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**Difference Theory: An Alternative National Focus**

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# Contents

1. Introduction – *Theoretical Perspectives on Electoral Change*  
P. 1-4
2. Literature Review – *Second Order Theory & It's Critics*  
P. 5-11
3. Aggregate Analysis – *Incongruence Contextualized*  
P. 12-18
4. Results – *The Strength of Scotland's Voice*  
P. 19-25
5. Conclusion – *Difference Theory: A Nationalistic Focus on Regional Elections*  
P. 26-29

Appendix 1: Data Sources – P. 30

Bibliography – P. 31

## 1. **Introduction – *Theoretical Perspectives on Electoral Change***

The purpose of this dissertation is to determine what causes differential voting in Scottish Parliament elections (SP). In her analysis of regional elections to Scotland and Catalonia, Lineira (2011, 284-285) discusses the three main theoretical perspectives on what drives electoral change between the regional & national level; (1) *dependency* (2) *autonomy* & (3) *difference*. The first of these is linked to the theory of second-order elections. First introduced by Reif & Schmitt, (1980, 9) second-order election theory proposes that elections to levels other than the national are subordinate to & influenced by, ‘political calculation concerning the main [national] arena.’ In the case of regional elections in Scotland, second-order theory states that vote choice in these elections is motivated by issues relating to the national arena at Westminster rather than issues related to the regional arena at Holyrood. This is a serious accusation, one which has consequences for the remit of the SP.

Devolution was introduced in the hope that it would address a deficiency in Scotland’s democracy. For too long, voters in Scotland had felt that their voices were not being heard. A long period of Conservative rule at Westminster meant that decisions on Scottish domestic policy were being made without a popular mandate. Supporters of devolution felt that, ‘the conduct of public policy should be more sensitive to public opinion.’ (Ingram: 2003, 107) The hope was that devolution would grant authority to a sub-national parliament which would enjoy, not just control over a significant amount of domestic policy, but more importantly, the support of the electorate. However, this electoral support is dependent on, ‘the behaviour of Scotland’s voter.’ (Curtice: 2009, 85) In other words, if the application of second-order theory in Scotland is accurate and vote choice at the level of the SP is determined by motivations from the national arena, then, ‘the lines of electoral accountability would be broken.’ (Denver & Johns: 2010, 10) The SP, and more importantly the Scottish executive, would be unable to proclaim the support of the Scottish electorate as its authority is wholly dependent on, ‘voter motivation at the ballot box.’ (Brown et al:

2001, 28) If proved to be second-order, the democratic mandate of the SP would be very much in doubt.

However, as noted above, theories of *dependency* are not the sole determinant of what drives electoral change between regional & national elections. Both theories of *autonomy* & *difference* propose an alternative perspective on what motivates vote choice. *Autonomy* theory states that, ‘voter behaviour and electoral outcomes are only a consequence of the politics of that specific [regional] arena’ whilst *difference* theory proposes that, ‘voters relate different meanings to different electoral levels, & demand different things from each institution.’ (Lineira: 2011, 284-285) Both theories share the assertion that regional elections are distinct, uncoupled from state-wide logic, and driven by a regionally specific dynamic. However, they differ in regards to what that dynamic is about. In theories of *autonomy*, the dynamic specifically relates to what is known in second-order theory as first-order effects. Cutler (2008, 494) describes first-order effects as, ‘voters using decision criteria such as party *images*, issue positions, evaluation of leaders, and performance judgements pertaining specifically to the level of government under election.’ In short, first-order effects suggest that regional elections are considered important enough, in the minds of voters, to guide voting decisions. Where theories of *difference* diverge, is in the notion that in regional elections, the dynamic is not about ‘how important’ but ‘what *is* important’. (Lineira: 2011, 285) According to *difference* theory regional elections take on a different meaning from the national, most specifically in the presence of a ‘centre-periphery conflict.’ (Lineira: 2011, 285) Where this is present, and non-state-wide parties (NSWPs) have mobilised around it, elections at the sub-national level take on a new meaning.

This contention is supported by Wyn Jones & Scully (2006, 130) who looked at the question of why voters chose to behave differently at SP elections. They argued that the differences in behaviour, largely exhibited by swings to a nationalist party, in this case the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP), can be explained through the idea that SP elections represent to Scottish voters an,

‘alternative national focus’. They suggest that the higher support found in regional elections for NSPWs is symptomatic of voters applying *different* criteria in deciding on how to vote in regional as compared to national elections. This is supported by Hough & Jeffery (2009) who studied comparative regional elections in Germany, Spain, Canada & the UK. They found that in Scotland, much the same as in the historical communities of Spain, ‘peripheral nationalisms challenge state-wide logics, introduce distinctive terms of competition in sub-state elections and (begin to) uncouple the relationship between the two.’ (2009, 229) In studies to the first two SP elections, similar conclusions were made. Whilst Curtice (2006) found some application of the second-order dependency theory, as discussed above, he agreed with Brown et al’s (2001, 27-46) conclusion that the most important factor in determining vote choice was who voters thought best stood up for Scottish interests. The main point here is that, in elections to the Scottish Parliament, vote choice is primarily about securing the best outcome for Scotland. Whilst this may seem obvious, an explanation of this conclusion will bring clarity. Within the UK, Scotland is a peripheral actor. *Difference* theory suggests that as a non-state nation with its own parliament, voters see elections to the SP as an opportunity to protect its interest within the wider context of its relationship with the UK. In short, the SP is seen as a weapon by voters, used to protect the periphery from the centre. This results in support for the party best deemed to use that weapon, usually a NSWP, which has mobilised around the centre-periphery cleavage and consolidated its position as defender of the nation.

