

PARTY VOTE LEAKAGE IN WARDS WITH THREE CANDIDATES OF THE SAME PARTY IN THE SCOTTISH LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS IN 2012

James Gilmour
Electoral Reform Society Scotland

jgilmour@globalnet.co.uk or jamesgilmour@f2s.com
24/12 East Parkside, Edinburgh EH16 5XN

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On 3 May 2012 voters in Scotland elected 1,223 councillors to the 32 Local Government Authorities from among 2,496 candidates by the single transferable vote system of proportional representation (STV-PR). Elections were held in 353 wards: 189 wards returned 3 councillors; 164 wards returned 4 councillors. There were no uncontested seats.

In nearly 80% of the wards one or more parties nominated two candidates (Table 1).

Table 1 Wards with two candidates from same party

Number of parties nominating two candidates	Number of wards
0	76
1	136
2	134
3	7

In 42 wards one party nominated three candidates: one was a 3-member ward; 41 were 4-member wards. The numbers of candidates nominated in these wards ranged from 5 to 14 (Table 2).

Table 2 Numbers of candidates in 42 wards in which one party nominated three candidates

Number of candidates	Number of wards
5	1
6	3
7	10
8	9
9	9
10	5
11	3
13	1
14	1

In 32 of these 42 wards one or more parties also nominated two candidates (Table 3).

Table 3 Wards with two candidates from same party in which one party nominated three candidates

Number of parties nominating two candidates	Number of wards
0	10
1	31
2	1

The instructions on the STV ballot papers used in Scotland (Figure 14, page 12) make it clear that voters can mark as many or as few preferences as they wish. Where parties have nominated two or three candidates in a ward they put considerable effort into trying to persuade their supporters to vote for all of their nominees, preferably as “1, 2” or as “1, 2, 3” as appropriate. Some examples of such election literature from the 2007 Local Government elections are shown in Figure 15 (page 13; copied from the collection in the Strathclyde University library). Some ward-wide leaflets (Figures 15a and 15c) give specific area instructions. Leaflets like those shown in Figure 15b would be distributed in different parts of the ward.

For this analysis a very strict definition of ‘party vote leakage’ has been adopted. Where a party had nominated two candidates in a ward ‘leakage’ occurred when a voter who marked a first preference for one of that party’s candidates did not mark a second preference for the other candidate of that party. Where a party had nominated three candidates in a ward ‘leakage’ occurred when a voter who marked a first preference for one of that party’s candidates did not mark a second preference and a third preference for the other two of that party’s candidates.

The analysis presented in this paper is restricted to the 42 wards in which one party nominated three candidates. The data were extracted from the ward preference profile files published on the relevant Councils’ websites following electronic counting of the votes recorded on the paper ballot papers (Figure 1).

The two numbers in the first row are the number of candidates and the number of seats in the ward. The following rows contain the preference profiles found on the ballot papers preceded (first column) by the number of ballot papers showing that profile; each such record is terminated by a zero. The columns indicate successive preferences; the candidates are numbered by their positions on the ballot paper. The list of candidates and the ward name are given at the foot of the file (not shown here).

