

Attitudes to Coalitions and Split Ticket Voting: The Scottish Parliament Elections of 2007

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ABSTRACT: The Scottish Parliament elections of 2007 were the third to be held under the country's mixed-member proportional system. As voters continue to learn about and adapt to the new system, we explore two aspects of its use: i) attitudes to coalition as opposed to single-party government, and ii) ticket splitting. Previous literature and aspects of the Scottish context suggest a range of factors that might predict such attitudes and behaviour; the fact that many of these factors are common to both dependent variables implies that both could be interpreted within an overall model of voters' partisan attachments, ideological positions and strategic calculations. Empirically, we find that rather different factors predict the two variables: ticket splitting looks to be based on strategic partisan or ideological calculation, whereas coalition attitudes are less about partisan interests and more about an overall view of the kind of policies and the kind of politics delivered by coalitions. There is also clear evidence of a link between our two dependent variables, with some voters apparently splitting their ticket because they would prefer a coalition. We conclude by wondering whether this is indeed a direct causal effect, or whether both favouring coalitions and splitting tickets are a function of a general apartisan or multi-partisan approach to politics.

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Introduction

On 3 May 2007 voters went to the polls to elect members for the third term of the Scottish Parliament at Holyrood. This then was voters' third use of the mixed-member proportional (MMP) system that was instituted for Scottish elections under the terms of devolution. Until 1999, the Scots had experience only of the plurality systems that had to that point been used for general, local and European elections. Scottish Parliament elections thus confronted voters with a system completely new to them; not only that, but such mixed systems are generally agreed to be among the more difficult for voters to use (e.g. Bawn 1999; Farrell and Gallagher 1999). This combination of novelty and complexity means that Scotland is a useful case for those interested in observing the ways that voters adapt to the incentive structures within electoral systems.

In this paper, we examine two key features of voters using MMP: i) attitudes to coalition government, and ii) ticket splitting. Although coalitions are not of course inevitable under proportional systems – the 2007 elections ultimately resulted in a minority government – they are now central to the electoral equation in Scotland, while remaining the very rare exception in Westminster politics. Meanwhile, the ballot structure affords voters an opportunity to give support to two different parties. Hitherto the only variant on ticket splitting possible in the British electoral context was the possibility to vote for two different parties in those rare years in which general and local elections were held simultaneously (Rallings and Thrasher 2003). Both attitudes to coalition government and split-ticket voting are therefore worth exploring in some detail. Moreover, they are worth exploring together, because there are clear conceptual links between the two, both being in some sense reflections of multiple partisan preferences. Indeed, one interpretation of split-ticket voting is as a behavioural result of the preference for a coalition of the two parties supported.

These issues are yet to undergo detailed scrutiny in the literature on Scottish electoral behaviour, although as we see below various ad hoc analyses offer some pointers. The findings presented here are relevant not only for those interested in Scottish elections, but those concerned with MMP systems more generally. We add to the (growing but still relatively meagre) evidence base on coalition attitudes and split ticket voting in those systems. Furthermore, the differences between Scotland and the other principal sources of data – notably Germany and New Zealand – help us to understand how the impact of mixed systems varies according to institutional and contextual factors. The Scottish party system is complex and in flux. Additionally, as there is no formal threshold for representation at Holyrood it may be more difficult for voters to discern the relative electoral viability of the smaller parties. Perhaps most fundamentally, Scottish elections are (in some senses at least) sub-national elections. This matters partly because it calls into question their position on the first- to second-order continuum (Rallings and Thrasher 2005), but also because it means Scots can directly compare MMP to the very different and long-established plurality electoral system used for Westminster elections.