It is from this theoretical perspective, which this study will build. It is important to note at the outset, that it is not the position of this study that theories of *dependency*, particularly second-order theory, & theories of *autonomy* have no place in accounting for electoral change in Scotland. It is, however, the position of this study, that the most accurate theoretical perspective in accounting for such change is *difference* theory. It is therefore the task of this study to firstly, show that Scottish elections are now more first-order than second, and secondly, to explain why difference

theory is the most appropriate lens through which to understand and examine differential voting in Scotland. First, it will review the literature surrounding influences on vote choice, most specifically the theory of second-order elections. As this has been the dominant paradigm of the last thirty years regarding sub- & supra-national elections it is important to assess to what extent it is still applicable, particularly in the context of regional elections. Next, it will present an analysis of aggregate data. This analysis will show not only that Scotland is now more first-order than second but also the extent to which a regionally specific dynamic has found support. Following that, it will look to individual survey data to analyse motivations of vote choice at the 2011 Scottish election and determine what causes differential voting in Scotland. In order to determine what drives change in vote between electoral levels, it will specifically focus on an evaluation of why voters chose to switch to the SNP, the largest party in 2011. As this group makes up the largest percentage of dual voters (those voters who switch between the UK & SP election) this will allow us to determine what factors were most important in determining which specific account of electoral change is most applicable. It will end with a discussion of the results.

## 2. Literature Review – *Second-Order Theory & Its Critics*

Second-order election theory has been the dominant theoretical perspective on sub- & supra-national elections for the last thirty years. (Norris: 1997) First introduced by Reif & Schmitt (1980) after looking at the results from the inaugural elections to the European Parliament (EP), they suggested that there was a hierarchical relationship between national elections, considered to be first-order, and a ‘plethora’ of non-national, second-order elections such as, ‘by elections, municipal elections, various sorts of regional elections, those to a “second-chamber” and the like.’ (Reif & Schmitt: 1980, 8) Marsh (1998, 592) states that the core premise of second-order theory is that, ‘concerns which are appropriate to the first-order arena will affect behaviour in second-order elections, even though second-order elections are ostensibly about something quite different.’ Central to the idea that sub- & supra-national elections are second-order is the notion that less is at stake. This is the, ‘fundamental distinction’ (Van der Eijk et al: 1995, 162) between first-order & second-order elections. As non-national elections do not influence government formation at the national level, where most political power is thought to be located, they are deemed to be less important in the minds of voters who take this into consideration when deciding on how to vote. Reif & Schmitt suggest that as a result of this consideration three outcomes can be expected in second-order elections. First, turnout will be lower; second, national government parties will suffer losses & third, larger parties will do worse and smaller parties will do better. (Reif & Schmitt: 1980, 9)

These aggregate outcomes are expected as a result of, ‘several assumptions about individual-level motivations.’ (Clark & Rohrschneider: 2009, 645) Reif & Schmitt suggest that as less is at stake, voters feel there is less pressure at second-order elections to make their vote count. They can therefore choose to be more expressive with their vote. Marsh (1998, 593) suggests this expression is symbolic of an alteration between sincere & insincere voting. This can take the form of switching



from insincerely voting tactically at a national, first-order election to sincerely voting for the party of your preference at the non-national, second-order election. It can also take the form of switching from sincerely voting for your party preference at the national, first-order election, to insincerely voting against that preference in protest, at the non-national, second-order election. The former is termed, 'voting with the heart' & the latter, 'voting with the boot.' These two assumptions on what motivates vote choice form the foundation of second-order theory. However Reif & Schmitt's macro-level conclusions were not supported by micro-level analysis. This according to Hobolt & Wittrock (2011, 31) is one of the major concerns with second-order theory. They state that the lack of an, 'explicit individual-level theory' &, 'the methodological problems of observational equivalence and ecological fallacy' are inter-related and inherent in Reif & Schmitt's analysis.

At the European level attempts have been made to model vote choice and determine whether or not Reif & Schmitt's macro-level conclusions receive empirical micro-level support. The results are mixed but lean towards suggesting that the impact of Reif & Schmitt's assumptions is somewhat overstated. To determine what causes differential aggregate elections results between non-national and national elections, Carrubba & Timpone (2005) tested four alternative motivations for vote switching. Two were related to and supportive of Reif & Schmitt's assumptions and two were not. They found support for all four suggesting influence from both the first- and second-order arena. However, strong support for one in particular, which tested whether policy preference and levels of government were important in determining vote choice, suggested that, 'individuals actively want different preferences at different levels of government.' (Carrubba & Timpone: 2005, 279) This result runs contrary to assumptions made by Reif & Schmitt.