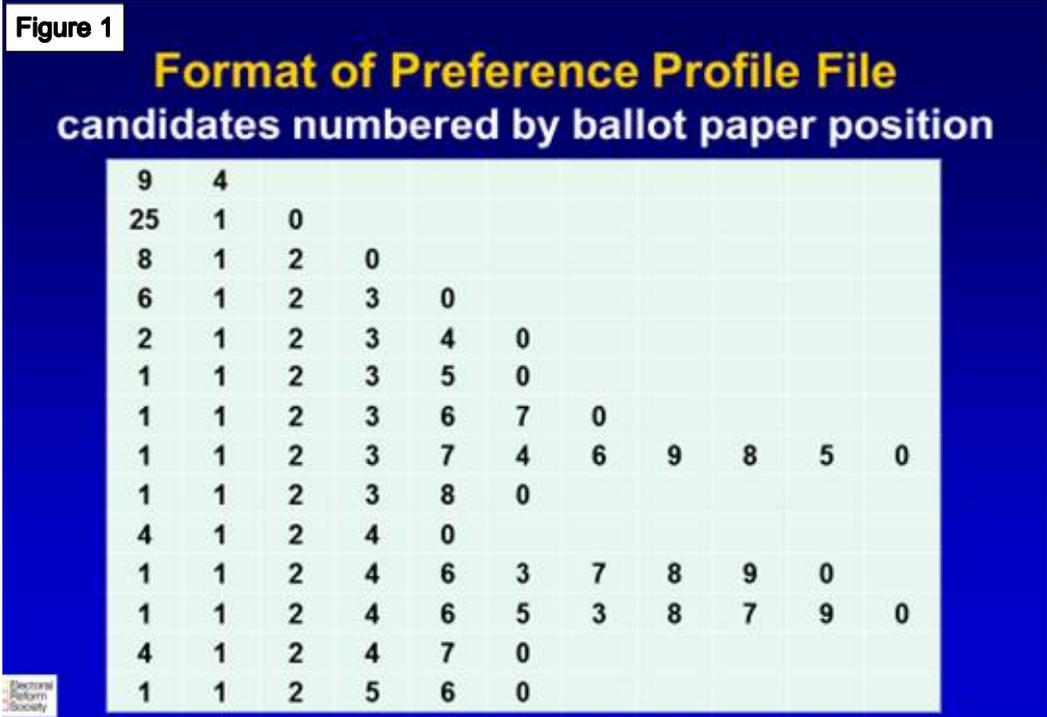
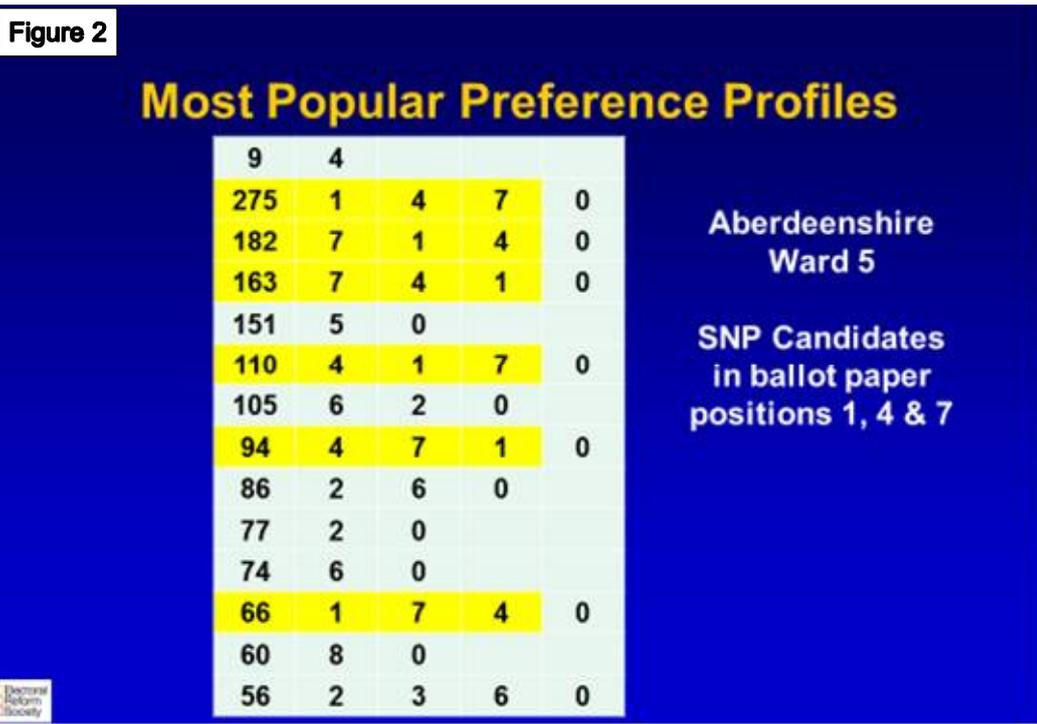
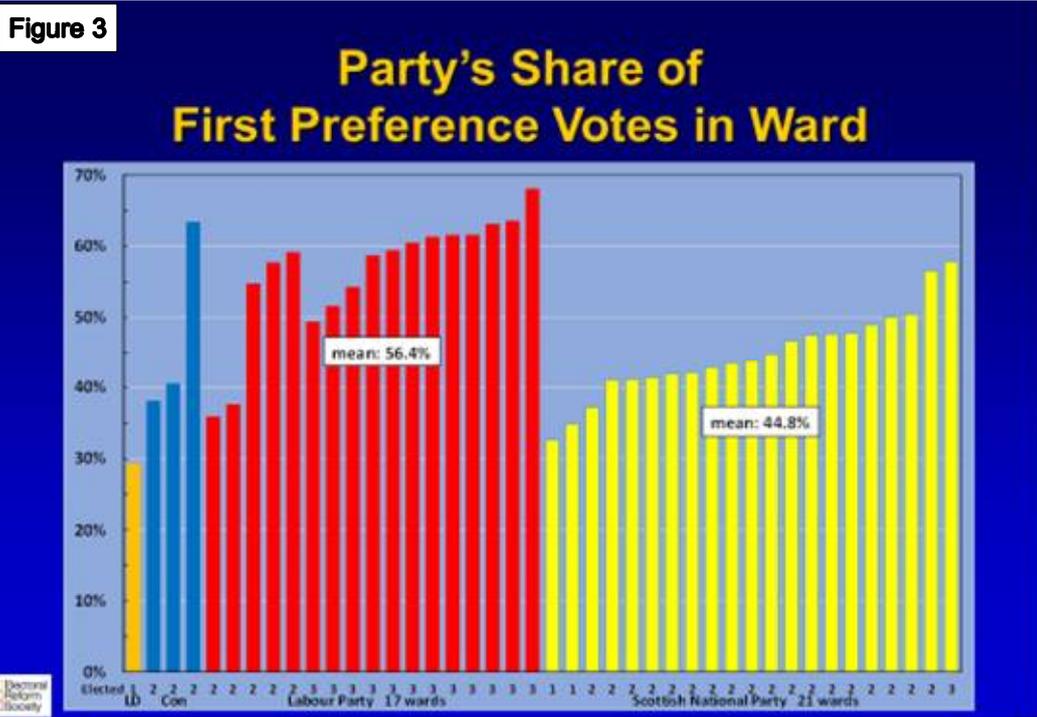


Figure 2 shows a small part of the data from the same file sorted by the frequency of each preference profile, highest to lowest. In this example (chosen at random) all six of the possible permutations including all three candidates of one party are among the most frequent preference profiles recorded in that ward.