Our study is based on data collected at the 2007 elections. This is partly because we can draw on surveys expressly designed to investigate these topics (among others). There are two further reasons why 2007 is a useful focus of study. First, as polling day approached the coalition picture was extremely messy, with nothing ruled in and little ruled out, and the leading parties still expressing hopes of being able to govern alone. Second, the simultaneous staging of

local elections under STV – a system brand new to Scottish voters – might be expected to have brought electoral systems, and their tactical implications, to the forefront of voters’ minds.¹

Given the shortage of previous research into these matters in Scottish elections, this is an exploratory study. Moreover, mindful of the complexity of the party system and the coalition prospects in 2007, we stick to a fairly straightforward approach. Our aim is to identify the individual-level factors that predict whether a voter will: i) favour a coalition over single-party government; ii) split her ticket. (The results from these analyses can then guide more detailed future investigations of specific coalition preferences, and of particular combinations of split tickets.) We begin by reviewing the literature on coalition attitudes and split-ticket voting in MMP systems, in order to pick out some likely predictors, and to discuss the rather involved relationship between coalitions and split tickets. Then, having briefly described the data and measures to be used, we present our multivariate models of coalition attitudes and split-ticket voting in 2007. To conclude, we consider what our findings may imply about the nature of decision-making in the multi-party politics that is fairly new to Scottish voters.

Coalition attitudes

In this study we use the term ‘coalition attitudes’ rather than ‘coalition preferences’. This is intended to indicate that, as mentioned above, we are concerned with *whether* a voter would like to see coalition government, rather than *which* particular coalition they would favour. Although there are data available on specific coalition preferences in 2007, analysis is rendered difficult by the diversity of preferences, which in turn is partly a result of the fact that so many conceivable coalitions were still on the table on election day. Unlike other MMP contexts the Scottish parties have not, thus far, taken to issuing explicit statements of potential post-election coalition arrangements they intend to pursue. The diversity in potential coalitions not only generates complexity but also reduces cell sizes, making the prediction of preferences less reliable.

The question of why a voter might or might not support coalition government has received little attention. One reason for this may be that, in most democracies, coalitions are either more or less inevitable or virtually unheard of. It would seem oddly hypothetical to ask a Belgian whether she would prefer single-party government, and equally strange to ask an English voter whether she would like to see a coalition in Westminster. Judging by the first two terms at Holyrood, Scotland falls closer to Belgium on that continuum. Yet, as noted, the third term has begun with single-party rule, albeit a minority (Scottish National Party) government with just 31% of the list vote and 36% of the seats. In Scotland, then, there is pressing reason to ask about coalition attitudes, and in surveys at all three Holyrood elections voters have been asked whether they favour government by a single party or by a coalition. There is considerable support for coalition government, with between 50% and 60% reporting a preference for coalition

¹ A third reason to look at 2007 relates to the unusually high rate of rejected ballots at those elections (Carman et al. 2007). Although the rejected ballots debacle, as it can without hyperbole be described, undoubtedly has serious implications, it should not be taken as indicating that Scottish voters in general are unable to cope with their MMP system. The previous two elections held in 1999 and 2003 did not display phenomenally high levels of rejected ballots. Furthermore, the vast majority of voters cast valid votes, and to assess understanding of the system we need to examine these just as closely as the rejected ballots.

government (Curtice 2006b, 134).² Further, this support seems to be relatively stable over time. Excluding the ‘don’t knows’, 56% of respondents to the 2003 Scottish Social Attitudes survey reported they prefer coalition government in Holyrood whilst 59% of 2007 Scottish Election Study respondents similarly favoured coalitions. The additional fact that similar proportions favour coalitions for Westminster government means that these look like genuine preferences (Curtice and Jowell 1998). Less direct evidence along the same lines comes from the 1999 findings that voters split 3:1 in disagreement with contentions that the new electoral system would lead to unstable government, and would give too much power to small parties (Paterson et al. 2001, 75-6).

