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THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF ELECTORAL BEHAVIOUR¹

Marie Skutilová*

ABSTRACT

The rise of the decentralisation or devolution reforms in Europe in the past decades brought scholars' attention to the voting behaviour in multi-level electoral systems. Some types of elections, such as local or regional, might be considered less important for voters than national ones. However, in some regions, the importance of the sub-state level of governance is rising, which might lead voters to change their perception of the regional elections. Since the beginning of the devolution in the UK, the Scottish parliament has become one of the most powerful regional parliaments in Europe. The study reviewed the main differences in electoral behaviour between general and regional elections in Scotland. The analysis used four aspects of the theoretical model of the second-order election. It focused on the turnout in both elections, the success of small and regional parties, the change of support for government and opposition parties and the main campaign topics. The results showed that the Scottish electoral behaviour went through a significant transformation at regional and state-wide level in the past two decades. The different electoral behaviour in regional elections was significantly influenced by the voting system that helped regional nationalist parties increase their support and become the main political force in the region that determines electoral competition. The transformation of electoral behaviour in the Scottish parliamentary election continued to the state-wide level. It determined that the regional elections, in the case of Scotland, cannot be perceived as less important and subordinated to the general elections.

Key words: Electoral Behaviour, Regional Elections, General Elections, Multi-Level Voting, Devolution, Scotland

Introduction

Many European states went through decentralisation or devolution reforms over the past decades. The reforms either created new regional administrations,

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which are being elected (e.g., the United Kingdom 1999, the Czech Republic 2000, Denmark 2005) or introduced a popular vote in the already established region (e.g., Greece 1994). Therefore, the number of sub-state elections has increased significantly. The United Kingdom has quickly become a widely popular case for multi-level electoral research. The devolved regional institutions in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland with a different set of powers at the beginning and throughout the history of the devolution opened a diverse ground for comparative research of the multi-level electoral system. Different scope of decision-making powers was adopted in each region, which might significantly impact electoral behaviour. Since the first Scottish Parliament election in 1999, the legislature has changed significantly: it gained many new powers, making it one of Europe's most powerful regional parliaments. Some academic scholars suggest that regional and local elections might be perceived as less important since there is *less at stake* than in the national elections with direct influence on the government (Reif and Schmitt, 1980). Hence, regional elections are perceived by voters differently since the institutions have only limited powers. However, regional electoral behaviour might also be influenced by other factors such as long-term or short-term circumstances, different electoral or party systems, social cleavages, or specific historical events impacting regional politics and society.

The relationship between different types of elections has received, as a topic, significant scholarly attention in the past decades. Scholars have provided many possible explanations for the variance in electoral behaviour. The research that is trying to explain different voting patterns in presidential and mid-term elections brought several continuously developed, tested and rejected theories. Early theories were based on the research of the US elections, focusing on the electoral behaviour difference between presidential and off-year/midterm elections (see Campbell, 1960; Tuftes, 1975; Kernell, 1977; Fiorina et al., 2003). Among the most influential approaches in the European environment are considered first-order and second-order elections, as introduced by **Karlheinz Reif** and **Hermann Schmitt** in 1980. In their article *Nine Second-Order National Elections - A Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of European Election Results*, they analyse the first elections to the European Parliament in nine states – Belgium, Denmark, Germany, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, and the United Kingdom.

Based on the analysis of the 1979 elections, they differentiate between the first and second-order elections. The first category includes national parliamentary and presidential elections; the second-order category comprises

elections to the European Parliament, municipal elections, by-elections, or elections to regional institutions. The authors introduced and analysed six main dimensions of second-order elections:

- (1) *The less-at-stake dimension* emphasises that there is no direct impact on the national/central government in the second-order elections. Hence the electorate might consider the regional election less important than the national election. This aspect leads to a lower turnout and higher support for smaller and new parties. Moreover, the popularity of national government parties fluctuates in accordance with the electoral cycle. For a short period following the elections, the support increases; after that, the governmental party/parties experience a decline and reach the minimum point about the midterm of the period. Prior to the election, the popularity increases again. On the contrary, with the same logic, the support for opposition parties increases and declines. In case the regional elections are held close to the midterm of the national cycle, it leads to higher support for the opposition parties and smaller parties as dissatisfied voters of governmental parties would express their disapproval with policies to pressure the government.
- (2) *The specific-arena dimension* considers various political and institutional backgrounds primarily reflecting differences in the policy areas, platforms, political parties competing in elections, et cetera.
- (3) *The institutional-procedural dimension* reflects the distinctive characteristic of electoral procedures in a national and regional political environment, for instance, the electoral system or age restrictions in elections.
- (4) *The campaign dimension* stresses that the campaign is more important for second-order elections since the voters' attention is drawn to other issues and events. However, this is not the case in the national election, where all voter and media attention is focused on the main political event.
- (5) *The main-arena political change dimension* takes into account political or economic development that could have a significant impact on the character of the elections.
- (6) *The social and cultural change dimension* deals with changes in the social structure or cultural environment. Political parties must reflect on those changes and adapt to them to maintain or increase their support in elections.