In the 2012 elections all four of the larger parties nominated three candidates in some wards: Liberal Democrats 1 ward; Conservative Party 3 wards; Labour Party 17 wards; SNP 21 wards. The parties' shares of the first preference votes (all three candidates) in the relevant wards are shown in Figure 3, together with the numbers of candidates elected.

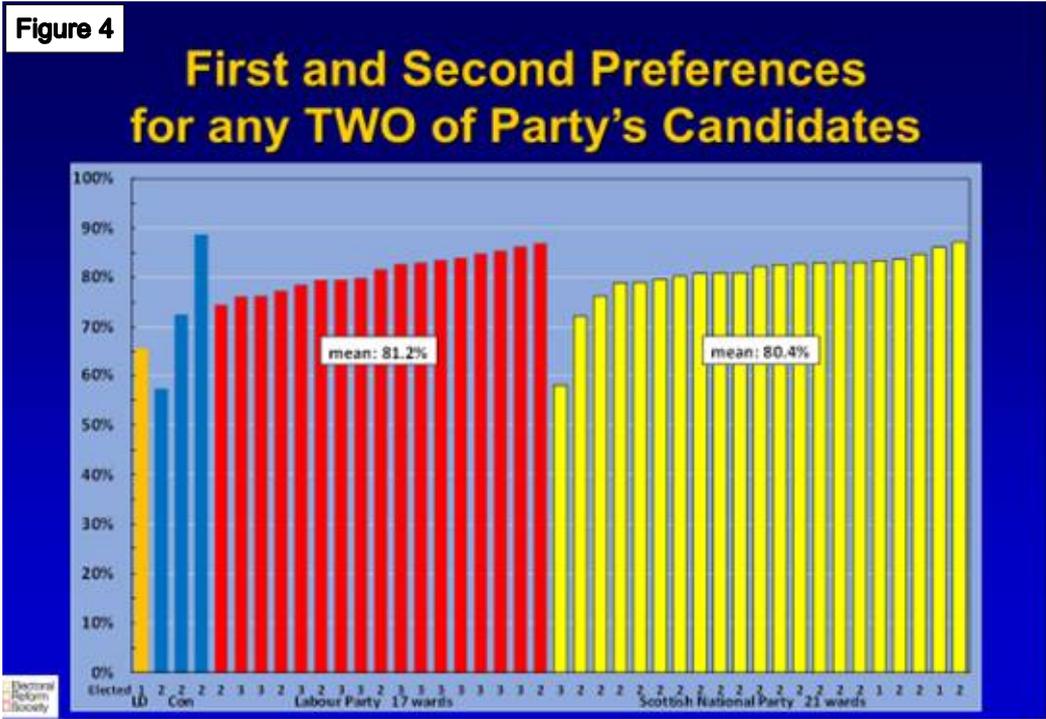
The Liberal Democrat candidates obtained only 29% of the first preference votes in the one ward where the party nominated three candidates and only one of the Liberal Democrat candidates was elected. The share of the first preference votes for the Conservative Party candidates ranged from 38% to 63% in the wards where the party had nominated three candidates and two of the Conservative candidates were elected in each of the three wards contested.



The shares of the first preference votes obtained by the Labour Party candidates in the 17 wards where the party nominated three candidates ranged from 36% to 68% (mean 56.4%). Two of the three Labour Party candidates were elected in five wards and all three Labour Party candidates were elected in 12 of the wards contested. The shares of the first preference votes obtained by the SNP candidates in the 21 wards where the party nominated three candidates ranged from 33% to 58% (mean 44.8%). In two of the wards only one of the three SNP candidates was elected; two SNP candidates were elected in 18 of the wards; all three SNP candidates were elected in only one of the wards.

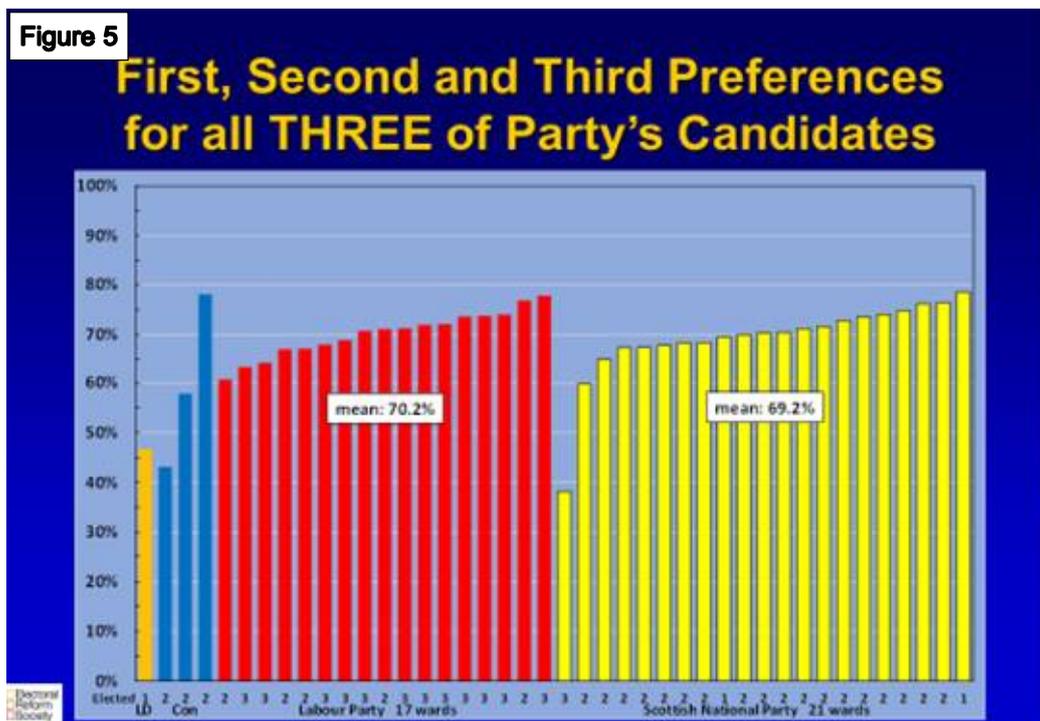
The results for all four parties are presented in the charts that follow, but statistical analysis is confined to the Labour Party and the SNP. Comparisons between these two parties were made by analysis of variance using the facilities for unbalanced designs in GenStat for Windows (release 16.2). The data were analysed as the percentages shown: transformation to logits did not change the significance of any of the differences.

