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THE 1997 SCOTTISH REFERENDUM: AN ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

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Referendums are rare events in the United Kingdom. Only one UK-wide referendum has been held - on membership of the European Community (as it then was) in 1975 - and before 1997 there had been only three other significant referendums: in 1973, in Northern Ireland, on the constitutional position of the province, and in 1979, in Scotland and Wales, on proposals for devolution. Thus the scarcity of cases available for study in itself makes the 1997 referendum on a Scottish parliament worthy of close attention. In addition, however, the fact that Scottish voters were asked to vote on, not one, but two questions - whether or not they were in favour of a Scottish parliament and whether such a parliament should have tax-varying powers - made the Scottish referendum unique among the (admittedly few) referendums that have been held in Britain.

Referendums provide a rare opportunity for analysis of the voting behaviour of the mass electorate in a context which is different from that of a normal election. Little is known about how voters respond in this relatively unfamiliar context. Although full investigation of this question must await the results of survey studies we can make a start by analysing the referendum results themselves. At the time of writing more referendums are in prospect: on the government of London, on electoral reform, and on membership of the single European currency. Analysis of the Scottish vote gives us a rare glimpse into the workings of a referendum in Britain, therefore, at a time when it seems likely that the device - once believed to be contrary to the

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spirit of the British Constitution - will be used more frequently in future. Before turning to our analysis, however, we provide a brief account of the background to the referendum.

SCOTLAND AND HOME RULE: THE ROAD TO THE REFERENDUM

For much of the period since 1945 the debate over Scottish home rule has been intertwined with the resurgence of political nationalism in the shape of the Scottish National Party. The rapid growth in the SNP vote in the late 1960s and early 1970s put pressure on governments at Westminster to bring forward plans for devolution. Both Labour and the Conservatives made such plans, but it was the Labour government of 1974-79 which produced proposals providing for an elected assembly in Edinburgh, with powers over most aspects of Scottish domestic policy, but with no tax-raising powers. A referendum was arranged for 1979 to allow the Scottish electorate to deliver their verdict on Labour's plans. The decision to hold a referendum was in part to appease anti-devolutionists in the Parliamentary Labour Party, and during the passage of the Referendum Bill an amendment, proposed by a Labour backbencher, was passed stipulating that, for devolution to go ahead, the proposals would have to be backed by 40% of the eligible electorate rather than a simple majority of those voting.

For a variety of reasons support for devolution ebbed away in the run-up to the referendum and the result was disappointing for the 'Yes' camp (see Bochel, Denver and Macartney 1980). Only 51.6% of those who voted were in favour and this represented only 32.5% of the eligible electorate. Moreover, in five of the nine regions and two of the three islands areas a majority of voters voted 'No'. Labour's devolution plans were lost and, in the aftermath, SNP MPs helped to eject the government by opposing it in a vote of confidence. The Conservatives won the resulting general election, and went on to hold office for the following 18 years. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s Scottish home rule was resolutely off the Westminster agenda.

Within Scotland pressure for a devolved parliament began to grow again, however, and was reflected in the electoral performance of the pro-devolution parties, opinion polls on the constitutional issue and the setting up of the Scottish Constitutional Convention in 1989. Perhaps the most important motor of pro-devolution sentiment, however, was the Conservatives' continued domination of the British political scene. Already a minority in Scottish politics in 1979, the Conservatives' Scottish base

declined at each election thereafter (with the limited exception of 1992). But the party did well enough in England to continue to form the government. Scottish voters perceived themselves as being governed by a party which they had rejected. In addition, a whole series of specific events such as the imposition of the poll tax a year before its introduction in England, the closure of the Ravenscraig steelworks, a proposal to discontinue the London to Fort William sleeper train, and so on, appeared to indicate a remarkable insensitivity to Scottish sensibilities. Added to this, Mrs Thatcher, Prime Minister for most of the period, was very unpopular among Scottish voters (Mitchell and Bennie 1996: Bennie et al 1997).