The analysis of **Reif** and **Schmitt** confirmed that those elections are perceived as less important than national elections and hence can be considered second-order elections. Voters believe that in those types of elections, less is at stake, which leads to a lower turnout, a greater success of small and new parties, especially regional parties, and a change of support for the national government and opposition parties in accordance with the electoral cycle. Hence, they conclude that second-order elections are subordinated to national elections. They introduced an influential framework that became a baseline for ongoing research on different types of elections. The scholars used the second-order elections model for further examination of the European elections (see Carrubba and Timpone, 2005; Hobolt and Wittrock, 2011), the regional elections and local elections (see Schakel and Jeffery, 2013) or the multi-level voting comparison (see Lefevere and Van Aelst, 2014).

In the United Kingdom, before the attention turned primarily to the devolved regional institutions, scholars focused on the electoral behaviour in European elections, local elections and by-elections (see Heath et al., 1999; Ingram, 2003). **Charlie Jeffery** and **Dan Hough** resumed their research in 2003 and investigated the dynamic of multi-level voting in Scotland and Wales. Since only two electoral cycles were completed at that time, they compared the UK's regions with data from Germany, Spain and Canada with a longer multi-level system voting history (Jeffery and Hough, 2003). Among one of the most recent works might be included **Alia Middleton's** article *All aboard? Scottish and Welsh multi-level voting; competence, leadership and blame-attribution*. Middleton used the case of Wales and Scotland to examine the valence politics, attributing policy responsibilities at a multi-level setting and perception of leadership at the national versus regional level (Middleton, 2019).

1. Methods

The research will partially use the framework of the second-order election model and will focus on four aspects: (1) turnout in regional elections, which will be compared with the national elections; (2) change of support for the national government and opposition parties in both elections; (3) the success of small/minor parties; and (4) the campaign and its main topics out of the scope of the regional parliament.

The research structure follows the framework to display the main characteristics of political behaviour on both levels. For detecting the main

changes in electoral behaviour in the past two decades, the research uses a dissimilarity index which measures the difference in votes between national and subsequent regional elections. For a better understanding of the possible support change for the national government in the regional election, the analysis tests the electoral cycle logic. The second-order election model suggests that the highest loss of the government party in a regional election occurs in the midterm period of the national electoral cycle. The third part of the research focuses more on the success of minor political subjects, as minor political parties are considered all *other* parties except for the major four in the region.² For analysing the differences in voting between both types of elections, the research focuses on three aspects: (1) the number of seats; (2) the number of votes; and (3) relevance.

The analysis of manifestos looks for several keywords connected to reserved matters. A preliminary analysis was conducted to select the most frequently mentioned topics indicating overstepping powers of the Scottish parliament and government. Those keywords were additionally analysed in the context of topics that belong to reserved powers. For example, the keyword referendum was considered only in the context of independence; hence, references to the EU referendum 2016 were not included since the UK government held the referendum.

Table 1: Keywords for analysing the manifestoes

Reserved matters	Keywords
Defence	Defence, Trident, nuclear weapons, missiles
The Constitution – Union Settlement	Independence, union/unionist/unitary, federal
The Constitution	referendum, constitution/constitutional, devolved powers/devolution
Foreign affairs etc.	European Union, NATO, UN

Source: Author

The analysis should determine how the electoral behaviour in Scottish parliamentary elections differs from the general elections and whether the

² Parties that were either directly participating in regional government or became the main opposition party; gained at least one mandate and more than 5 % of votes in the region in all general and regional elections since 1999 – the Conservative and Unionist Party, Scottish Labour Party, Scottish Liberal Democrats and Scottish National Party.

regional elections are perceived as less important than general elections. Moreover, it should examine the main changes in electoral behaviour since devolution began and reveal the main political circumstances or events that influenced the transformation.

Q1: Are Scottish parliamentary elections perceived as less important than general elections?

Q2: Which main factors (if any) affected the electoral behaviour in Scottish parliamentary elections?

2. More Devolution for Scotland

The parliament's powers have changed significantly since the first regional elections in Scotland. The Scotland Act 1998 established the fundamental characteristic of the Scottish parliament, its relationship with Westminster, election process and enlisted all reserved powers to Westminster. The Scottish parliament disposes of the primary legislative powers in all areas that are not reserved to Westminster. The devolved powers were not strictly defined, and powers that were not marked as reserved were devolved to the Scottish parliament. Reserved matters were divided into two categories: general reservations and specific reservations dealing with particular topics in areas concerning social and economic policies.

Table 2: Reserved Matters – Scotland Act 1998

General reservations	Specific Reservations
The Constitution	Financial and Economic Matters
Political Parties	Home Affairs
Foreign affairs etc.	Trade and Industry
Public Service	Energy
Defence	Transport
Treason	Social Security
	Regulation of the Professions
	Employment
	Health and Medicines
	Media and Culture
	Miscellaneous

Source: *Scotland Act 1998*, 1998

Since the establishment of the regional parliament, the cleavage about the future position of Scotland in the Union has become stronger. The four main

political parties were divided on the scale between status quo and independence. The Conservative Party was against further devolution and supported the status quo. The Liberal Democrats endorsed further devolution, mainly on the fiscal powers, to the point of federalisation of the United Kingdom, and the Labour Party was not internally united in the matter. The Scottish National Party holds the most radical position on the matter up to this date and demands full independence; however, further devolution is considered a way to their goal (Masseti, 2008).

