisan districts rose from .646 in 1974 to .670 in 1977. This is not surprising. Although the decline in Independent candidates would tend to decrease fractionalisation this was more than counter-balanced by the increased support for the SNP and, in some restricted areas, by the presence of the breakaway Scottish Labour Party.

Although the mean of the index of fractionalisation in 1977

suggests a perfect three-party system, there was in fact considerable variation in fractionalisation across districts. At one extreme the three districts with the lowest fractionalisation scores (Berwickshire, Eastwood, and North-East Fife) are overwhelmingly Conservative. The next four districts in ascending order (Dundee, Clackmannan, Cumbernauld, West Lothian) seems to approximate to a two-party system. At the other extreme four districts have exceptional dispersion of support amongst the various parties (Lanark, Dumbarton, Cunninghame and Cumnock and Doon Valley). All districts in between seem to have some form of three-party system at the level of voter support.

Fractionalisation in terms of seats is perhaps a more accurate description of local party systems since, unlike vote fractionalisation, it takes into account uncontested elections. On the other hand, local authorities usually have many fewer seats than a national legislature and in some cases a switch of only a few seats has a major impact on the proportion of seats each party holds. Like vote fractionalisation, however, the index of seat fractionalisation showed an increase between 1974 and 1977, from a mean of 517 to a mean of .562. It is worth noting that the figure for seat fractionalisation is lower in both years, confirming Rae's law that electoral systems — i.e. means of converting votes into seats — tend to defractionalise party systems.

There was, again, considerable variation about the 1977 mean, the lowest scores being found in Berwickshire, Eastwood, North-East Fife, Cumbernauld and Kilsyth, East Kilbride, Kyle and Carrick and Clackmannan and suggesting one-party dominance in these districts. The highest scores were in Dumbarton, Lanark, Renfrew and Kirkcaldy, in all of which seats were divided among four or more parties.

The index of fractionalisation is a useful descriptive tool but in order to make a more readily understandable classification of party systems it is worthwhile combining it with a classification scheme suggested by Sartori.[9] He suggests that there are four categories: (i) A predominant party system in which, over time, one party consistently obtains 50% of the seats or more; (ii) A two-party system in which both are within reachable distance of 50% of the seats; (iii) A system of 'limited fragmentation', where there are more than two relevant parties. This can either be balanced multi-partyism where the parties are about equal or unbalanced, in the sense that one or two of the parties may be considerably stronger that the others; (iv) A system of 'extreme fragmentation' involving six or more relevant parties.

In these terms the following may be suggested as a preliminary categorisation of the local party system in Scotland.

1. *Predominant Party Systems*

Conservative	*Labour*	*SNP*
Berwickshire	Motherwell	Cumbernauld and Kilsyth
Eastwood	Dunfermline	Clackmannan
North-East Fife	Monklands	
Kyle and Carrick	Cumnock and Doon Valley	
Perth and Kinross	East Lothian	
Bearsden and Milngavie	Hamilton	

2. *Balanced Two-Party Systems*

Conservative v Labour	*Labour v SNP*
Dundee	West Lothian
Edinburgh	Falkirk
	Clydebank

3a. *Balanced Three-Party Systems*

Conservative v Labour v SNP
Renfrew
Strathkelvin
Glasgow
Cunninghame
Stirling

3b. *Unbalanced Three-Party Systems*

(The dominant party or parties is indicated in brackets in each case)

Conservative v Labour v Liberal
Aberdeen (Con & Lab)
Inverclyde (Lab & Lib

Conservative v Labour v SNP
Midlothian (Lab & SNP)
Kilmarnock & Loudoun (Con & Lab)

4. We have no system corresponding to Sartori's category of 'extreme fragmentation'. In order to describe three districts, however, we might invent a new category:

'Considerable Fragmentation'
Kirkcaldy (Lab dominant)
Dumbarton
Lanark

Two districts have not been included in any category. These are Gordon where Independents are a predominant 'party' and Angus which is an unbalanced 'three-party' system with the Conservatives and Independents dominant and Labour in a minority position.

On the basis of this analysis it seems to us that it is misleading to talk of 'the party system in Scottish Local Government'. Rather there are a variety of local party systems in Scotland. Of the 32 districts we have classified, 14 are best considered as predominant party systems. Only five are balanced two-party systems and, somewhat surprisingly given the impression that aggregate figures for the whole of Scotland convey, only five can be considered as evenly balanced three-party systems. The remaining districts have party systems that are unbalanced or more fragmented in one way or another. This is a useful reminder about the dangers of over-simplified interpretations of aggregated results and also serves to stress how the results of opinion polls covering Scotland as a whole have to be considered in the light of a party situation which varies from place to place.

How are we to account for the variety of party systems which we have suggested exists at local level in Scotland? Political sociologists would expect that local party systems would be a product of varying social and economic structures, and there is some evidence that this is the case. In a recent article R. Webber and J. Craig[8] published the results of a cluster analysis of all first-tier local authorities in Britain. They utilised a range of 40 variables concerned with such matters as demographic structure, housing, socio-economic status and industry. Based on this the authors defined six 'families' of local authorities which in turn were sub-divided into 30 smaller clusters. Twenty Scottish districts fell into one cluster. Fifteen of these were districts we have classed as non-partisan; three we have described as 'predominant Conservative' systems (Perth and Kinross, North-East Fife and Berwickshire) while in the other two (Gordon and Angus) —which we have taken as partisan — the prominence of Independents prevents any meaningful description of the party system.

Clearly, then, there is a social and economic substructure which tends to produce non-partisan local politics or else Conservative predominance. The latter is also typical of another cluster described as 'older, high-status and residential' for only

Bearsden and Milngavie and Eastwood of the Scottish districts fall into this group.

Thereafter the connections between the clusters found by Webber and Craig and the categorisations of party systems we have made become rather more tenuous. The 'family' of authorities described in shorthand form as 'having much local authority housing' brings together 21 Scottish districts and it would seem that these constitute the main battle-ground between Labour and the SNP. In this group are four of the five predominantly Labour systems, both predominantly SNP systems and all three cases of two-party competition between Labour and the SNP. Of the three-party systems found in this group four are balanced, three involve Labour or SNP or both dominating and only one Conservative-Labour dominance. By contrast a separate 'family'. described briefly as 'service centres' contains only one district with a strong SNP presence (Stirling). Of the remainder one is predominantly Labour (East Lothian), one predominantly Conservative (Kyle and Carrick) and three others involve mainly Conservative *versus* Labour competition (Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh). Interestingly this cluster also contains the non-partisan districts of Inverness and Nithsdale and this may suggest that party politics may gradually develop in these areas.

There are, then, some limited grounds for believing that the party systems found reflect local social and economic structures, though clearly we have been able to make only the most sketchy analysis of this.

In this paper we have analysed some aspects of the political situation in Scottish Local Government in the years 1974-77. We have seen that in this relatively short time there have been a number of important developments. The next major test of Scottish opinion — in the absence of a General Election — will be the elections for the nine Regional and three Island Area Councils to be held in 1978, but given the current fluidity of opinion in Scotland it would be unwise to make predictions about these elections a year in advance.

REFERENCE

[1] Full results will be published in November 1977 in *The Scottish District Elections 1977, Results and Statistics* by J. M. Bochel and D. T. Denver, University of Dundee, Department of Political Science.