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, devolution (without a further referendum) remained Labour's policy. For the Conservatives, however, John Major continued his predecessor's opposition to a Scottish parliament. Indeed, he made that opposition a centrepiece of his campaign in the 1992 election, arguing later that it was an important factor both in the Conservatives' (very small) recovery in Scotland and in their overall victory.

After the 1992 election, however, the Conservative government soon ran into trouble on a variety of fronts, and its popularity ebbed away. Labour established a strong and persistent lead in British national opinion polls and, as it seemed increasingly likely that Labour would form the next government, the prospect of a Scottish parliament being established drew nearer. In 1995, however, Labour came under serious attack on the issue from the Scottish Conservatives when Michael Forsyth became Scottish Secretary. Forsyth focused on the tax varying powers in Labour's proposals, the 'tartan tax' as he called it. Labour struggled to find an effective response and there was a fear that New Labour's carefully constructed image as a low tax party might be tarnished. In the face of considerable controversy within Scotland, therefore, the Labour leader, Tony Blair, announced in 1996 that a referendum would be held consisting of two questions, one on the principle of devolution and the other on tax varying powers. This was designed, firstly, to give added legitimacy to the Scottish parliament proposed by Labour and, secondly, to remove the potentially damaging issue of tax from the forthcoming general election campaign. Labour could now respond that it would be up to the Scottish people to decide whether they wanted the parliament to have the power to raise (or lower) taxes. Moreover, if they made that choice, it would again be up to the Scottish electorate to decide whether and how the power should be used, by voting for appropriate candidates in elections to the parliament.

The devolution debate featured prominently in the 1997 general election campaign in Scotland. Once again, John Major attempted to make the future of the United Kingdom a centrepiece of his campaign but his party went down to its worst twentieth century defeat, losing all of its seats in Scotland. The new Labour government, elected on 1 May moved quickly to implement its plans for devolution. A white paper outlining proposals for a Scottish parliament was published in July and a referendum on the issue organised for 11 September 1997.

TURNOUT IN THE REFERENDUM

During the referendum campaign and, indeed, on referendum night itself, there was a good deal of journalistic speculation about the likely turnout in the referendum and about how the turnout should be interpreted. A low turnout, it was feared, would dent the legitimacy of the new parliament even if there were a 'Yes' majority. The unasked question in most discussions of turnout (both before and after the referendum), however, is what levels of turnout would count as 'low' (or 'satisfactory' or 'high'). Indeed, much of this comment revealed a rather sketchy knowledge of turnout levels and patterns of turnout variation in different kinds of elections. The national turnout in the referendum was 60.4%. This figure is put into context in table 1, which shows turnouts in Scotland at various kinds of elections and at the three referendums held so far. The turnout in 1997 was very close to those recorded in the two previous referendums. Indeed, the electoral register on which the 1997 figure is based was more than six months older than that used in 1979 and, when a standard adjustment is made to take account of deaths and electors who have moved since the compilation of the register, the turnouts in the two referendums were almost identical. Turnout at all three referendums was, of course, lower than in the last general election. But this reflects a general phenomenon. In all countries referendum turnouts tend to be lower than the turnout in parliamentary elections (Butler and Ranney 1994). This may be because the important cues of party loyalty to guide voters are frequently absent in referendums. On the other hand the referendum turnout was much greater than the Scottish turnout in local elections or in elections to the European parliament. Turnout in the referendum was, then, about as good as could have been expected.

The national turnout figure masked quite wide variations across the country, however. The average turnout in the 32 local authority areas (for which the results were announced separately) was 61.5% (see Appendix). On the whole, most local authorities had turnouts close to this, as reflected in the

small standard deviation of 4.9%. The highest turnouts were in East Dunbartonshire (72.7%), East Renfrewshire (68.2%) and South Ayrshire (66.7%), and the lowest were in Shetland (51.5%), Glasgow (51.6%), Orkney (53.5%), Aberdeen (53.7%), Dundee (55.7%) and Western Isles (55.8%).