Hence, the most profound development in devolution occurred with the Scottish National Party in government. The Scottish National Party unofficially renamed the Scottish Executive to the Scottish Government at the beginning of its first governing period. The change did not mean new powers for the government; nevertheless, it might have had a symbolic effect on the perception of the office. During the first Scottish National Party term, a new Scotland Bill was presented, and later on, in 2012, received Royal Assent. The Scotland Act 2012 officially renamed the Scottish government and introduced new powers relating to air weapons, drug misuse, speed limits, drink-drive limit, administration of elections and most importantly, new tax powers. Besides new Income Taxes, the parliament received complete control over the Land and Buildings Transaction Tax and Scottish Landfill Tax, which replaced the Stamp Duty Land Tax and Landfill Tax (Torrence, 2020).

In 2011 the Scottish National Party formed a majority government and held a referendum on Scottish independence in 2014. Even though the Scotland Act 2012 was still being implemented, the campaign opened a new debate over further devolution and the region's future, primarily due to a growing number of independence supporters at opinion polls. All three state-wide parties in the region opposed independence, yet they agreed on the additional extension of the devolution settlement. A few days before the referendum, the polling showed a narrow result, forcing David Cameron, Nick Clegg and Ed Miliband to make "*The Vow*" about more powers for Scotland if voters rejected independence.

In response to the result of the referendum and "*The Vow*", the Smith Commission was established, resulting in an agreement among all Scottish parliamentary political parties on the Scottish parliament's further development. The Smith Commission report focused on the current status and forthcoming strengthening of the regional parliament and government in the political system; and the extension of powers in the areas of social justice, housing, employment and especially, taxation and thus financial responsibility (The Smith Commission, 2014).

Based on the commission's recommendation, the UK government drafted a new bill in May 2015. The bill passed both chambers of parliament in March 2016. The Scotland Act 2016 established the Scottish parliament and government as permanent institutions within the constitutional setting of the United Kingdom. Both institutions can only be abolished due to a decision of the Scottish people in a referendum. The Scottish parliament has been given control over income tax bands, rates on non-savings and non-dividend income, and Air Passenger Duty. More powers over road limits, traffic signs, gaming machines, consumer support and advice on abortion were also devolved. Furthermore, powers related to social security and election security have been expanded. However, only some of the powers were transferred to the regional parliament immediately after the Act passed, and the transfer of competencies was scheduled for the next few years. The former Minister for Scotland, David Mundell, commented for the BBC in 2016 on the Scotland Act 2016 that it made the Scottish Parliament one of the strongest devolved institutions in the world.

3. How Did the Scottish Parliamentary Elections Change?

3.1 Turnout

As Reif and Schmit suggested, one of the characteristics of the second-order model is lower turnout in sub-state elections compared to national elections. Since the elections have no impact on the formation of a national government, voters do not recognise the regional elections as important; and hence, are less likely to participate in such elections. Table 2 shows the development of turnout at both electoral levels. In the case of Scotland, the data confirms the second-order assumption since the turnout is, on average, about 10,8 % lower in each regional election than in the previous national election.

Table 3: Turnout in Scotland (in %)

Elections	1997	1999	2001	2003	2005	2007	2010	2011	2015	2016	2017	2019	2021
General elections UK	71.4		59.4		61.4		65.1		66.2		68.8	67.3	
General elections Scotland	71.3		58.2		60.8		63.8		71.0		66.4	68.1	
Regional elections		58.16		49.42		51.72		50.4		55.7			63.3

Source: Based on the data from Pilling and Cracknell, 2021

Even though the data in Scotland support this hypothesis, two facts must be

noted. In general, the turnout in national elections in Scotland is usually lower than the state-wide number; however, two exceptions exist in 2015 and 2019. In both cases, the campaign was partially affected by referendums and the question of independence. In 2015 the independence referendum, when almost 85 % of eligible voters had participated, still echoed. The referendums that occurred only in the region had a mobilisation effect on the electorate; hence the turnout in Scotland was the highest among all other parts of the UK. In the case of the 2019 elections, The United Kingdom European Union membership referendum still resonated as the majority in Scotland voted in favour of remaining a member of the EU. Moreover, the Scottish government strongly criticised the long and complicated negotiations and called for a new independence referendum.

Second, the regional elections' turnout replicated the national election pattern. The excitement of the first regional elections in 1999, with a turnout of about 58 %, was followed by a downturn of almost nine percentage points in 2003. Since then, the number of voters casting their ballots has been slowly increasing. The only exception is the regional election 2011, when turnout fell back to just over 50 %. After this electoral period, new competencies due to the Scotland Act 2012 and 2016 were devolved. In 2016 the total number of electors in Scottish parliamentary elections increased by 3.7 percentage points since 16 and 17 years old were allowed to go to the polling station for the first time, constituting 1.99 % of the overall turnout (Pilling and Cracknell, 2021). The 2021 regional elections brought the highest turnout so far, with an increase of more than seven percentage points. Once again, the Scottish government, led by the Scottish National Party, strongly emphasised the question of independence due to leaving the EU and its negative view of the UK government on dealing with coronavirus.