Of course, these descriptive statistics do not tell us about who favours coalition government and why. Evidence on those questions is sparse, and not just in Scotland. However, there is one useful analysis from New Zealand. Karp and Bowler (2001) posit two grounds on which a voter might decide whether she favours coalitions.³ The first is straightforward partisanship: “some of this assessment is likely to be based on whether their preferred party has enough support to govern alone” (2001, 62; see also Pappi and Thurner 2002, 216). The second is based on the plausible notion that voters (especially perhaps those less preoccupied by politics) do not distinguish between coalitions in the abstract and coalitions in practice. In this case they will answer the general coalition attitudes question by judging the performance of recent governments of either type.⁴ Both of these hypotheses receive support, with coalitions much more popular among supporters of small parties and among those positively evaluating the then governing coalition (Karp and Bowler 2001, 66).

Karp and Bowler thus present an instrumental and valence-flavoured model of coalition attitudes. In addition to testing this model on Scottish voters, we extend it to include ideological and political cultural dimensions. Karp and Bowler hint at the ideological point when arguing that preference for one-party government is most likely to be seen among those seeking “specific and possibly quite radical policies” (2001, 63). The tendency of coalitions to deliver more consensual and less extreme outcomes means that we would expect them to be favoured by those voters who themselves take a more moderate stance on policy issues.⁵ Leaving aside the policy *outputs* of coalitions, some voters may simply prefer the *processes* of coalition government: it is associated with a more cooperative, less adversarial style of policymaking. Speculatively, this may explain why Karp and Bowler (2001, 66) found that more educated voters were more inclined to favour coalition government: education (especially at university) involves the kind of discussion, and is held to foster the tolerance for opposing viewpoints, that is more characteristic of coalitions (e.g. Golebiowska 1995). It may also lead us to expect women, who have been

² In 1999, strong support for coalitions could plausibly have been attributed to a general desire for a ‘new’ Scottish politics, as different as possible from Westminster politics. It is noteworthy, then, that the proportion favouring coalition government has held up at subsequent elections.

³ They also look at a third, ethnic minority status, but that is less directly relevant to Scotland whose ethnic minorities are smaller and more diverse than the Maori minority in NZ.

⁴ This inference from the specific to the abstract was especially important in New Zealand, where the first MMP election resulted in a coalition that was an unpopular combination even before its performance could be judged. That experience could have soured voters’ opinions of coalition government in general (see Karp and Bowler 1999).

⁵ Since, in Scotland at least, the smaller parties tend to be more ideologically polarised, we would expect ideologues in the electorate to be pulled in two different directions: coalitions offer more radical parties a chance of power, but they also tend to inhibit radical policy. Nonetheless, controlling for support for specific small parties, we would expect ideologues to be less favourable towards coalition government.

argued to favour a more consensual style of politics (e.g. Childs 2004), to be keener on coalitions, although Karp and Bowler found no significant effect of gender (2001, 66).

A very different reason for the education effect observed by Karp and Bowler is that the education variable was serving as a surrogate for political awareness, and that more knowledgeable voters were aware that the patterns of party support in NZ made single-party government highly unlikely. This reading raises concerns about how respondents interpret the coalition attitudes question: do they report their preference in an ideal world, or given the party system that confronts them?⁶ Differing interpretations of the question may be one reason why, judging by the pseudo- R^2 (0.06) reported by Karp and Bowler, coalition attitudes are difficult to predict. Another reason is that it is a fairly obscure topic anyway. Converse (1964) famously reported that many voters lacked stable attitudes on even the most controversial issues of the day; ‘nonattitudes’, or at least weakly-held opinions, seem likely to be still more common on abstract constitutional questions like those tapping coalition attitudes.⁷ The upshot is that, even with a well-specified model of such attitudes, we are unlikely to be able to explain an impressive proportion of variance. In the concluding section we say a little more about this situation and what might be done about it.