Table 1
Turnout in elections and referendums in Scotland

Elections	%	Referendums	%
General election 1997	71.4	European Community 1975	61.7
Local elections 1995	44.9	Devolution 1979	63.8
European election 1994	37.9	Devolution 1997	60.4

It might be thought that variations in referendum turnout across Scotland would reflect variations in levels of support for devolution, with low turnout occurring in areas where people were most indifferent to devolution and higher turnouts being in areas where there was more enthusiasm. But the results provide no support for such an interpretation. The correlation between turnout at the referendum and the percentage voting 'Yes' on the first referendum question, support for a Scottish parliament, is very weak (0.04). There was, then, no relationship between turnout and support for a parliament. Areas in which a higher than average proportion of voters were in favour of a parliament were just as likely (or unlikely) to have a high turnout as areas in which a lower than average proportion were in favour.

In fact, the pattern of turnout variation was very similar to the patterns which occur in general and local elections. It was higher in more middle class and affluent areas than it was in more working class and poorer areas, and it was notably lower in inner cities. In general elections these broad social differences are overlain by political considerations - most obviously the marginality of constituencies and the consequent variations in local campaign effort put in by the parties. Such considerations were absent, of course, in the referendum (and may help explain why turnouts in referendums are usually lower than in general elections). Table 2 shows simple correlations between referendum turnout and some social and political features of the local authority areas. As expected, turnout was higher where there were more

professional and managerial workers and lower where there were more manual workers. Although the coefficients for % owner occupiers and % council tenants are not statistically significant (the relatively small number of local authority areas means that a correlation has to be strong to achieve this) they are in the expected direction, as is that for % private tenants. Turnout also tended to be lower (although the correlation coefficient does not quite achieve statistical significance) in more agricultural areas, probably reflecting the traditionally poor turnout in North East Scotland. This is also likely to explain the negative correlation between turnout and Liberal Democrat performance in the 1997 general election as the latter scored well in Aberdeenshire and the Highlands. There is no significant association with the performances of the other parties in the 1997 election, however. The strongest correlation of all is between turnout in the referendum and turnout in the 1995 local elections (0.574). This emphasises the extent to which 'normal' electoral behaviour was repeated at the referendum. (See Appendix.)

Table 2
Correlations with Local Authority Turnout in the Referendum

% professional and managerial	0.360*	Turnout in local elections 1995	0.574*
% manual workers	-0.428*	% Conservative 1997	0.302
% owner occupiers	0.271	% Labour 1997	0.242
% council tenants	-0.112	% Lib Dem 1997	-0.394*
% private tenants	-0.367*	% SNP 1997	0.042
% employed in agriculture	-0.309		

*Note: * = statistically significant, $p < .05$.*

There was, then nothing strikingly unusual in the pattern of turnout in the referendum across the country. It was lower where we would expect voters to be relatively reluctant to vote on any occasion, and higher where we would expect voters to be regular participants in elections. As we noted above, variations in the extent and intensity of local campaigning on referendum turnout might also explain variations in turnout. Recent work on constituency campaigning at general elections suggests that campaign effort plays an important part in mobilising support for political parties (Denver and Hands 1997). The local campaign might well make a difference in a referendum, too, with active campaigns increasing turnout. Indeed, one could argue on a

priori grounds, that, with party loyalty not being so important, local campaigning might matter more in referendums than in elections. Anecdotal evidence seems to bear out this interpretation: one further reason for the very low turnout in Glasgow, for example, might be that very little local campaigning seems to have taken place there.

Table 3
Support For a Scottish Parliament in Opinion Polls

Should there be a Scottish parliament?

Company	Sponsor	Publication	Yes %	No %	Don't know %
System 3	Herald	June 1997	64	21	15
System 3	Herald	July 1997	68	21	10
System 3	Herald	August 1997	65	19	16
System 3	Herald	2/9/97	61	23	18
NOP	Sunday Times	7/9/97	63	21	16
ICM	Scotland on Sunday	7/9/97	60	25	15
MORI	STV	8/9/97	67	22	11
System 3	Herald	10/9/97	61	20	19
ICM	Scotsman	10/9/97	63	25	12

Should a Scottish Parliament have tax-varying powers?