The turnout in the past decade has been increasing continuously. However, there are reasons for this pattern other than the extension of devolved powers. Major events, such as an independence referendum in 2014, "*Brexit*" negotiations and leaving the EU or the global pandemic and government responses, had a significant mobilisation effect on the electorate. The mobilisation is taking place at both levels since the turnout has increased in regional and general elections. After those events, the electorate was more likely to show their support or disapproval for the government parties on a state-wide and regional level.

3.2 Dissimilarity Index and the Electoral Cycle

To better understand the change in support between parties at the national

and regional level of voting, a modified Pedersen index of volatility was used in the analysis. The index shows the parties' vote share difference between the two closest elections and indicates a party system transformation. For the first time in a multi-level environment, the dissimilarity index was used in the case of Canada to investigate the divergence in national and provincial elections (Jeffery and Hough, 2003). The results for each political party in national elections in the particular region are compared with a vote share for the same political party in the following regional elections. The summarisation of absolute values divided by two indicates the dissimilarity of the vote between the two elections.

$$Dissimilarity = \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^n |X_{iN} - X_{iR}|^3$$

The dissimilarity shows change in voting behaviour between various levels of the state system; hence, the percentual change of the support among parties. One precondition must be fulfilled for achieving valuable results: more or less, the same parties must compete at both levels. The dissimilarity cannot be measured if no single party participates in both national and regional elections. Moreover, there should be a difference in the electoral results at both levels; otherwise, dissimilarity does not exist. The closer to 100 %, the greater the dissimilarity occurred, which means that the highest percentage of votes were allocated to a different party than in the previous elections (Jeffery and Hough, 2003; Schakel, 2013).

Table 4: Dissimilarity Index – vote share (%)

General Elections	Regional elections	Conservative and Unionist Party	Labour Party	Liberal Democrats	Scottish National Party	Scottish Greens	Others	DI
1997		17.50	45.60	13.00	22.10	0.10	1.90	
	1999	15.46	36.22	13.33	28.02	1.80	5.18	
		2.04	9.38	-0.33	-5.92	-1.70	-3.28	11.32
2001		15.60	43.30	16.30	20.10	0.20	4.50	
	2003	16.06	31.99	13.58	22.33	3.45	12.58	
		-0.46	11.31	2.72	-2.23	-3.25	-8.08	14.02
2005		15.80	38.90	22.60	17.70	1.10	3.90	

³ X_{iN} = a vote percentage of the party i in national elections

X_{iR} = a vote percentage of the party i in the following regional elections

	2007	15.24	30.64	13.72	31.97	2.11	6.32	
		0.56	8.26	8.88	-14.27	-1.01	-2.42	17.69
2010		16.70	42.00	18.90	19.90	0.70	1.80	
	2011	13.13	28.99	6.56	44.71	2.18	4.42	
		3.57	13.01	12.34	-24.81	-1.48	-2.62	28.91
2015		14.90	24.30	7.50	50.00	1.30	2.46	
	2016	22.48	20.81	6.52	44.11	3.58	2.50	
		-7.58	3.49	0.98	5.89	-2.28	-0.04	10.13
2019		25.10	18.60	9.50	45.00	1.00	0.80	
	2021	23.35	20.33	6.17	45.31	4.81	0.03	
		1.75	-1.73	3.33	-0.31	-3.81	0.77	5.84

Source: Based on the data from Pilling and Cracknell, 2021

Application of the dissimilarity index in the case of Scotland showed that the regional electoral behaviour experienced some significant changes in the examined period. Since the first regional elections, the index has shown relatively steady results, except for the 2011 elections. The results presented in Table 4 indicate that 11 %, respectively 14 % of the electorate, switched their vote in the first two elections. The system was adjusting to new conditions at that time, and the results were close to the general elections. The Labour Party experienced the most extensive dissimilarities. The party mainly profited from the two-party system resulting from the single-member plurality system at the state-wide level. On the other hand, the party was losing in the regional multiparty system. Moreover, minor parties and independent candidates, especially in the 2003 elections, and the Scottish National Party with the Scottish Green Party encountered a positive swing between the general and regional elections. One of the explanations is a different electoral system in both elections, as **Duverger** (2016) established two effects of electoral systems. Each electoral system has a different mechanical and psychological effect, which are closely connected. The mechanical effect deals with the transformation of votes into mandates. The psychological effect includes voters and how they are familiar with the mechanical process of the system. Hence the voters are trying to cast their ballots in the most profitable way. With the first-past-the-post system, voters are more likely to cast their ballot for a larger party and try not to waste their vote on minor or new parties, even though they would be the first choice. The mixed-member proportional system, the so-called Additional Member System (AMS) in the UK, combines

single-member plurality voting and proportional voting to ensure a more proportional electoral result. Hence the state-wide Labour Party was able to profit from the FPTP system, especially due to a high concentration of voters, but under a more proportionate system, experienced some disadvantages. On the other hand, for the minor and regional parties, which struggled in the general elections, the AMS implementation was beneficial.