Ticket splitting

Any discussion of ticket splitting needs to be prefaced with a cautionary methodological note. There are two main ways of estimating the amount and pattern of ticket splitting: inference from aggregate results, and survey reports of voting behaviour. The former method has become much more accurate thanks to advances in techniques of ecological inference (King 1997; Burden and Kimball 1998), but does not allow us to measure the individual-level correlates of ticket splitting. The latter approach allows for that, but is subject both to sampling bias – that is, the sample is not representative of the electorate – and to response bias, with some respondents misreporting their vote choice either through forgetfulness, confusion, or occasionally deceit (e.g. Wright 1993). As we discuss in the ‘Data and measures’ section below, the survey data used in this study show evidence of both forms of bias. The implications of this for our multivariate analyses are assessed later. At this stage, we need our survey data simply to estimate the *extent* of ticket splitting in 2007, and for that purpose the best strategy is to ‘reverse-weight’ the data so that it reproduces the marginals of vote choice.

Measured thus, ticket splitting in Scotland appears to be on the increase, at 27% in 2007 compared to roughly 20% in 1999 (Paterson et al. 2001, 78). The increase compared with previous elections is likely to be due in part to a strategic decision on the part of the minor parties to run very few if any candidates in the constituency seats (in which they would stand no chance). Any voter opting for a minor party on the regional list is therefore by definition a ticket-splitter, unless she abstains in the constituency vote. Turning to cross-national comparison, the figure is roughly what would be expected given the positive association posited by Karp et al. (2002) between the extent of ticket splitting and the complexity of the party

⁶ Karp and Bowler (2001, 65) clarified interpretations somewhat, by asking a question reminding respondents that single-party government would entail disproportionality. Unsurprisingly, this increased support for coalitions, though not hugely.

⁷ As Thurner and Pappi (1999, 12) find, even specific coalition preferences – that is, the parties involved – are surprisingly resistant to accurate prediction.

system. Thus Scotland sees more splitting than the simpler system in Germany (Klingemann and Wessels 2003), but less than in emerging and fragmented party systems like Russia (McAllister and White 1998).⁸ This correlation is evidently not the whole story, given that the Scottish party system is not markedly simpler than that in New Zealand which sees around 35% ticket splitting (Johnston and Pattie 2003). In this section we point to some important institutional details that also influence the amount of ticket splitting in Scotland. For the moment, suffice it to note that ticket splitting is common enough a phenomenon to be well worth investigating.

The use of survey data, combined with the complexity of the party system, means that we have insufficient cases to predict reliably different combinations or types of ticket splitting (cf. Rallings and Thrasher 2003; Karp et al. 2002; Pappi and Thurner 2002). Instead, as with coalition attitudes, we are concerned with the simple questions of who splits their ticket and why. Compared to coalition attitudes, split ticket behaviour in MMP systems has proved somewhat easier to model, with individual-level factors enabling around 80% correct prediction of whether a voter splits her ticket (e.g. Gschwend 2006; Karp et al. 2002). To classify such factors, we use Gschwend's (2006) basic distinction between capacity and motivation.⁹ Motivations to split ticket are dealt with in detail below. First, we explore what is meant by capacity in this context.

Ticket splitting is now usually regarded as a variant of strategic voting (Cox and Schoppa 1998; Bawn 1999; Paterson et al. 2001; Karp et al. 2002).¹⁰ As such, it is likely to be the province of the more politically aware and sophisticated portion of the electorate. Paterson et al. point to "a sizeable minority within the Scottish electorate who are politically interested and well informed about the political situations in which their votes are cast. These voters are willing and able to make full use of the new electoral system in casting their votes" (2001, 81). This highlights the dual purposes of awareness: a successful ticket-splitting strategy requires knowledge both of the way the system works and of the context – that is, the constituency and the region – in which the voter is using it. Unsurprisingly, then, political awareness – measured in a variety of ways – is a potent predictor of split ticket voting (Karp et al. 2002; Roscoe 2003; Gschwend 2006). Splitting is also more common among those describing themselves as tactical voters (Rallings and Thrasher 2003; Paterson et al. 2001) and among those reporting that opinion polls influenced their decision (Pappi and Thurner 2002).