Clark & Rohrschneider (2009, 645) tested two competing hypotheses on the motivations behind vote choice. The first of these two hypotheses, the *transfer* hypothesis, supported Reif & Schmitt's second-order assumptions and suggested that voters simply transfer motivations from the first-order

arena into the second. The second of these hypotheses, the *suis generis* hypothesis, suggests the opposite. Motivations for sub- or supra- (in this case) national elections relate to the arena they take place in. They found considerable support for both hypotheses, once again suggesting influence from both the first- and second-order arena. They conclude however that the influence of the transfer hypothesis 'may be supported, in part, by the way in which EP elections are conducted.' (Clark & Rohrschneider: 2009, 659) The suggestion here is that as elections to the EP are run and contested by the national parties, reported on by the national media & take place in a national setting, the influence of the first-order arena is aided greatly to the detriment of the other. Holbolt & Wittrock (2011, 39) touch upon this in their own analysis of what motivates vote choice. Using an experimental method they find support for Reif & Schmitt's assumptions but with the use of a control mechanism were able to determine the influence of EU information. From their findings they suggest that the more information given to participants on issues related to the EU, the more likely they were to, 'vote on the basis of EU attitudes.' (Holbolt & Wittrock: 2011, 39)

Though results from micro-level analysis do not lend great support to Reif & Schmitt's assumptions on what motivates vote choice; analysis of aggregate data, particularly at the European level, has shown support for their expected outcomes. (Hix & Marsh: 2007) Reif (1984, 253) himself concluded in a follow up analysis of electoral data that elections to the EU were in danger of becoming, 'third-order national elections, with barely more relevance than that of an official opinion poll.' However, with this in mind, there has been room for revision and reassessment. When considering how the second-order model applies in Europe after the 2004 enlargement, Koepke & Ringe (2006, 321) found that voters in the Central & Eastern European block of the European Union, 'do not cast protest votes against their incumbent national governments' violating a core prediction of second-order theory. Marsh (1998, 591) concluded that although he found broad support for Reif & Schmitt's conclusions, after four European elections the theoretical propositions, 'hold much more effectively in countries where government alteration is the norm.'

Marsh is suggesting that distinctions drawn between first- and second-order elections are less clear cut in countries without a bi-polar party system. In other words, 'the national election itself lacks the first-order characteristics of determining the composition of national government.' (Jeffery & Schakel, 2013: 328)

A turning point in the second-order literature was Van der Eijk et al's (1996) study of the European voter. They found that though second-order theory had continuing relevance and its application in European elections remained important, its core propositions needed to be re-evaluated. They emphasised the role of context in determining turnout and vote choice stating that the EP elections represented, 'a whole range of [different] political contexts.' (1996, 161) They concluded that the, 'dichotomous typology' established by Reif & Schmitt was ineffective in capturing the reality of voting behaviour. They suggested a more encompassing approach would be to dissolve the aforementioned typology and recognise the existence of an electoral continuum, stretching from first to second order, with every type of election in between. This would enable political scientists, through contextualisation, to, 'assess empirically to what extent different elections are first-order or second-order in character.' (1996, 162)

The need to contextualize was an important development and increased the scope with which second-order theory could be applied effectively. Rather than beginning assessment of what motivates voters with definitive typologies, it was important to recognise that different elections and electoral levels could not be as easily classified as Reif & Schmitt originally suggested. This resulted in the focus moving away from whether one type of election is first or second-order, towards whether elections exhibit first or second-order characteristics and effects. This development most pertinently applied to the sub-national level where it was most obvious to students of sub-national political institutions that more was at stake than at the European or supra-national level. This was highlighted in Curtice et al's (1996) study of local and European elections in Britain. They

found that local elections exhibited greater first order effects than those found in their European counterparts. They observed that there was greater turnout at local elections, more importance ascribed to who won and individually, fewer reported that issues specific to the national arena were important considerations influencing voting. (1996, 406) In the end they concluded, that if elections to the EP are second-order elections, elections to local councils are, 'one and three quarters order.' (1996, 391) These findings were supported by another study on local elections in the UK carried out by Rallings & Thrasher (2005) who stressed the importance of placing elections on the continuum rather than, 'forcing [them] into one of two or more discrete categories.' (2005, 595) Their conclusions were similar to those found in Heath et al's study and suggested that in local elections there is, 'arguably more instrumental and less expressive voting.' (2005, 595) By instrumental voting, Rallings & Thrasher are suggesting that voters are actively differentiating between electoral levels and choosing candidates and parties based upon their individual preference at that level.

Moving from local election studies to regional ones; it becomes clearer that the notion of a continuum is essential for the accurate application and classification of second-order theory. Regional elections represent the only other election available to voters in which they can elect, 'both a parliament and a government.' (Lineira: 2011, 284) Whilst the legislative capacity of these regional governments is variable, it is clear that by and large more is at stake than at the local level and most certainly more at stake than the European. Nowhere is this better exemplified than in Canada, where Cutler (2008) analysed sub-state elections in Ontario to show just how first-order regional elections can be. He concluded that, 'two first-order elections co-exist in Canada for the simple reason that a lot is at stake.' (2008, 502) With this in mind, it is important to note that there are however many studies that suggest that regional elections can and do exhibit strong second-order effects. In an edited volume on the impact of devolution on electoral politics, Hough, & Jeffery (2006, 249) conclude that taken together the country case studies, which include Spain, the

UK, Germany & Austria, paint a pretty clear picture; sub-state elections are second-order, 'with some qualifications.'