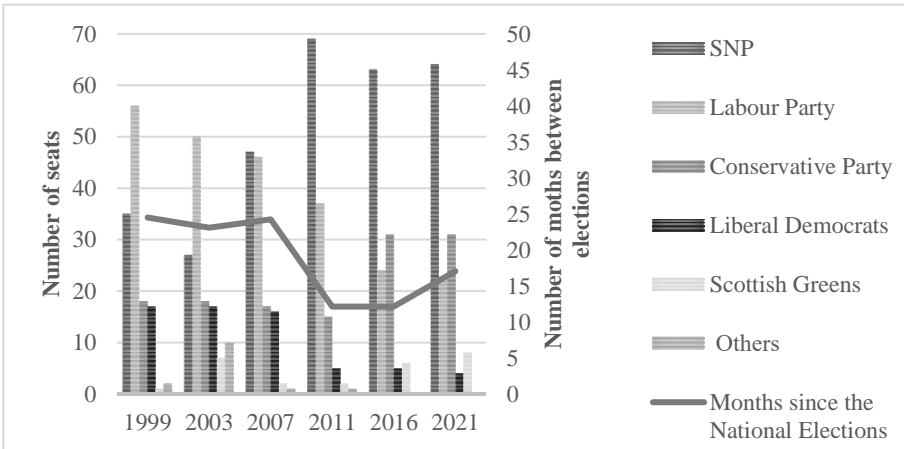
The system slowly started to change in the 2007 regional elections, mainly due to the growing support for the Scottish National Party and, on the other hand, decreasing support for the Labour Party. At the beginning of the devolution process, the Scottish National Party was just a small regional party that started to profit most from the new political environment. With the devolution, the support for the regional party started to increase rapidly. **Gerry Hassan** (2019) links the success of the Scottish National Party with self-presentation as a defender of Scottish interests and acceptance by the electorate as the "*Party of Scotland*". Moreover, problems of Scottish Labour grew due to its close connection with New Labour and its unpopular politics, especially regarding the Iraq invasion. In 2007 the Scottish National Party changed the campaign approach and tried to be seen as an alternative to the governing Labour Party. The declining popularity of the Labour Party and the positive tone of the campaign led by the Scottish National Party had a decisive impact on the electorate in 2007 (Lynch, 2013). The Labour Party played the role of the strongest party in Scotland for decades. The party system began to change with regional elections in 2007 when Labour Party lost by a narrow margin to the Scottish National Party for the first time.

The Scottish National Party's performance as a governing party was quite positively reviewed, and the support continued growing. Hence, the major change in the party system occurred with the 2011 regional elections, when one-third of voters swapped to a different party than in previous general elections in 2010. The data shows that the Scottish National Party experienced the highest dissimilarity in the vote share, followed by the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats. It underlined the trend of the state-wide parties so far, which performed worse in the regional elections than in the general elections in Scotland.

A transformation on the regional level followed a change in political behaviour on the state-wide level. Before the devolution started, Labour Party had dominated the system by gaining more than half of the Scottish seats in Westminster since 1959. The Scottish National Party suffered from the effects of the single-member plurality system since the electorate was less concentrated

than those of state-wide parties. However, in the 2015 UK elections, sometimes labelled as an "electoral earthquake", the Scottish National Party took over for the first time in history and won all but three seats in Scotland. **Jane Green** and **Christopher Prosser** (2016) associated the result with the mobilisation of the electorate, especially nationalist supporters, by the independence referendum in September 2014. Hence, since 2015 the Scottish National Party has become the largest party at both levels. Moreover, the state-wide parties also experienced a significant shift in the system. In the 2016 regional election, the Conservatives defeated the Labour Party for the first time in the history of the modern Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party. The Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats are facing declining support among the electorate and, thus, the weakest results since the devolution started. The last two regional electoral terms showed growing stability in the system again, with the index showing dissimilarity of only 10 % in 2016 and even 6 % in 2021.⁴

Chart 1: Electoral results and the electoral cycle



Source: Based on the data from Pilling and Cracknell, 2021

When the data are confronted with the electoral cycle, there is no strong evidence of the connection as the model suggests. The electoral cycle divides the term into three periods: honeymoon (0-19 months of the five-year term), mid-

⁴ The dissimilarity index between the 2017 general election and the 2021 regional election is overall 7 %.