Company	Sponsor	Publication	Yes %	No %	Don't know %
System 3	Herald	June 1997	53	28	19
System 3	Herald	July 1997	56	26	18
System 3	Herald	August 1997	54	27	19
System 3	Herald	2/9/97	47	32	21
NOP	Sunday Times	7/9/97	51	34	15
ICM	Scotland on Sunday	7/9/97	45	38	17
MORI	STV	8/9/97	51	32	17
System 3	Herald	10/9/97	45	31	24
ICM	Scotsman	10/9/97	48	40	12

The 1997 Scottish Referendum: an Analysis of the Results

SUPPORT FOR THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

In the run-up to the 1979 referendum opinion polls gave supporters of a Scottish Assembly grounds for optimism about the outcome. Bochel and Denver suggested at the time that 'in any election a political party would feel very confident if opinion was as strongly in its favour as it seems to be for the Assembly' (Bochel, Denver and Macartney 1981, p.143). In the event, the 'Yes' lead was steadily whittled away as the campaign progressed. In 1997 things were different. Table 3 shows the results of Scottish opinion polls on the questions posed in the referendum. Once again support for a parliament was initially strong but this time there was no significant slippage as referendum day approached. If 'don't knows' are excluded (as is normal practice) then all of the polls listed reported that more than 70% of the electorate were in favour of a Scottish parliament (the average for all nine being 74% - exactly as the result turned out). Support for tax-varying powers was less enthusiastic and here there is some evidence of slippage. When 'don't knows' are excluded, the polls from July to August averaged 67% in favour; the first four during September averaged 58.5%; the two published on 10 September averaged 57%. In the event (see table 4), support in the referendum for tax-varying powers was stronger than the September polls suggested.

Table 4 shows the final results of the referendum for both questions. Support for a Scottish parliament was overwhelming, with almost three-quarters of all those who voted endorsing the proposal. This was in marked contrast to the 1979 referendum result, when the majority was very narrow. Furthermore, the 1997 result was more emphatic in other ways too. While the '40% of the electorate' rule imposed in 1979 did not apply in 1997, it provides a useful yardstick with which to compare the two votes. As we have seen, although a bare majority of voters supported a parliament in 1979, this fell well short of 40% of electors. In 1997, however, the 40% hurdle was easily cleared, 44.7% of the electorate voting in favour. Moreover, if the 'eligible electorate' is adjusted in the same way as in 1979 (the electorate was reduced by 90,002 to take account of deaths, those under voting age on referendum day, prisoners and those registered in two different places) then an estimated 45.7% voted Yes. Furthermore, whereas in 1979 a majority of the regions had been opposed to devolution, in 1997 all regions voted in favour. A regional comparison between the two referendums is given in table 5 (the 1997 local authorities being combined into the old regional council areas for this purpose). Even in the most lukewarm area, Orkney, a clear majority (57.3%)

voted in favour of a parliament. At the other extreme, more than three-quarters of the voters supported a parliament in the populous regions of Strathclyde, Central and Fife as did almost 80% of voters in the Western Isles. The size of the Yes vote suggests that, in John Smith's phrase, the desire for a parliament in Edinburgh was indeed the 'settled will' of the Scottish people.

Table 4
The Referendum Results

	% of votes cast	% of electorate	% of adjusted electorate
Q1. Support a Scottish parliament			
Yes	74.3	44.7	45.7
No	25.7	15.5	15.8
Q2. Support tax-varying powers			
Yes	63.5	38.1	38.9
No	36.5	21.9	22.4
Turnout		60.4	61.8

Note: the figures under 'adjusted electorate' are comparable with those for the 1979 referendum when the electorate figure was reduced by excluding electors who could not vote.