However, more and more analysis is showing how inaccurate second-order theory can be in capturing the realities of regional voting behaviour. Schakel & Jeffery (2013, 338) studied a large (N) dataset of regional voting patterns and discovered clear second-order effects could only be found in a sub-set of their dataset. They concluded that strong second-order effects were present in 18% of the 2,933 elections analysed. They suggest that current analysis of regional elections is subject to a 'nationalizing bias' (2013, 324) which emphasizes a top-down approach to studying the dynamics of sub-state elections. They suggest that regional elections need to be evaluated on their own terms with a focus on what exactly is at stake in order to more accurately determine what drives vote choice at that level. (2013, 339) Studies that have done so have found that a major contributor to distinctive regional electoral patterns is the presence of a distinctive regional culture or identity.

In their analysis of regional voting patterns throughout Europe, Budge et al (1996, 167) found that the major element in voting distinctiveness was, 'voting for a minority nationalist party.' (1996, 167) They concluded that the, 'territorial centre-periphery cleavage cannot be ignored when studying national politics.' (1996, 180) This is supported by Jeffery & Hough (2003) who study regional elections in Spain and Germany. In the case of Spain, Jeffery & Hough find that regionally distinctive patterns of voting are predominantly found in the historical communities, i.e. the Basque Country & Catalonia, where the centre-periphery cleavage has worked to uncouple regional elections from state-wide logic. They state that as a result of the, 'territorially heterogeneous environments,' regional elections, 'operate according to distinctive, even divergent, logics and rhythms.' (Jeffery & Hough: 2003, 209) These are important conclusions and suggest that the application of second-order theory is limited in regions with distinctive 'peripheral' identities.

This notion of peripheral identity is present in Scotland. As a country that is distinct, culturally & historically, from the rest of the UK, it has long possessed not just a peripheral identity but a peripheral nationalism. This can be examined through the lens of *difference* theory which sees Scottish elections as having taken on a different meaning due to underlying social cleavages. The peripheral conflict has inspired a difference perspective on regional elections, support for the periphery is equal to support for the nationalist party. This is echoed in empirical analysis throughout much of Europe. We shall now go on to look at aggregate analysis and from there start to draw conclusions about what influences the SP vote.

### **3. Aggregate Analysis - *Incongruence Contextualised***

We shall now look to assess, through analysis of aggregate data, to what extent Scottish elections can be considered second-order. First we will examine turnout levels at the SP. Then we will examine electoral incongruence. We will do so by utilising the index of dissimilarity which determines to what extent differential voting has taken place. We will then qualify this electoral incongruence by use of the ‘expected vote’ to show that though there is incongruence, it is incongruence via influences at the regional level and not the national. Reif & Schmitt predicted that in a second order election; turnout will be lower, parties in the national government will lose support and the opposition will gain, and smaller parties will do better at the expense of larger parties. Whilst, as we will soon see, some of these effects have been observed, a contextual understanding of Scottish elections is needed to allow for a better understanding of electoral dynamics in the SP.

Levels of turnout in Scotland have been relatively consistent with second-order expectations. Turnout for SP elections has been lower than turnout for all preceding BP elections since the introduction of devolution. The high point was the first SP election which saw turnout levels reach 58.2%. This was in fact higher than Scottish turnout at the following general election in 2001. This may reflect the enthusiasm surrounding the inaugural election to the SP, where expectations were high for its first full session. However, notably, the following Scottish election recorded the lowest levels of turnout at 49.42%. This could reflect that fact that after the highs of 1999, the first full session of the SP had left the Scottish electorate underwhelmed. General trends in BP elections show that whilst SP election turnout is lower, the gap is closing. This, coupled with the fact that SP election turnout is generally far greater than to other electoral levels, i.e. the European level, serves to support the idea that the SP is getting, ‘more first order over time.’ (Denver & Johns: 2010, 12)

Turning now to electoral incongruence, the index of dissimilarity pioneered by Johnston (1980) calculates, ‘the percentage of the electorate that would have to vote differently in a sub-state election so as to recreate the nearest (in time) state-wide election results in the same territory.’ (Jeffery & Hough: 2009, 229) It explores, ‘how different patterns of voting behaviour are in the same region in regional compared with statewide elections.’ (Jeffery & Hough: 2003, 210) Whilst second-order theory predicts that at the aggregate level, elections are less congruent & therefore highly dissimilar, through contextualising the Scottish results we shall see that levels of dissimilarity are the result of arena effects, specific to the region in which the election is taking place. Table 1 shows levels of dissimilarity over the course of the Parliament, 1999-2011. The most striking finding is the level with which it has increased over the course of four elections. From the 1999 SP election to the most recent in 2011, there has been a 16 point increase in levels of dissimilarity. Whilst initially modest, levels of dissimilarity have grown to match those found in highly incongruent federations such as Canada where according to Jeffery & Hough (2009), ‘it is difficult to speak in any meaningful sense of any state-wide logic operating across different levels of government.’ This lends support to the notion that the SP has become more first-order over time. Whilst patterns of voting behaviour were initially similar to those found in BP elections, as voters became accustomed to the Scottish Parliament and Scottish elections, they have come to evaluate it on its own terms.