There was no significant ($P < 0.05$) difference overall between the supporters of the Labour Party and the supporters of the SNP in the percentage of voters who, having marked a first preference for any one of the party's candidates, marked a second preference for another of the party's three candidates (Figure 4). For Labour the percentage of supporters voting for any two of the party's candidates ranged from 75% to 87%. For the SNP the range was similar, 72% to 87%, with the exception of one ward where only 58% voted "1, 2" for any two of the party's candidates. Interestingly, that was the one ward where all three of the SNP candidates were elected – an effect of vote transfers from candidates of other parties (27% of third candidate's final vote).



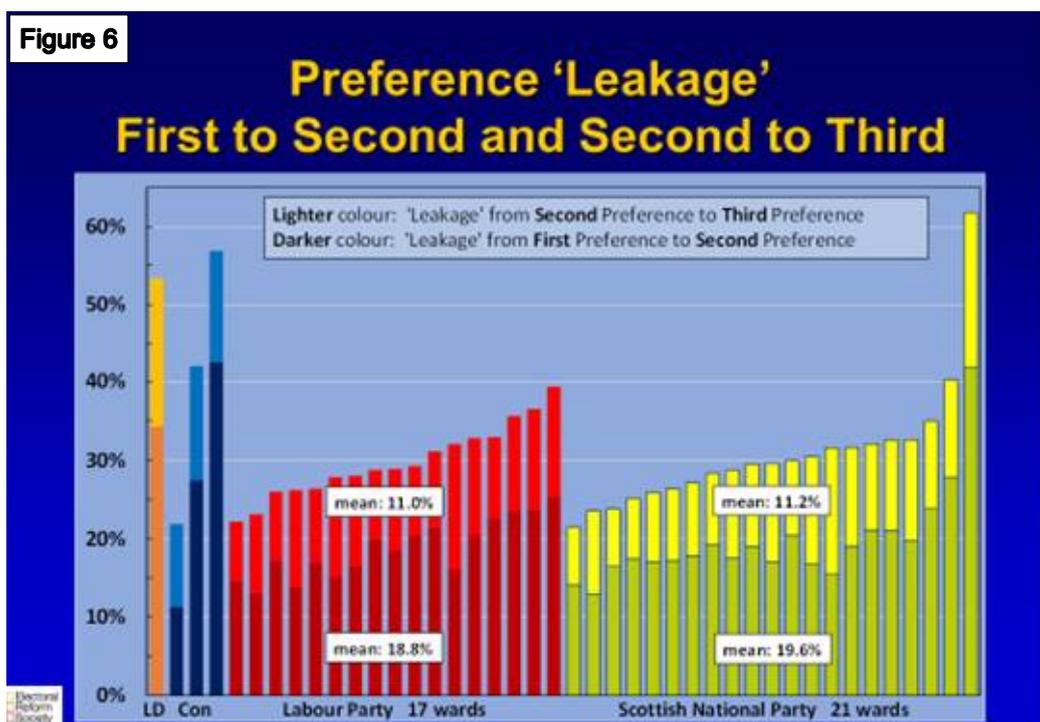
There was also no significant difference overall between the supporters of the Labour Party and the supporters of the SNP in the percentage of voters who, having marked a first preference for any one of the party's candidates, marked a second preference and a third preference for the party's other candidates (Figure 5). For Labour the percentage of supporters voting "1, 2, 3" for all three of the party's candidates ranged from 61% to 78%. For the SNP the range was similar, 60% to 79%, again with the exception of one ward where only 38% voted "1, 2, 3" for the party's three candidates.

Figure 5



These results can be presented in terms of 'leakage' of party votes from first preferences to second preferences and from second preferences to third preferences (Figure 6).