This does not mean, however, that ticket splitting is invariably strategic, let alone successfully so. Analyses routinely reveal that substantial proportions – usually around one third – of split tickets are in combinations that are strategically sub-optimal (Jesse 1988; Pappi and Thurner 2002; Karp et al. 2002; Curtice 2006a). The most common example is voting for a small party in a constituency seat that it stands no chance of winning, but there is a wide range of other possibilities.¹¹ This sub-optimal behaviour is not surprising given Schmitt-Beck's (1993) finding of widespread confusion among German voters about their country's MMP system. One common misconception is that the two votes are intended for the reporting of first and second

⁸ The figure is also higher than that for ticket splitting when general and local elections are held simultaneously in Britain (Rallings and Thrasher 2003).

⁹ Gschwend's focus is rightly on specifically political capacities and motivations. Demographic variables have usually proved weak predictors of ticket-splitting behaviour (e.g. Rallings and Thrasher 2003; Roscoe 2003).

¹⁰ This is perhaps partly due to its obvious links with dealignment, which has been (mis-)characterised as a shift from unthinking loyalty to a party to a more rational and judgemental approach (e.g. Rose and McAllister 1986).

¹¹ Clearly the proportion varies according to the definition of optimality. Most authors adopt a fairly relaxed criterion, with optimal splitting defined as 'large party in the constituency, small party on the list'. Gschwend (2006) sets a more demanding yardstick, that the combination must also match the two most likely coalitions, and finds only one in three splits to be optimal.

preferences: this leads by definition to split-ticket voting. Survey data from 1999 and 2003 suggest that this misunderstanding is extremely common among Scottish voters (Curtice 2006b, 125-6), and confusion may have been redoubled in 2007 when, due to redesign of the ballot papers, what had been the ‘first’ (the constituency vote) became the ‘second’ vote and vice versa.¹² Another possible source of confusion is the counter-intuitive fact that constituency votes are largely irrelevant for seat shares (Bawn 1999; Karp et al. 2002, 6), although it is unclear whether voters failing to grasp this are more or less likely to split their ticket. All of this has two implications about the relationship between political awareness and ticket-splitting: first, it will be dampened by sub-optimal splits; second, it may be curvilinear, with a certain level of awareness required for splitting, but with the most knowledgeable voters realising the limits on what such behaviour can achieve.

We turn now to motivations for ticket splitting. Before discussing various reasons for splitting, we should first note the central motivation for *not* splitting (that is, for ‘straight-ticket’ voting), namely partisanship. Strongly partisan voters are unlikely to defect from their preferred party in either vote, and so models of splitting invariably involve a significant and strongly negative coefficient for partisanship (Karp et al. 2002; Rallings and Thrasher 2003; Roscoe 2003; Gschwend 2006). Dealignment notwithstanding, large proportions of voters in Western democracies continue to report a party allegiance, and this evidently places an upper limit on the extent of split-ticket voting.

Since every vote counts (more or less) in the proportional component of mixed systems, the central strategic motivation for ticket splitting is to avoid wasted constituency votes. As Karp et al. put it, “rational voters whose first preference is for a party or candidate they know has little or no chance of winning in their local electorate [constituency] will defect and support a more viable alternative” (2002, 3). The consequence is that supporters of small parties have been shown to be much more likely to split their ticket (Thurner and Pappi 1999; Paterson et al. 2001; Pappi and Thurner 2002; Karp et al. 2002; Gschwend 2006). In the Scottish elections of 2007, this kind of strategic splitting was in effect obligatory because the smaller parties ran candidates in hardly any of the constituency contests.¹³

Another motivation for splitting is a personal vote, in which an elector defects from her preferred party (and list vote choice) to support a particular candidate in the constituency seat. Strictly, this is the only rational motivation for splitting: “since only the second [regional] vote affects seats shares, a voter who casts a split ticket must care about the identity of her district representative” (Bawn 1999, 493). Moser and Scheiner (2005) show that the personal vote is a major driver of split-ticket voting in a variety of mixed systems (see also Karp et al. 2002). Their analysis excludes Scotland, but Curtice (2006b, 135-6) provides clear evidence of a personal vote there, too: among those reporting that their constituency vote was for a specific candidate, fully half were split-ticket voters.