Whilst incongruence is important in determining whether or not differential voting has taken place, only through contextualisation can we prove that the aforementioned differential voting is the result of regionally specific dynamics. Dinkel’s (1977) test of expected vote shares in regional elections, ‘tests for the subordination of regional elections to the electoral rhythms of statewide politics.’ (Jeffery & Hough: 2003, 210) The expected vote test allows us to determine whether party choice in regional elections has or has not resulted in outcomes that are predicted by the second-



**Table 1 – Dissimilarity at Scottish Elections 1999-201**

	<b>Index. Party</b>	<b>Index. Election</b>
1997-1999	Labour: 3.4 Con: 0.6 Lib Dem: - 0.6 SNP: -3.3	<b>7.8</b>
2001-2003	Labour: 4.4 Con: -1 Lib Dem: 2.5 SNP: - 1.85	<b>9.9</b>
2005-2007	Labour: 3.35 Con: -0.4 Lib Dem: 3.2 SNP: -7.8	<b>14.75</b>
2010-2011	Labour: 5.15 Con: 1.42 Lib Dem: 5.49 SNP: -12.74	<b>24.8</b>
<b>Average 1997-2011</b>		<b>14.31</b>

**Table 2 – Expected Vote at Scottish Elections 1999-2007**

<b>Scottish Elections</b>	<b>Expected Vote</b>	<b>Scottish Results</b>	<b>Performance Relative to Expected Vote</b>
1999	Labour – 44.5% Con – 16.5% Lib Dem – 14.65% SNP – 21.1%	Labour – 38.8% Con – 15.6% Lib Dem – 14.2% SNP – 28.7%	78% 76.9% 96.6% 136%
2003	Labour – 41.15% Con – 15.7% Lib Dem – 19.45% SNP – 18.9%	Labour – 34.6% Con – 16.6% Lib Dem – 15.4% SNP - 23.8%	84.1% 105.7% 79.2% 125.9%
2007	Labour – 40.45% Con – 16.27% Lib Dem - 20.74% SNP – 18.82%	Labour – 32.1% Con – 16.6% Lib Dem – 16.27% SNP – 32.9%	79.9% 102% 78.4% 174.8%
<b>Average 1999-2007</b>			<b>Labour – 80.5%</b> <b>Con – 94.9%</b> <b>Lib Dem – 84.7%</b> <b>SNP – 145.6%</b>

order model. Expected vote is calculated using the average of the two national or federal elections which fall directly before and after the regional election in question. It tells us what percentage of votes that parties should expect in the regional vote and from that we can determine how they have performed relative to that expectation. If second-order effects are present then the parties of government at the national level can be expected to perform poorly relative to their expected vote and the opposition as well as smaller parties can be expected to perform better.

Looking to table 2 we can see calculations of the expected vote in SP elections from 1999-2007. At the time of writing, expected vote could not be calculated for the 2011 SP election as only one of the two BP elections required to calculate had taken place. On first glance, it may appear that the performance of parties at SP elections relative to their expected vote, match expectations of the second-order model. The Labour party forms the incumbent national government in each regional election. Looking at their performance relative to expected vote we can see that in accordance with the second-order model they have performed badly. Their average performance at SP elections is 80.5% of their expected vote from 1999-2007. This lends support to Reif & Schmitt's assertion that at regional elections, the party of national government loses support. Moving to the conservative vote, their performance has generally conformed to second-order expectations, with the exception of the 1999 SP election. On average they perform just mildly better than expected which, whilst supporting the notion that national opposition parties do better, may be down to a number of contextual factors too numerous for discussion.

The results become interesting however, when we start to examine the Lib Dem and SNP performance. The Liberal Democrats whilst being a third party at the national level can most probably be categorised as both small, on a national scale, in comparison with Conservative & Labour, and in opposition. It is here we see results contrary to the expectations of Reif & Schmitt's second-order model. Their performance relative to expected vote is lower in every SP election. It is

particularly low in the 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> SP election where their performance is 20% below what was expected. Their average performance at SP elections is not much better than the party of government at 84.7%. This opens up the possibility that SP elections, according to aggregate data, may not conform to second-order expectations.

This notion is supported by the performance of the SNP. Their performance at SP elections has been consistently higher, much higher, than what was expected on the basis of their national performance. Their average performance is 145.6% of expected vote, with the highest recorded in 2007 at 174.8%. Whilst from a national perspective these results seem to support the second-order thesis, a contextual approach to understanding this result suggests otherwise. Though considered a small party at the national level, the SNP, alongside the Labour party, is a major actor at the Scottish level. As NSWPs, they operate purely within the confines of the Scottish arena and over the course of the Parliament have grown in both stature and importance. This is reflected in their election victories in 2007 and 2011. It may be premature therefore to consider their electoral support as the manifestation of second-order support for small parties. This is highlighted by Schakel & Jeffery (2013, 327) who suggest that in this context, the application of SOE ideas is wrong with two ‘obvious objections.’ Firstly, as NSWPs operate specifically within the region or territory to which the regional election applies, using a ‘nationwide scale of measurement runs the risk of misunderstanding their strength & purpose.’ (2013, 327) Secondly, though second-order theory suggests that their performance relative to the expected vote is an example of either ‘voting with the boot’ or ‘voting with heart’ channeled through small party support, ‘it can be better understood as the use of regional elections by voters to express their distinctive territorial identity and/or their demand to secure a regionally defined set of interests.’ (2013, 327)

These findings support ideas expressed earlier, namely, that the influences on vote change in Scottish regional elections can be captured most effectively through *difference* theory. *Difference*

theory suggests that regional elections in Scotland have come to take on a different meaning. This meaning is expressed through regional or NSWP's, typically nationalist in character, who have their routes in a centre-peripheral conflict. Elections then, to the SP, are focused on securing Scotland's interests and the candidate deemed most appropriate for the job is the candidate, who in the eyes of the voters, best stands up for Scotland. It is clear then, from an analysis of aggregate data, that SP elections are certainly not second-order. Whilst they may have some second-order characteristics, a more first-order effects have taken route over the Parliament's life time. This is captured by Denver & Johns (2010, 11) who suggest that , 'with every passing election as the devolved institutions become ever more a fixture on the Scottish political landscape, the consequences of Scottish government action (or inaction) have more and more impact on the electorate and voters become used to increased coverage of Scottish politics in the media.'