Figure 6

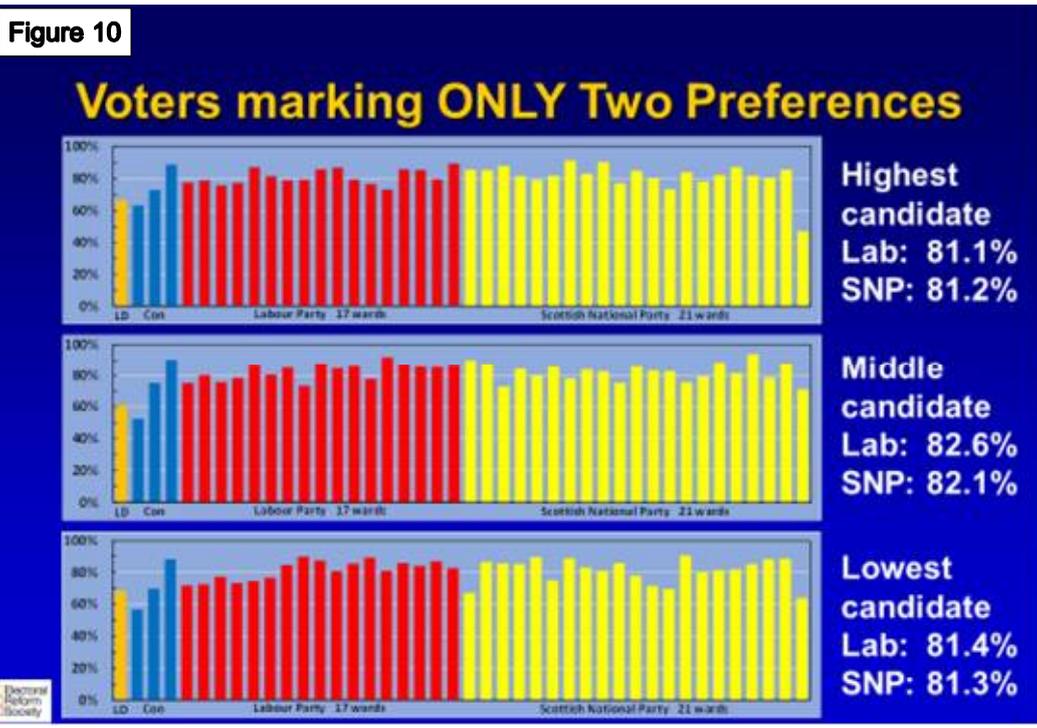


The Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives experienced higher levels of 'vote leakage' than either the Labour Party or the SNP. There was no significant difference between Labour and the SNP in 'vote leakage'. The differences in 'leakage' from first to second preference and from second to third preference were very highly significant ($P < 0.001$). There was no significant interaction between party (Labour v. SNP) and preference 'leakage' (first to second v. second to third).

Some supporters of all four parties voted only for the candidates nominated by the supporter's preferred party, i.e. left all other preference positions blank. Although this restricts the voter's ability to have the maximum influence on the outcome of the election, it does accord with the "instructions" given by some of the parties to their supporters, e.g. as in Figures 15a and 15c.

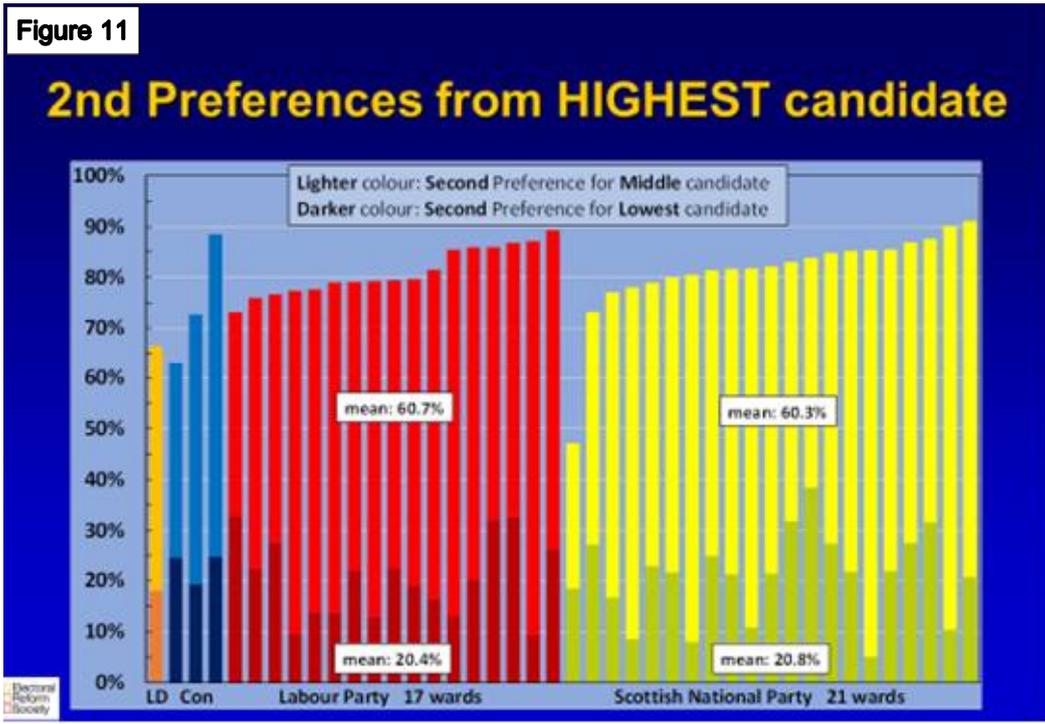
However, what is perhaps surprising is that nearly 10% of party supporters in some wards voted for only one of their preferred party's three candidates (Figure 7). In two of the three wards where the Conservative Party nominated three candidates 9% of voters who recorded a first preference for any one of the party's three candidates in those wards marked only that one preference. Similar levels of "first preference only" voting occurred in three of the wards where the Labour Party nominated three candidates and in one of the wards where the SNP nominated three candidates. Overall the level of such "first preference only" voting was very highly significantly lower in the wards contested by three SNP candidates (mean 4.4%) than in the wards contested by three Labour candidates (mean 7.4%).