term (20-39 months of the five-year term), and late-term (40 - 60 months of the five-year term). Elections in 1999, 2003 and 2007 occurred during the mid-term period. While 2011, 2016 and 2021 were held shortly after the Westminster elections in the honeymoon period. According to the model, the governing Labour Party should have lost its support during the first three cycles. Even though the Labour Party did not dominate the regional elections in the same way as on the national level, it remained the strongest party in Scotland for eight years. The Labour Party lost its status in 2007 to the Scottish National Party, and it was not because of a significant loss of support but rather due to the ability of the Scottish National Party to attract more voters across the whole spectrum. The Conservative Party, as a governing party, should have profited from the honeymoon elections in 2011, 2016 and 2021. However, the highest increase in votes was experienced by the Scottish National Party instead. A potential explanation might be found in the Scottish electoral history for a behaviour opposing the electoral cycle tendencies. Scotland was for decades a stronghold of the Labour Party, and more importantly, the regional party system tended more left on the socioeconomic cleavage than the UK party system (Masseti, 2008). Hence, the Labour Party did not lose support to a party with an opposite stance but was succeeded by another similarly oriented party on socioeconomic issues. The same reason applies to the often-weak result of the Conservative Party, even though in 2016, its support had increased, and the party became the main opposition party. The growing support for the Conservative Party is more connected with the strengthening of independence–unionist cleavage. Even after the independence referendum in 2014, the question of Union settlement remained at the centre of the debates, primarily because of leaving the EU.

3.3 Party Systems and Minor Party's Results

One of the main differences between the first-order and second-order election models is voting for the new and minor parties. On the national level, voters are less likely to cast their ballot for those types of parties than in the elections considered to be second-order. As already noted, different electoral systems on national and regional levels significantly impact the party system in the region.

Table 5: Votes in general elections in Scotland

General Elections	Votes for other parties	Votes for all parties	Vote share for other parties (%)	Seats for other parties
1997	53 427	2 816 748	1.90	0
2001	93 471	2 313 703	4.04	0
2005	101 754	2 333 977	4.36	0
2010	60 490	2 465 780	2.45	0
2015	95 110	2 910 465	3.27	0
2017	18 109	2 649 695	0.68	0
2019	48 487	2 759 061	1.76	0
Standard deviation			1.32%	

Source: Based on the data from Pilling and Cracknell, 2021

Table 6: Votes in regional elections in Scotland

Regional Elections	Constituency ballot				Regional ballot			
	Votes for other parties	Votes for all parties	Vote share for other parties (%)	Seats for other parties	Votes for other parties	Votes for all parties	Vote share for other parties (%)	Seats for other parties
1999	63 770	2 342 488	2.72	1	263 583	2 338 914	11.27	2
2003	184 239	1 916 192	9.61	2	433 882	1 917 619	22.63	15
2007	43 402	2 016 978	2.15	0	299 092	2 042 804	14.64	3
2011	21 534	1 989 276	1.08	0	241 507	1 990 836	12.13	3
2016	24 913	2 279 154	1.09	0	252 740	2 285 752	11.06	6
2021	50 823	2 706 761	1.88	0	358 308	2 712 784	13.21	8
Standard deviation			3.26%				4.36%	

Source: Based on the data from Pilling and Cracknell, 2021

A simple comparison of the results for both elections shows that the main difference occurs in the two tiers of the electoral system rather than in the behaviour of multi-level voting. Voting in constituencies retains similar features in both elections, except for the 2003 regional election. The second Scottish parliamentary election deviates significantly in casting ballots for minor parties. In the regional ballot, more than ¼, and in the constituency ballot, almost 10% of all voters decided to support a different party from the main four, which is the highest score since the devolution began. However, the 2003 election remains the only deviant case. Overall, the vote share for other parties in general elections and constituency ballot in the regional elections shows similar results. The most significant difference occurs with the regional vote when voters are more likely to cast their ballot for minor and new parties since the electoral system ensures

more proportionate results and, thus, a higher chance to gain a mandate for the party.

The mechanical and psychological effect of the electoral system also has an impact on political parties. Minor parties standing in regional elections use the regional ballot more frequently instead of standing their candidate in the constituency. For example, among the most successful minor parties (seat-wise), the Scottish Green Party stood its candidate in constituencies only in half of the Scottish parliamentary elections and focused more on the regional ballot. Apart from the main four parties, no other political party or candidate gained any seat in the House of Commons for Scotland in the researched period. Only one independent candidate had won its constituency in regional elections in 1999 and two candidates in 2003. Minor parties are more successful in the regional ballot than constituencies. However, only the Scottish Green Party, Scottish Socialist Party, Scottish Senior Citizens and Margo MacDonald (an independent candidate) have gained a mandate in the Scottish parliament since 1999 via the regional ballot.

Only the Scottish Green Party had found a stable position in the regional system and gained some relevance. Due to its stance on the matter of independence, it benefits primarily from the minority governments of the Scottish National Party. Even though the Scottish Green Party had lost five seats in 2007, they helped **Alex Salmond** become the First Minister in exchange for implementing some green policies and receiving committee posts. In August 2021, both parties announced a power-sharing agreement, and the Scottish Green Party entered the coalition for the first time. However, the party gained all its MSPs through the regional ballot and has never had a successful constituency candidate in regional or general elections. Hence, the relevance remains highly limited by its number of mandates and depends on the position of other more successful parties with similar policies.