## 4. Results - *The Strength of Scotland's Voice*

Table 3

<b>Scottish Parliament Election Results 2011</b>		
Party	Vote Shares	Seat Shares (Seats)
- SNP	45.5% (+12.6)	53.5% (69)
- Labour	31.7% (-0.5)	28.7% (37)
- Conservatives	13.9% (- 2.7)	11.6% (15)
- Lib Dem	7.9% (-8.3)	3.9% (5)
- Turnout: 50.75%		

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<i>*Vote share based on constituency results</i>	<i>*Based on four main parties for comparison</i>
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In this section we will look at individual level data to determine, most importantly, whether SP elections are, at the micro-level, decided upon by Scottish issues. First, we shall look at a brief overview of the 2011 SP election. The 2011 SP election was a historic one. Not only was it a convincing win for the SNP but for the first time in the parliament's history a single party secured a majority. This was an unexpected outcome, in a parliament which was designed, via its proportional electoral system, to prevent such a result from happening. As we can see from Table 3, the SNP secured a massive swing in vote percentage at the constituency level from 32.9% in 2007 to 45.5% in 2011. The losers in the election were the Liberal Democrats who recorded their lowest constituency vote total since the Parliaments inception with a -8.3 swing in vote share. Before we analyse the results of the multivariate analysis, let us take a look at some responses to questions in our dataset which will help to show where focus for the election lay as well as how voters assigned responsibility in three key areas of public policy.

Table 4 asks, of those who voted, ‘Was your Scottish assembly vote decided on Scottish or British issues?’ Near enough half of the respondents answered that their decision was based mostly upon Scottish issues. Whilst this isn’t conclusive, it lends support to the notion that the Scottish election is certainly more first-order than second. We will factor this into our analysis to determine whether or not where voters focus their attention is important in determining change in vote choice.

**Table 4**

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Main focus of attention when Voting in Scottish Parliament elections 2011

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Mostly in the Scottish Arena	48.5%
Mostly in the British Arena	27.9%
Equally	18.1%
Other/Don’t Know	5.5%
(N)	(1,197)

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*\*Figures for those who voted. 38% N/A, 2011 SSA Survey*

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Table 5 shows us how voters in Scottish election assign responsibility with regards to three key areas of policy. Voters were asked to record whether, in the 12 months running up to the election, they felt there was a change in either, the standard of health service, education or the economy. The results are mixed. With regards to the health service it seems that the electorate is split as to which level to assign responsibility. This is not the case with regards to education or the economy. 57.7% believe that changes in the standard of education had been the responsibility of the

Scottish Government whilst a similar number believed that changes in the economy were the responsibility of the UK government. These results are supportive of the notion that both first- and second-order effects are present in Scotland, however the belief that the UK government holds the power with regards to the economy, a crucially important factor in determining voice choice, may add slightly more second-orderness to results.

Table 1.4

<b>What do you think has change in standard of service been the result of?</b>	
Change in Standard of Health Service	
- UK	44.6%
- Scotland	47.8%
- Both	7.6%
Change in Standard of Education	
- UK	33.7%
- Scotland	57.7%
- Both	8.5%
Change in Standard of Economy	
- UK	55.1%
- Scotland	34.8%
- Both	10.1%
<b>*22% N/A, 2011 SSA Survey</b>	

### *Multivariate Analysis*

To estimate a model of vote choice in Scottish elections, we had to think about which factors would be influential in determining a change in vote from the national to the regional. We framed these factors through the theoretical perspectives discussed earlier. The variables measuring the influence of *dependency* theory are those related to UK performance as well as the question on where respondents main focus was when deciding on how to vote. The variables measuring *autonomy* theory are those related to the Scottish performance as well as the question on where respondents main focus was when deciding on how to vote. *Difference* theory is measured by the



variables which look at the strength of the Scotland's voice as a result of SNP government, constitutional preference, and the question on respondent's main focus.

The estimated model is not without its limitations. The influence of the 'valence model' in Scotland has been studied at the last two SP elections. Both studies have concluded that the valence model is in fact the number one determinant of vote choice in Scotland. (Denver et al: 2009; Carman et al: 2013) The valence model suggests that, amongst the electorate, 'there is broad agreement on the desired outcomes of policy, and political competition is about which contender is most likely to deliver them.' (Denver et al: 2009, 208) In short, the valence model is about evaluation of performance. It is therefore important to try and capture as many elements of that performance as possible when modeling vote choice. Elements would typically include evaluation of party performance and evaluation of leaders. However due to limitations in the dataset, variables measuring evaluation of leadership were unavailable. Therefore the significance of conclusions are somewhat limited.