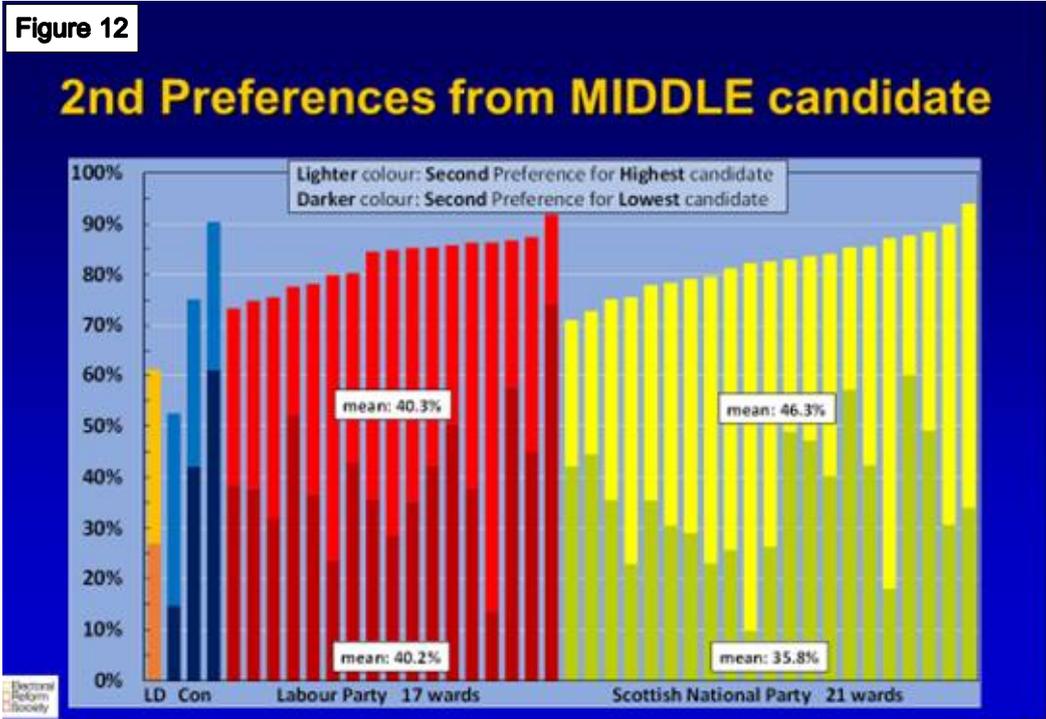


The position on the ballot paper of the voter's first preference did, however, influence the candidate chosen as the voter's second preference as shown in Figures 11, 12 and 13. (The wards are ordered separately in each chart by the proportion of voters marking two preferences for any of the preferred party's three candidates.)

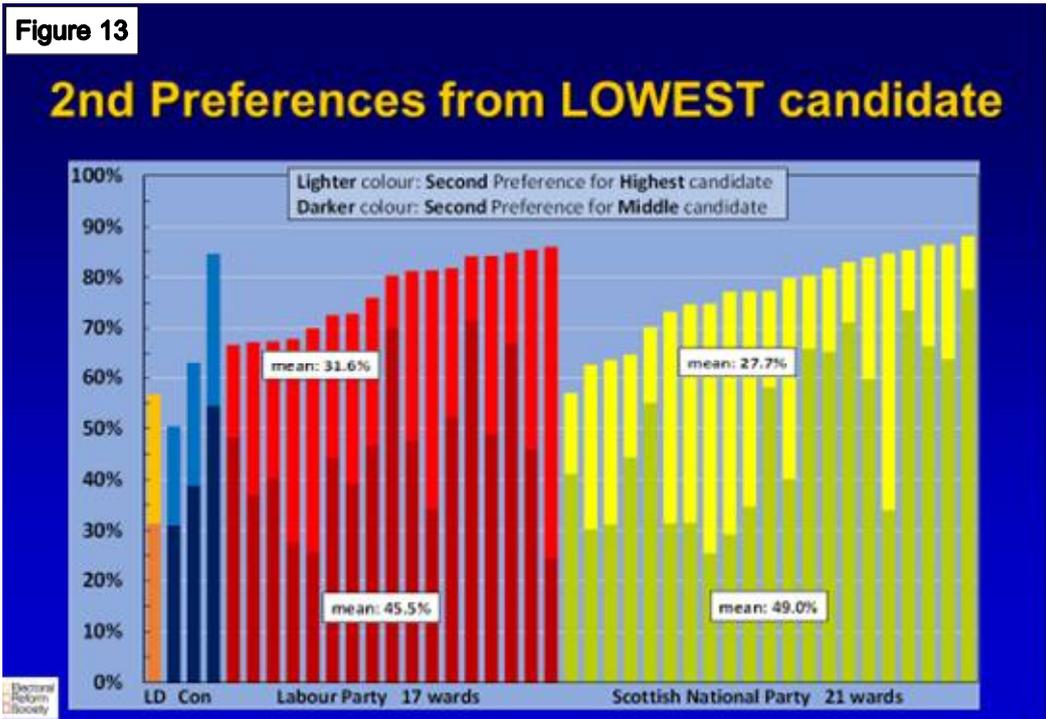
Of the voters who marked their first preference for the highest placed candidate of their preferred party 60% marked their second preference for the middle candidate and only 21% marked their second preference for the lowest placed candidate (Figure 11). This difference in voting pattern was very highly significant within the wards contested by three Labour candidates or three SNP candidates, but there was no significant difference in this behaviour between supporters of the Labour Party and supporters of the SNP, nor was there any significant interaction. There was comparatively little ward-to-ward variation.