3.4 Campaign

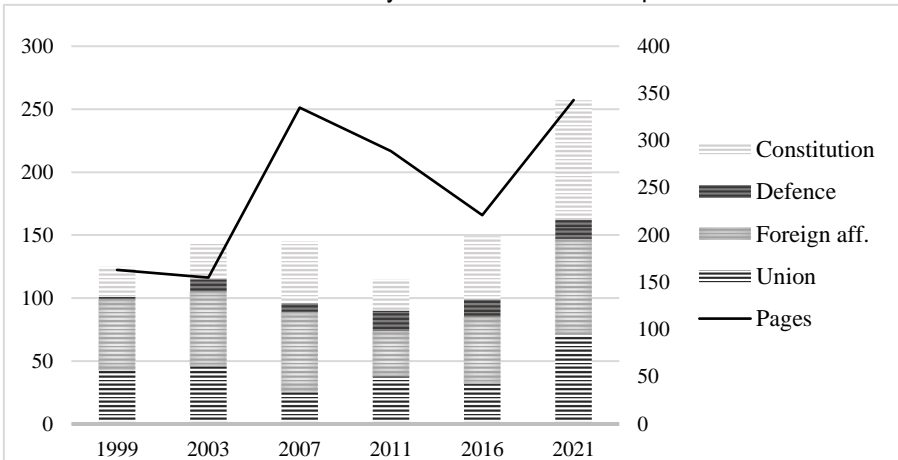
Since a regional parliament has not had the same powers in policy-making as the national one, during the campaign, each level in multi-level voting should emphasise different topics that the regional parliament might be able to influence. Moreover, the campaign is affected by the presence of state-wide parties on the regional level, given that centre of a party may be involved in the decision-making process concerning the electoral strategy. Therefore, analysing the differences in multi-level voting must consider the devolution process and the decentralisation

of state-wide parties' branches in the region.

As a regional party, the Scottish National Party was the only one with the decision-making centre in Scotland. The branches of the state-wide parties had to adapt to the conditions created by the new political centre in the region and introduce structural and organisational reforms, so they would be able to react to specific Scottish requirements. The Liberal Democrats developed a federal structure before the devolution in 1988; hence they had almost full independence in creating their political strategy. However, they consult the strategy with English and Welsh counterparts to maintain consistency and to avoid potential tension among units resulting from the limitation of the devolved powers. With the start of the devolution process, the decentralisation of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party and the Scottish Labour Party took place. Similar to the Liberal Democrats, so are the Scottish Conservatives able to determine their policy in the devolved areas. The coalition cooperation affected the Scottish Labour Party's decentralisation of policy-making powers since they needed more powers to create their policy in order to avoid internal conflicts and, more importantly, to find compromises with the coalition partner and thus ensure the government's survival (Lynch, 2003; Fraser, 2004; Ingle, 2008; Keating, 2010; Deacon, 2012). **Peter Lynch** and **Derek Birrell** (2004) noticed a significant difference regarding manifesto-making in the first 1999 and the second 2003 elections and the involvement of the regional branch. While in the 1999 election, the manifesto was primarily created by the central government consulting only with the Scottish Office, in 2003, the process became more inclusive, and almost half of the Scottish Labour Party members got involved.

The analyses of the manifestos showed that the reserved matters for the Westminster parliament and London government are more likely to be mentioned by parties supporting independence, namely the Scottish National Party and Scottish Green Party. The results also showed that the topic of defence was not adopted by the state-wide parties and was mentioned mostly by the Scottish National Party and the Scottish Green Party. On the other hand, Foreign Affairs represented by an international organisation, particularly the EU and the UN, were mentioned in the manifestoes by all parties since the first election.

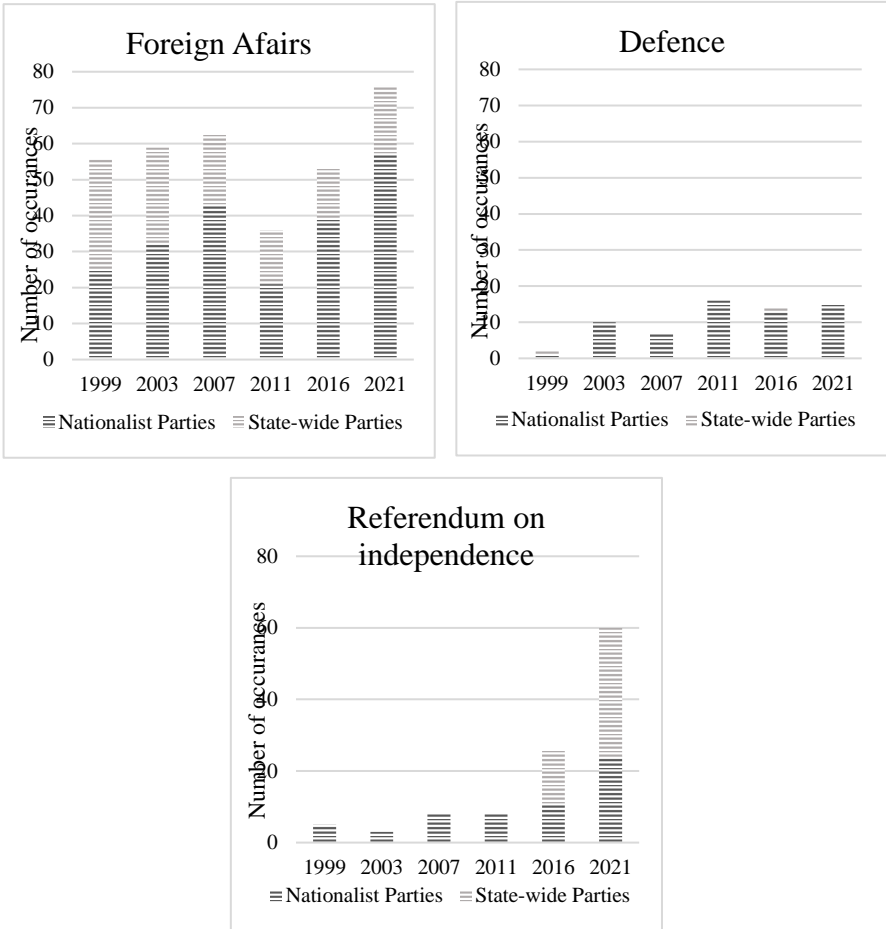
Chart 2: The occurrence of the keywords in manifestoes per election