In this analysis of survey data we want to determine what causes differential voting. We do this through observing why people choose to switch to the SNP whose vote 'varies most substantially' (Wyn Jones & Scully: 2006, 126) between the devolved election and the national. Firstly, we want to determine whether or not voters switch allegiance to the SNP at the SP because of issues related to Scotland or because of issues related to the UK. If proven to be the former then we can assume that Scotland is more first-order than second and that *dependency* theories have little accuracy in determining vote choice in Scottish regional elections. Secondly, we would also like to determine whether or not switching to the SNP at the SP is related to issues specific to either arena or something different entirely. If the latter, then we can propose that the best perspective for understand electoral change in regional elections in Scotland is that of *difference* theory. We apply a multivariate model of voting behavior to answer these questions. Using data from the 2011 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey we run a binomial logistic regression on vote choice and determine what factors are significant in predicting a switch to the SNP at regional elections. Our dependent

**Table6 – Binomial Logit Estimates (standard errors) for model of election voting, Scotland, 2011**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>SNP Loyalists</b>	<b>SNP Switchers</b>
Age	0.016 (0.006)*	-0.18 (0.006)*
Male	0.373 (0.209)	-0.131 (0.199)
Owner	0.175 (0.232)	0.087 (0.227)
Level of Voting Decision		
Mainly Scotland	0.316 (0.252)	1.147 (0.282)** 0.597 (0.318)
Mainly UK	-0.512 (0.321)	
Strength of Scot Voice in UK from SNP Gov.		
Stronger	0.730 (0.254)*	10.82 (0.254)** 0.928 (0.657)
Weaker	-0.471 (0.843)	
Constitutional Preference		
Independence	2.484 (0.770)**	1.673 (1.070)
Greater Devo	0.557 (0.767)	2.300 (1.057)*
Status Quo	0.343 (0.852)	1.542 (1.110)
UK Gov Evaluations		
- Standard Health		
Increased	-0.4 (0.732)	-1.521 (1.092)
Decreased	0.669(0.287)*	0.010 (0.282)
- Standard Education		
Increased	0.831 (0.769)	0.024 (0.906)
Decreased	0.034 (0.342)	0.195 (0.324)
- Standard Economy		
Increased	-1.047 (0.921)	0.359 (0.727)
Decreased	-0.135 (0.241)	0.349 (0.231)
Scot Gov Evaluations		
- Standard Health		
Increased	0.326 (0.288)	0.008 (0.285)
Decreased	-0.619 (0.827)	-0.984 (0.806)
- Standard Education		
Increased	0.148 (0.309)	0.149 (0.289)
Decreased	0.180 (0.440)	-1.191 (0.513)*
- Standard Economy		
Increased	0.270 (0.296)	0.439 (0.289)
Decreased	-0.813 (0.624)	0.557 (0.477)
Constant	-4.313 (0.905)	-3.952 (1.151)

**\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.001$**

variables are support for the SNP at both the UK and SP elections and support for the SNP at just the SP election. We term these variables as SNP (Loyalists) and SNP (Switchers) respectively. Our

independent variables in the model include standard socio-demographic controls (age, sex, & home ownership) as well as variables that are more specifically related to theoretical perspectives. We include two dummy variables on whether Scotland or the UK was most important in influencing voting choice. We include a series of questions asking where respondent's attach responsibility in three important policy areas (health care, education & the economy) & what they think the impact has been. We include a dummy variable on whether or not respondents think, as a result of the SNP government from 2007-2011; Scotland's voice in the UK has become stronger or weaker. We also include a dummy variable on support for independence, support for greater devolution & support for the status quo.

Results are reported in Table 6. & they are striking. With regards to SNP switchers, it is clear which arena and what factors are influencing the change in vote choice. Looking firstly at the level of voting decision, we can see that those who focus their decision on Scottish issues are significantly more likely to switch from another party at the national level to SNP at the regional level. Looking at the variable which asks whether or not having the SNP in government from 2007-2011 has strengthened Scotland's voice in the UK; we see that those who feel the SNP government has strengthened Scotland's voice are significantly more likely to switch to support the SNP at the regional level. We also see that those who support greater devolution as being significantly more likely to switch. Age is significant, the older, the less likely you are to switch. The only other variable in the model which reaches significance concerns those who felt the Scottish government was at fault for the decline in education standards. It seems those who thought this was the case were unlikely to switch their vote to the SNP at the regional level. Looking now to the SNP loyalists, unsurprisingly, support for independence has a significant part to play in whether or not respondents vote SNP at both the regional and national elections. This is however, to be expected. Independence aside, the variable measuring the strength of Scotland's voice within the UK, reaches significance. So if you thought the SNP had strengthened Scotland's voice within the UK over the course of its government then you were more likely to vote for them both at the regional and at the

national level. Again age has a part to play. This time the older you get, the more likely you are to stick with the party. Our only UK evaluation which reaches significance is related to voting for SNP at both levels. According to the model, if you believe that the UK government is responsible for the decline in the health service, then you are more likely to be an SNP loyalist. These results are discussed and elaborated upon in the following section.