Voters who marked their first preference for the middle candidate of their preferred party were more equally divided in marking their second preferences between the highest placed candidate and the lowest placed candidate of the same party (Figure 12). However, the difference in voting pattern was statistically significant overall; although this arose from the differences among supporters of the SNP candidates the difference between the parties was not statistically significant nor was there a significant interaction. There was considerable ward-to-ward variation in the two-preference voting patterns among the wards contested by three candidates for the Conservative Party, for the Labour Party and for the SNP.



Of the voters who marked their first preference for the lowest placed candidate of their preferred party 47% overall marked their second preference for the middle candidate and only 29% marked their second preference for the highest placed candidate (Figure 13).



This difference in voting pattern was very highly significant within the wards contested by three Labour candidates or three SNP candidates. Although the difference was greater among SNP voters than among Labour voters this difference between the parties was not statistically significant, nor was there any significant interaction.

It is not possible to make any direct comparisons of the voter behaviour reported here with voter behaviour in public elections in other jurisdictions that use the single transferable vote system of proportional representation because the ballot data from those elections are not published. However, some assessment of ‘party vote leakage’ in those STV-PR elections can be made from the vote transfers recorded on the published result sheets. For comparative purposes, ‘party vote leakage’ in the present study has been taken as the percentage of voters who having marked a first preference for one of a party’s candidates, did not mark a second preference and a third preference for the other two of that party’s candidates (Figure 5).

Gallagher (1975) calculated the percentages of “within party transfers” for 19 General Elections in Ireland from 1922 to 1977 (Table 4). Similar data were extracted from a figure in Sinnott (1995) for 15 General Elections in Ireland from 1948 to 1992 (Table 5).

Table 4 Vote transfers in 19 General Elections in Ireland 1922 - 1977

Transfers where there was at least one ‘continuing candidate’ of the same party			
	Fianna Fáil	Fine Gael	Labour
mean	81.5%	73.8%	63.7%
minimum	69.6%	62.1%	50.0%
maximum	90.5%	83.7%	76.7%
Data source: Gallagher (1975) Table 1 Internal Party Solidarity 1922-1977			

Table 5 Vote transfers in 15 General Elections in Ireland 1948 - 1992

Transfers where there was at least one ‘continuing candidate’ of the same party			
	Fianna Fáil	Fine Gael	Labour
mean	77%	73%	63%
minimum	73%	65%	51%
maximum	82%	79%	77%
Data source: Sinnott (1995) Figure 8.3 Transfer patterns 1948-92: party loyalty			

The average levels of ‘party vote leakage’ for Fianna Fáil (20.5%) and Fine Gael (26.6%) in these Irish General Elections were lower than those recorded in the wards where the Labour Party (29.8%) or the SNP (30.8%) nominated three candidates in the 2012 Local Government elections in Scotland, but the average level of ‘party vote leakage’ for the Labour Party in the Irish elections (36.6%) was higher.

There are fewer published analyses of vote transfer patterns from Local Government elections, but Coakley and Wolohan (1982) reported considerably higher levels of ‘party vote leakage’ in the 1979 Local Elections in Ireland. The overall average levels where there was a ‘continuing candidate’ of the same party in those 1979 elections were: Fianna Fáil 37.1%; Fine Gael 39.6%; Labour 48.7%. Jansen (1998) calculated overall ‘solidarity ratios’ for Provincial elections in Canada between 1920 and 1953 in three cities in Alberta and Manitoba where STV-PR was used. The reported ‘solidarity ratios’ were combined values for all parties giving average ‘party vote leakages’ of: 18.9% for Calgary (range: 13.3% to 31.7%, 8 elections); 20.6% for Edmonton (range: 16.5% to 32.2%, 8 elections); and 39.1% for Winnipeg (range: 27.7% to 52.6%, 9 elections).

Taken overall, the levels of ‘party vote leakage’ in the wards contested by three candidates of the same party in the 2012 Local Government elections in Scotland sit well among the results from the STV-PR elections in Ireland and Canada. However, a very different picture emerges if a comparison is made with the results from STV-PR elections in Malta.

Malta has elected its Parliament by STV-PR since 1921 from multi-member electoral districts, originally from 8 electoral districts each returning four MPs but from 13 electoral districts each returning five MPs since 1976. It is a feature of Maltese elections that the main parties usually nominate many more candidates than the total number of seats in the electoral district (Table 6). The parties do this because casual vacancies are filled by ‘counting again’ the ballot papers from the immediately preceding General Election. (Casual vacancies can arise immediately after each General Election because candidates are allowed to stand simultaneously in several electoral districts but can be elected as MP for only one. There were 11 such casual vacancies following the 2013 General Election.)