Scottish elections differ importantly from those analysed in the literature reviewed here, in that they are sub-national and in some respects regarded as second-order with respect to general elections to Westminster. Curtice (2006a) investigates the possibility that these elections, being seen as less important, give voters ‘a chance to experiment’ by supporting smaller parties, and

¹² This reversal should in the long run help voters, in that they will be better served by voting for their first preference on the regional list.

¹³ Gschwend (2006) argues that, in the German context, the potency of this wasted vote argument depends on the closeness of the constituency race: to defect from a small party in a safe seat would be to swap one type of wasted vote for another.

hence in some cases by ticket-splitting. He finds little evidence of this in the 2003 election, with those who believed that the election mattered being just as likely to support small parties. Here we run a similar test, this time with ticket-splitting as the key dependent variable, and with two indicators of subjective importance: interest in the elections, and how much the result is perceived to matter.

A recurring theme in the literature on ticket splitting in the US is the suggestion that some voters seek by splitting to achieve balance, with different offices in the hands of different parties (Fiorina 1992; Alesina and Rosenthal). More recent studies have found rather little support for this ‘balancing hypothesis’ (e.g. Burden and Kimball 1998; Grofman et al. 2000; Roscoe 2003; Geer et al. 2004; though see Rallings and Thrasher 2003, 558), and in any case ticket splitting in an American context is institutionally a very different phenomenon from that explored here, in which both votes are for the same legislative body. However, if the notion of balance is considered in the context of ideology, it may be applicable. It is, for example, possible that split-ticket voting in mixed systems is more common among moderates, sharing their votes between two parties in the hope that the resulting policy will fall in the middle-ground between them (see Kedar 2005). Alternatively, ticket splitting may be more common among ideologues, who use the list vote to support more extreme parties while still avoiding a wasted constituency vote.¹⁴ We can use data from 2007 to explore these possibilities.

These points about using split-ticket voting to influence policy lead neatly on to the final potential motivation for splitting: that is, to support a particular coalition. Given the importance of this possibility for our study, we dedicate a separate section to it.

Coalition attitudes and split-ticket voting

As before, we need to distinguish between coalition preferences and coalition attitudes. Dealing first with *preferences*, we should note that mixed systems, because only one of the votes goes to determine seat shares, do not allow voters to support particular coalitions. By supporting a party on the regional list, voters can boost the likelihood that that party will be in a coalition, but they cannot influence the composition of that coalition. Turning to coalition *attitudes*, the question becomes: can a voter, by splitting her ticket, increase the chances that there will be a coalition (of whatever make-up)? Here the answer is yes, but such a deliberate strategy is really only open to supporters of larger parties, and then potentially at the expense of that preferred party. Supporters of small parties should vote for them on in the PR component anyway, and what they then do with the constituency vote will not affect the likelihood of a coalition.¹⁵ Supporters of large parties – though not large enough to govern alone – can defect on the regional vote to a smaller party, presumably their preferred coalition partner. This strategy will be most rational, and most effective, where that large party would not benefit from a list vote. To take a Scottish example, the Labour vote in Glasgow is so strong that the party wins virtually every constituency, and hence receives no top-up list seats. So Labour-supporting Glaswegians can improve the chances both that there will be a coalition, and that their second-preference party

¹⁴ Since only one of the two votes will influence seat shares, these are not rational strategies, but they may nevertheless drive some ticket-splitting behaviour (some of which may appear objectively rational).