## 5. Conclusion - *Difference Theory: A Nationalistic Focus on Regional Elections*

The results of the multivariate analysis are clear. Vote choice was determined both by Scottish factors and by theories of *difference*. *Difference* theory states that in regional elections, it is not 'how important' elections are which determines their distinctiveness, but 'what is important.' In the Scottish instance, it has been shown the vote choice is driven by a nationalistic focus. Results from our model of vote choice support this conclusion. The significant outcomes with regards to variables on the constitutional preference, the strength of Scotland's voice & the political level which influences voting decisions suggest that a change in support for the SNP is greatly influenced by a consideration of Scottish interests. Not only are those that switch likely to want greater powers for Scotland, but those that switch are more likely to feel that the SNP has been effective in strengthening Scotland's voice. However, this is not the whole story. Theories of autonomy do play a role in influencing dual voting in the SP elections as can be seen from the significant result regarding the evaluation of the Scottish government and its role in falling standards of education. According to our model, voters in Scotland react to this and decide not to switch to the SNP at the regional level. It is a relatively similar picture regarding the SNP loyalists. Most interestingly however, is the inclusion of a second-order effect in the results. Those who blame the UK government for a fall in health standards are significantly more likely to vote for the SNP in both regional & UK elections. Theories of dependency do play a role then in determining vote choice at Scottish regional elections.

What does this mean for our overall study? Three broad conclusions can be drawn: (1) Scottish elections are more first order than second (2) the best perspective for understanding differential voting in Scotland is *difference* theory (3) *Autonomy* theories & *dependency* theories do play a role in influencing differential voting. Starting with the first conclusion, we have shown

through an analysis of second-order literature that second-order theory has an important, but relatively limited role to play, in regional elections where a centre-periphery cleavage is present. This applies to the case of Scotland where the centre-periphery has been utilized by the SNP to mobilise support and challenge the subordination of regional elections to the national. We then showed that aggregate election results reflect this reality. By measuring incongruence and calculating expected vote, we were able to qualify through a contextual understanding of the role of NSWPs, the regionally specific dynamic which had built up in SP elections over the past 14 years. SNP performance at regional elections in Scotland has been consistently higher relative to its expected vote. We showed this was evidence of how regional elections in Scotland have become relatively uncoupled from any state-wide logic. And finally, the analysis of vote choice at the 2011 SP election was able to show that the biggest influences on ‘dual voting’ were not from the UK arena but from the Scottish.

Looking at our second-conclusion, once we had recognized the impact that Scottish influences had on dual voting, we were able to determine which kind of Scottish influence had the biggest effect. Our results from our model are fairly clear. Vote choice was influenced by consideration of Scottish interests within the wider context of its relationship with the UK. Whether this was in the form of constitutional preference or the ability of Scottish government to stand up for Scotland, differential voting was influenced by a *different* perspective on how to assess the SP elections. Following on from this, whilst it was clear that *difference* theory provided the biggest explanation as to what influences vote choice, *autonomy & dependency* theories still had a role in influencing vote choice.

In answer to our original question, ‘what are the causes of differential voting in Scottish regional election’, we can give this response; Scottish elections are predominantly influenced by factors relating to Scotland. Vote switching in SP elections is motivated by a desire on the part of

the electorate to secure the best deal as well as the best representation for Scotland & Scottish interests. This, in recent years, has taken the form of the SNP, who have worked hard to define themselves as the party of Scotland, working for Scottish issues and Scottish people.

Looking back to our earlier analysis, we suggested that the consequences for Scottish democracy of voting behaviour which was unresponsive to Scottish issues and the Scottish arena were serious. We are pleased to report that, concerns regarding the health of Scottish democracy at the regional level are largely unwarranted. It seems that SP elections have developed specific dynamics in which Scottish voters now find themselves inhabiting , ‘two political worlds.’ (Carman et al: 2014, 107) Looking forward, it is interesting to note the changing political climate of the Scottish arena. At the time of writing, the most recent YOUNGOV poll for voting intention in the 2015 general election is shown in Table 7.

**Table 7**

<b>Westminster Voting Intention in Scotland</b>		
	Vote Share	Seat Share
SNP	46%	(48)
Labour	27%	(9)
Cons	18%	(1)
Lib Dem	4%	(1)

**\*As of March 10-12, 2015**

Source: YOUNGOV

The SNP are on course for a resounding win. Whilst this is not unexpected at the regional level, such a result at the UK level is unheard of. It would give the SNP 42 seats, Labour 9, & the Conservatives & Lib Dems 1. Would this result lend support to the idea that the regional level dynamic is now starting to encroach upon the national level? On the surface it seems that way. From the *difference* theory perspective, it looks likely that that could be the case. The UK government is currently engaged in a programme of austerity aimed at deficit reduction. It has been

since the onset of the 2008 financial crash which brought global markets to a stand-still and governments to the brink of collapse. This programme of cuts to public spending is supported by the three main parties at Westminster. However, it isn't supported by the general public and more importantly, the SNP. Voting intentions at the general election then possibly lend support to the notion that, as the SNP are seen as champions of Scottish interests, the electorate in Scotland want to elect them to the national level to give them the opportunity to negotiate the best deal for Scotland. This is a possible avenue for new research. Rather than trying to determine how the national level influences the regional level regarding vote choice, it may be a suggestion that future research is focused on the how the regional level dynamic in Scotland is starting to influence the national level dynamic of the UK. Is Scotland, for Scottish voters, becoming the new first-order arena, not just at the regional level, but at the UK level also?



## **Appendix 1: Data Sources**

Scottish Social Attitudes has been an annual survey conducted since 1999 by the National Centre for Social Research, with initial financial support from the Economic & Social Research Council. (For further details, see <http://www.natcen.ac.uk/our-research/research/scottish-social-attitudes/> )

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