Source: Based on the analyses of manifestoes of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party, the Scottish Green Party, the Scottish Labour, the Scottish Liberal Democrats, and the Scottish National Party.

The most notable change in frequency of using topics remaining in reserved matters regards constitutional topics such as the Union settlement, the power to hold a referendum, further devolution, or the constitution. For the first four elections, the topics were primarily carried by the nationalist parties; however, the fourth parliamentary season changed the narrative. After the Scottish National Party was allowed to hold a referendum on independence in 2014, the state-wide parties started to emphasise those topics themselves. In the 2011 election manifesto, state-wide parties did not use the words independence or referendum a single time, compared to the 2016 and 2021 elections, where about half of the searched words occurred in the state-wide parties' manifestos. Nevertheless, the context of emphasising those matters differs substantially. Whereas nationalists call for a referendum to become independent, the state-wide parties stand against those tendencies, hence adopting those topics as a counterreaction.

Chart 3-5: The difference in the occurrence of the keywords in manifestoes per election between nationalists and state-wide parties



Source: Based on the analyses of manifestoes of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party, the Scottish Green Party, the Scottish Labour, the Scottish Liberal Democrats, and the Scottish National Party.

Those examples show three approaches to topics regarding reserved powers in the electoral campaign. First, matters such as foreign affairs are commonly accepted among all parties to be used in the campaign. Second, some matters are seen as solemnly reserved to Westminster from the perspective of state-wide

parties; however, nationalist parties include some aspects of those matters in the campaign, i.e., defence. Third, nationalists were able to push the topics to the top of the agenda since devolution and afterwards were recognised as relevant topics by others, even though the powers were not devolved. Hence, the state-wide parties accepted those topics to contradict the nationalists.

Conclusion

Electoral behaviour in the Scottish parliamentary elections has gone through a significant transformation since the first election in 1999. The distinction between the first- and the second-order election is inadequate for the Scottish case since electoral behaviour has proved to be dynamic rather than static over the past two decades and is influenced by more prominent factors than less at stake dimension. First, different electoral systems are used for general and regional elections. The voters changed their electoral behaviour in the regional elections since the system enabled more proportionate results, mainly due to the regional ballot. Hence, the natural threshold is lower and fewer votes are needed for a party to enter the parliament in contrast to the Westminster elections with the first-past-the-post system. The small/minor parties profit from the system and are able to attract more voters and gain some seats. However, the relevance of those parties depends on the strength of other parties and their ability to form a majority government. The electoral system profoundly affected the Scottish National Party, which transformed from a small regional party into the largest Scottish party on both national and regional levels. Second, the Scottish party system differs from the UK system, with a leftist tendency and a strong independence-union cleavage, which leads to a very weak impact of the electoral cycle on the results of the governing and opposition party since. Only the last election supports the presumption of the cycle with growing support for the governing Conservative Party; however, the result is more likely connected with the party's unionist position and, thus, its role as the main opposition to the Scottish National Party rather than as an outcome of the electoral cycle.

The main topics emphasised during the campaign are given by the differences between the branches of the state-wide parties and nationalist parties. Even though the branches included mostly the devolved issues, they were pushed to accept some reserved topics after the Scottish National Party became the governing party. The most notable has become the region's future in the Union, especially the potential next referendum on Scottish independence.

Hence, the parties are not strictly focusing only on devolved matters, but to some extent, they reflect on the major events in the system and the nationalist tendencies.

Furthermore, Scotland does not show any strong evidence for the subordination of the regional elections in electoral behaviour to the general elections. The data revealed that the first impulse for a change in electoral behaviour was given in the regional elections in 2007 and 2011. After transformation on the regional level, it continued further to the national level. The change primarily started with the Scottish National Party as a new main political party in Scotland, its ability to win a majority in the Scottish parliament and hold an independence referendum. The referendum was the catalyst of the transformation and an event that mobilised a more nationalised electorate who changed their voting behaviour and supported the regional rather than state-wide party also in the general elections. Since then, the system and electoral behaviour have shown stable results and similar tendencies on both researched levels; hence the regional elections should not be perceived as less important than general elections.

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