But while a majority of voters in all parts of the country supported the parliament, there were still significant variations across regions. As table 5 reveals, the regions opposed to an Assembly in 1979 were also those which were least strongly in favour of a parliament in 1997. The regions which had given greatest support to the 1979 proposals were still the strongest supporters in 1997. The country as a whole had moved in favour of a Scottish parliament, but the geography of relative support and scepticism remained unaltered.

The fact that in 1997 results were announced for 32 local authority areas rather than 12 'regions' allows more scope for analysis of the votes. In these areas, the percentage voting 'Yes' on the first referendum question ranged from 57.3% in Orkney to an astonishing 84.7% in West Dunbartonshire. Six areas recorded Yes votes of 80% and above while six (in addition to Orkney and Shetland) were lower than 65%. What explains these variations?

Given the polarised and politicised nature of the devolution campaign, with Labour, the Liberal Democrats, and the SNP all in the Yes camp, and the Scottish Conservatives almost alone on the No camp, we would expect levels of support for the parliament in the local authorities to be closely related to the strength of the parties in the areas concerned. This is certainly true as far as Labour and the Conservatives are concerned. As table 6 shows, Labour's share of the vote in the general election correlates strongly positively and the Conservatives' share strongly negatively with the percentage voting 'Yes' on the first question in the referendum. The better the Conservatives did in the general election, the lower was the Yes vote for a parliament. The better Labour did, the higher the Yes vote. In short, Labour areas were more strongly in favour of a parliament than Conservative areas.

Table 5
Referendum Results by Region 1979 and 1997

Region	1979 Yes %	1997 Yes (Q1) %	1997 Yes (Q2) %
Western Isles	55.8	79.4	68.4
Central	54.7	76.3	65.9
Strathclyde	54.0	78.1	67.7
Fife	53.7	76.1	64.7
Highland	51.0	72.6	62.1
Lothian	50.1	74.5	63.7
Tayside	49.5	67.6	57.0
Grampian	48.3	67.6	55.6
Borders	40.3	62.8	50.7
Dumfries & Galloway	40.3	60.7	48.8
Orkney	27.9	57.3	47.4
Shetland	27.1	62.4	51.6
SCOTLAND	51.6	74.3	63.5

Note: regions are listed in descending order of the 'Yes' vote in 1979.

It is important to remember that the analysis of results for different areas does not allow us to make inferences about the behaviour of individuals within

those areas. This is illustrated by the apparently surprising fact that the stronger the support for the Liberal Democrats in the general election the weaker was the Yes vote in the referendum (correlation of -0.578). After all the Liberal Democrats are long-time proponents of devolution and the Scottish Liberal Democrat leadership figured prominently in the Yes campaign. But Liberal Democrat support in Scotland is concentrated in the Borders, the rural North East and the Highlands and these are also the areas where what remains of Conservative support is concentrated. The negative correlation does not necessarily mean that Liberal Democrat voters were lukewarm in their support for a parliament - we require survey data to test that interpretation - but simply that areas of relative Conservative strength were also conservative in their approach to the question of Scotland's constitutional status. By the same token, the absence of any significant association between SNP strength and the size of the Yes vote should not be interpreted as meaning that SNP supporters were hesitant about voting Yes. It reflects the fact that in the 1997 general election the SNP did well in some traditionally Conservative areas but also quite well in traditionally Labour areas.

Table 6
Correlations with % Yes (first question) in the Referendum

% professional and managerial	-0.517*	% Conservative 1997	-0.723*
% manual workers	0.312	% Labour 1997	0.826*
% owner occupiers	-0.629*	% Lib Dem 1997	-0.578*
% council tenants	0.733*	% SNP 1997	0.065
% private tenants	-0.692*		
% employed in agriculture	-0.727*		
% Scottish born	0.729*		

*Note: * = statistically significant, $p < .05$.*

Table 6 also shows the correlations between the percentage voting Yes and some aspects of the social make-up of local authority areas. Given the relationships with party strength it is not surprising to find that support for the Scottish parliament was lower in more middle-class areas (negative correlations with % professional and managerial and % owner occupiers) and higher in more working class areas (positive correlations with % manual

workers and % council tenants). There is also a strong negative correlation with % employed in agriculture. This may reflect an anti-Central belt element in the voting. In both 1979 and 1997 some concern was expressed in more rural and remote parts of Scotland that a Scottish parliament would be dominated by politicians from the Central belt - in particular by Labour members from the urban West of Scotland - and that rural interests and concerns would be swamped. This interpretation is supported by our analysis since even when we take account of Conservative strength and the proportion of middle class voters there is still a significant negative association between the level of agricultural employment and the size of the Yes vote.