¹⁵ When Pappi and Thurner argue that small-party supporters “have a clear incentive to give their first [constituency] vote to the present or prospective coalition partner” (2002, 228), they are correct only due to the technicality of surplus seats, or *überhangmandaten* (see Bawn 1999).

will be in it. One element missing from the Scottish calculation, though, is the threshold for representation, set at 5% in Germany and New Zealand. Gschwend (2006) demonstrates that the kind of strategic defection from large parties described above is more common when it is unclear whether the second-preference small party is at risk of falling beneath the threshold. Although there is an effective threshold in operation in the Scottish mixed system, it is neither formalised nor discussed widely enough to be a likely influence on voters' tactical thinking.

All of this abstruse tactical detail risks missing the point, though. In the previous section we noted a range of motivations for ticket splitting, most of which would fail a strict test of rationality. There is an intuitive plausibility about voters splitting their ticket between their two most preferred parties, and as Pappi and Thurner point out, they may well do so "without considering which vote is more pivotal for which party" (2002, 215). This simpler interpretation of coalition-driven ticket splitting is more plausible given that, as a wealth of studies have shown, vote decisions are much more often based on simple heuristics and loyalties than on intricate understanding and tactical manoeuvring (e.g. Popkin 1991; Kuklinski and Quirk 2000; Lau and Redlawsk 2006). Such voting could also be interpreted as expressive (as opposed to rational) support for a coalition of two parties: in multiparty settings, multiple party identifications are not at all unusual (van der Eijk and Niemöller 1983; Schmitt 2002). It might even be argued that, given the notoriously tenuous link between election results and coalition outcomes (plus of course the infinitesimally small probability of influencing the result anyway), a voter who automatically splits her ticket between her two most-preferred parties is more rational (in the weak sense) than one who pores over the coalition possibilities and how best to bring about the favoured option.

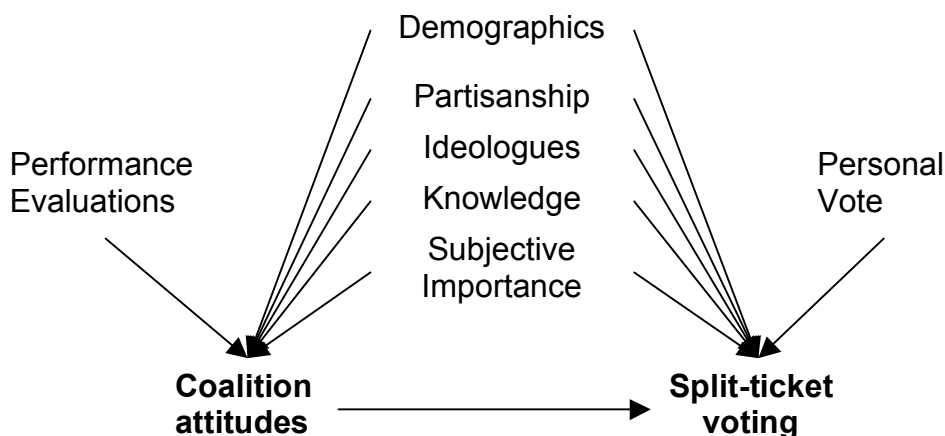
Finally, we come to the rather limited evidence on coalition attitudes, preferences, and split-ticket voting. On coalition attitudes, the only test to date is reported by Thurner and Pappi (1999): they found that German voters who favoured coalition government were indeed more likely to split their tickets (although important factors like awareness and ideological position were not controlled in their model). On preferences, Curtice (2006b, 134-5) finds "little sign that voters have used their two votes to express a coalition preference", pointing out that ticket-splitting behaviour in 2003 was largely unrelated to answers to a question about the preferred coalition. Pappi and Thurner (2002, 226) describe a somewhat different picture on the basis of German evidence, finding that those with tied first-preference parties were likely both to favour a coalition between and to split their ticket – often sub-optimally – among those parties. One reason why evidence on this point will vary across countries and across elections is that voters sometimes get to see a clear menu of coalition options before making their choice, while at other times – as in Scotland in 2007 – they are restricted to guesswork. Split-ticket support for a particular coalition is much more likely if that combination is explicitly on offer to voters prior to the election (see Schoen 2000).