Table 6 Malta Parliamentary General Election 2013:
numbers of candidates nominated in each five-member electoral district

Electoral District	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Partit Laburista	14	11	15	11	13	9	9	8	10	11	12	13	5
Partit Nazzjonista	8	4	5	7	7	9	11	8	12	11	10	7	5
Other parties	1	4	1	1	1	2	1	2	3	1	3	1	1

‘Party vote leakage’ in Maltese General Elections is extremely low (Table 7). Nearly all of the supporters of the main parties mark successive preferences for all of their preferred party’s candidates. Only 2.5% of transfers were to a candidate of a different party and only 2.4% of party voters failed to mark a preference for a party candidate who could have been elected.

Table 7 Vote transfers in 23 Parliamentary General Elections in Malta 1921 - 2013

2,738 comparisons where there was at least one ‘continuing candidate’ of the same party	
Tranferred to a candidate of same party	95.1%
Tranferred to a candidate of a different party	2.5%
Non-transferable (ballot ‘exhausted’)	2.4%
Data source: Malta Elections - University of Malta	

Although the political culture in Scotland is undoubtedly very different from that of Malta, the results of the STV-PR elections in Malta show what parties can achieve in minimising ‘party vote leakage’.

References

Coakley J and Wolohan M (1982) The Irish Local Elections of June 1979. *Administration* 30: 84 - 106

Gallagher M (1978) Party Solidarity, Exclusivity and Inter-Party Relationships in Ireland, 1922 – 1977: The Evidence of Transfers. *Economic and Social Review* 10: 1 – 22.

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Sinnot R (1995) *Irish Voters Decide*. Manchester University Press, Manchester.

Figure 14

NAME OF COUNCIL NAME - NAME OF WARD

Four of the candidates listed below will be elected.
You can make as many or as few choices as you wish.

Put the number 1 in the voting box next to your first choice.
Put the number 2 in the voting box next to your second choice.
Put the number 3 in the voting box next to your third choice. **And so on.**

ANDERSON Hans
112 South Street, Anytown
Rowan party



CRANSTON Helen
112 South Street, Anytown
Beech Party



FLEMING Douglas Martin
112 South Street, Anytown
Independent

HAMILTON Flora
112 South Street, Anytown
The long name political Party



KUMAR Kuldip
112 South Street, Anytown
Elm party



MACDONALD Donald Alexander
112 South Street, Anytown
Oak Party



MASTERS Susan Caroline
112 South Street, Anytown
Tea Party



PATERSON James
112 South Street, Anytown
Rowan Party



Figure 15a

SNP 'How to Vote' Leaflet May 2007

North Lanarkshire LGA - Ward 4 : 3 Councillors

SNP LOCAL and NATIONAL ELECTION DAY 3rd MAY 2007

IT'S TIME... FOR A BETTER DEAL FOR CUMBERNAULD

IT'S TIME... FOR A BETTER SCOTLAND

VOTE SNP

CUMBERNAULD NEEDS A BETTER DEAL FROM NORTH LANARKSHIRE

ONLY THE SNP CAN DELIVER FOR CUMBERNAULD ON MAY 3rd.

MAXIMISE THE SNP VOTE!

VOTE STRATEGICALLY!

IN MILDURM, LUGGIEBANK, THE VILLAGE AND GARROCH WAY VOTE:

IRVINE	2
JOHNSTON	1

IN AEROHILL VOTE:

IRVINE	1
JOHNSTON	2

LOOK FOR THE SYMBOL AND ONLY VOTE FOR THE SNP

Figure 15b

Labour Party 'How to Vote' Leaflet May 2007

Working for you in Cumbernauld South

Danny Carrigan 1
Gerry McElroy 2

Vote Labour on Thursday 3rd May

North Lanarkshire LGA

Ward 3

Working for you in Cumbernauld South

Gerry McElroy 1
Danny Carrigan 2

Vote Labour on Thursday 3rd May

4 Councillors

Figure 15c

SNP 'How to Vote' Leaflet May 2007

North Lanarkshire LGA - Ward 3 : 4 Councillors

SNP LOCAL and NATIONAL ELECTION DAY 3rd MAY 2007

IT'S TIME... FOR A BETTER DEAL FOR CUMBERNAULD

IT'S TIME... FOR A BETTER SCOTLAND

VOTE SNP

CUMBERNAULD NEEDS A BETTER DEAL FROM NORTH LANARKSHIRE

ONLY THE SNP CAN DELIVER FOR CUMBERNAULD ON MAY 3rd.

MAXIMISE THE SNP VOTE!

VOTE STRATEGICALLY!

IN CARRBRAIN EAST AND CONDRORAT CENTRAL VOTE:

SOLIE	2
HENDER	1
MACCALLUM	1

IN CARRBRAIN WEST, GREENFAULS AND CONDRORAT NORTH VOTE:

SOLIE	1
HENDER	1
MACCALLUM	2

IN BLAYLOCK, KAVENWOOD AND CONDRORAT SOUTH VOTE:

SOLIE	1
HENDER	1
MACCALLUM	2

LOOK FOR THE SYMBOL AND ONLY VOTE FOR THE SNP