Finally, there is a significant relationship between how 'Scottish' an area is (as indicated by the proportion of the population born in Scotland) and the size of the Yes vote. Although 'Scottishness' overlaps with some of our other measures it seems that the more Scottish a community the greater was the support for the parliament. This may appear an obvious result but it suggests that the Yes campaign drew support from areas where a Scottish identity is likely to be more common and, possibly, more intense.

In sum, then, analysis of the local authority results shows that there was a distinct pattern to voting in the referendum. Primarily, we would suggest, the pattern is party-based, reflecting the traditional support for Labour and the Conservatives. But there was a clear social division in levels of enthusiasm for devolution and there is also evidence of a rural-urban difference. In addition, areas which are more homogeneously Scottish were more strongly in favour of a parliament than those which are relatively heterogeneous. (See Appendix.)

SUPPORT FOR TAX-RAISING POWERS

There was little real surprise at the victory of the Yes camp on the first question in the referendum. The only doubt was over the extent of the winning margin. But the result on the second question, on whether the new Scottish parliament should have limited tax varying powers, was less certain. Some saw this as the Achilles' heel of Labour's proposals. The conventional wisdom of voting studies, after all, is that the electorate does not vote for tax rises (as George Bush found to his cost in the 1992 American presidential election). But as we have seen (table 4) the referendum produced another clear majority in favour of giving the parliament tax powers (63.5%). While the majority was clear, it would not have been enough to cross the 1979 threshold of support from 40% of the electorate - whether or not the

electorate figure is adjusted in the same way as in 1979 - since the proposal was supported by 38.1% of the Scottish electorate (38.9% when adjusted). Only two of the old Scottish local government regions, Central and Strathclyde, crossed the 40% threshold. In Orkney and Shetland, only around a quarter of the electorate voted in favour of tax-raising powers.

The pattern of voting on tax varying powers across local authorities was almost identical to the pattern of voting on having a Scottish parliament. The correlation between the two votes is virtually perfect (0.986). The same sorts of areas which voted heavily in favour of a parliament also voted heavily in favour on the tax powers question. But, of course, the overall level of support for tax powers was 10.8 percentage points lower and this decline was remarkably uniform across the country. The largest drop in the Yes percentage between the two questions was in Renfrewshire (-15.5). This may have been a consequence of the publicity surrounding alleged corruption among Labour councillors in Paisley, with some voters apparently being unwilling to trust politicians to handle their money. The smallest drop was in Glasgow (-8.6). When we calculate the difference between the two votes as a percentage of the Yes vote - thus getting an estimate of the proportion of 'Yes-No' voters (assuming that few cast a 'No-Yes' vote) we find that the figure is 14.8%. Again this was lowest in Glasgow (10.6%) but this time it was highest in Moray (22.1%).

It is by no means clear that the decisive majority in favour of tax varying powers demonstrates a high level of altruism among the Scottish electorate, even although a number of surveys have shown that voters in Scotland are more likely to favour high public spending, and high taxation to pay for it, than are voters in the south of England (Pattie and Johnston 1990; Bennie et al 1997). There is also evidence that at least some Scottish voters were well aware that giving tax-varying powers to the new parliament could mean increased taxes in Scotland but were, nonetheless, prepared to support the proposal. Preliminary results from a survey of Scottish electors, which we carried out immediately after the referendum, show that, of those who voted and who agreed that devolution 'would mean extra taxes for Scotland', 45% (N=829) voted in favour of tax-varying powers (and 55% against).

On the other hand, the tax-varying powers on offer for the new Scottish parliament are limited. The parliament is entitled to vary Scottish taxes by a modest 3 pence in the pound. Indeed, in what came to be seen as one of the few Labour gaffes of the 1997 general election, Tony Blair caused a furore in Scotland by making unguarded comments which were interpreted (if somewhat unfairly) by the media as suggesting that the powers of the

Scottish parliament were comparable to those of a parish council in England. Speculating a little, we might suggest that voting 'Yes' or 'No' to the tax question was actually used by voters as a means of expressing the strength of their support for the parliament. A 'No-No' vote expressed clear opposition, 'Yes-No' a partial endorsement, and 'Yes-Yes' a full vote of confidence. 'Yes-Yes' voters were voting for a parliament with teeth, we suspect, rather than necessarily for higher taxes and public spending. It was on the tax issue that the residual opposition to devolution seems to have expressed itself. The only two local authority areas to vote against taxation powers, Orkney (with 47.4% voting for the measure), and Dumfries and Galloway (with 48.8% in favour) had both voted against devolution in 1979, as had other areas where the winning margin for the 1997 Yes to taxation powers vote was narrow, such as Borders (50.7%), Shetland (51.6%), Grampian (55.6%) and Tayside (57.0%).

CONCLUSION

The Scottish devolution referendum marked the end of an era. For most of the twentieth century, the home rule debate has formed a backdrop to Scottish politics (Mitchell 1997). While it has rarely dominated the political agenda in Scotland, it has always been just below the surface. The decisive 'Yes-Yes' vote provides a clear mandate for a parliament which should be in place in Edinburgh by the year 2000, almost 300 years after the last Scottish parliament abolished itself. Moreover, the new parliament will be elected by a form of proportional representation - which will make it difficult for any single party to win a majority of seats - and could see the development of an entirely new style of politics.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the decisive result, so markedly in contrast with the 1979 result, was largely a product of the experience of the preceding 18 years of Conservative government. Late in the referendum campaign, Mrs Thatcher kept a long-planned speaking engagement in Scotland. Such was the animus against her, seven years after she had left office, that a leading Scottish tabloid featured her photograph on its front page, along with the headline 'If you still need a reason to vote Yes: here's one'!

The referendum achieved another purpose. The result confers an initial legitimacy on the Scottish parliament which might have been contested if the government had proceeded without a referendum. When the will of the people is expressed so clearly - and much more clearly than is possible in a

general election - it is difficult, in practical political terms, for opponents to think of reversing the policy at some future date.

Our analysis has shown that when called upon to decide a constitutional issue the electorate can turn out in very reasonable numbers, even without very much stimulus in the form of local campaigning. But it also sounds a warning for future referendums planned by the government. The results were strongly related to the levels of support for the Conservative and Labour parties. This referendum was held early in the term of office of the new government. It was still enjoying a honeymoon with the electorate and Tony Blair was hugely popular while the Conservatives were weak and discredited in Scotland. It may be that if referendums are held when the government is less popular - as was the case in 1979 - then it may find it more difficult to get its proposals so massively endorsed. A fickle electorate can undermine constitutional innovation by referendum just as surely as it swept away objections to Scottish devolution.

APPENDIX

1. The electorates of the local authorities vary greatly in size. Glasgow, the largest, has an electorate of almost 480,00 while Orkney, the smallest, has just over 15,500 electors. As a result, the mean turnout for the 32 authorities differs from the overall national turnout. The same applies to other mean scores.
2. Since the local authorities vary so much in size, but count equally as cases in correlation analysis, it is possible that our analysis gives too much weight to small authorities. We therefore calculated partial correlations controlling for the size of the electorate in an authority. In this analysis, the coefficients for turnout in local elections, % professional and managerial and % manual remain significant and that for % owner occupiers becomes significant. The coefficient for % Liberal Democrat in 1997 is no longer significant.
3. As before, we checked these conclusions by calculating partial correlation coefficients controlling for the size of electorate. All of the coefficients are significant and are of the same order as in the simple bivariate analysis.

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