The arguments above sketch a direct causal link between coalition attitudes and ticket-splitting: voting for multiple parties in the hope of encourage multiple-party government. One of our purposes in this study is to test for such an effect. However, the two variables may be linked in a different way. We have listed various factors that have been called upon to explain each, and there is considerable overlap in those lists. In particular, voters' partisanship, level of political awareness, and ideological position seem likely to be prominent predictors both of their attitudes to coalitions and of their propensity to split their ticket.¹⁶ We can therefore sketch a

¹⁶ We have said little about one of the arrows in the diagram, namely that running from subjective importance to coalition attitudes. There is little in the literature on this, but it is at least conceivable that voters might be more

broader conceptual model that depicts both the antecedents of coalition attitudes and split-ticket voting and the relationship between the two. That model is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: A conceptual model of coalition attitudes and split-ticket voting



The diagram makes clear the extent of overlap: most of the independent variables can be expected, or at least hypothesised, to influence both dependent variables. In statistical terms, then, the two may be connected spuriously as well as directly. As a consequence, we need to include a similar batch of measures in equations predicting both coalition attitudes and split ticket voting behaviour. Thus, we minimise the risk of overstating the direct effect of coalition attitudes and split-ticket voting.

Even having controlled for all these measured variables, though, there remains the possibility that the direct effect is overestimated because both coalition attitudes and split-ticket voting are influenced by some other, unmeasured, factor. (This seems all the more likely given that, judging by the variance explained by previous models, we are far from capturing the full range of variables accounting for split-ticket voting and especially coalition attitudes.) There is – by definition – little we can do about possible unmeasured variables other than speculate about their nature and effects. We indulge in some such speculation in the concluding section. Next, we focus on measured variables, describing the data and survey questions used to operationalise these variables and to test the conceptual model illustrated above.

Data and measures

Data and weights

willing to countenance coalitions in what they perceive as second-order contexts. For one thing, many Scottish voters will be accustomed to coalitions in a different second-order arena, namely local government. For another, one common objection to coalitions is that they tend to hinder strong government, and voters may well regard this as more important in first-order contexts. (In discussions of electoral systems, more than one student has asked ‘but if we have a coalition, who has their finger on the nuclear button?’) If such concerns are widespread, the popularity of coalitions is likely to be inversely correlated with subjective importance.

Our data are drawn from the 2007 Scottish Election Study (SES 2007).¹⁷ The pre-election wave of the SES 2007 was in the field two weeks prior to the 3 May elections whilst the post-election wave began the day after polling and continued through 10 May. The survey was administered by YouGov with pre- and post-election samples of 1,872 and 1,552, respectively. Results presented here are based on data weighted to generate a demographically representative sample of the Scottish electorate.

As noted above, our data show some evidence of both sampling and response bias that is difficult to account for with population weights. First, the sampled respondents were disproportionately likely to vote, to vote Scottish National Party (SNP), and to be politically aware. Second, an implausibly large proportion (over 4%) of respondents reported voting for a small (i.e. not one of the bigger four) party in the constituency vote, despite the fact that these minor parties put up constituency candidates in only a small handful of seats.¹⁸ These biases tend to work against one another in terms of measuring the extent of ticket splitting: a disproportionately aware sample is likely to over-represent splitters, while at least some of those who recall opting for a minor party on both votes were probably splitters. The important point, though, is that our analyses are concerned with the correlates rather than the amount of ticket splitting (and coalition attitudes). In this context, it matters less that the weights may not reproduce the exact marginal distributions of those key dependent variables.

Survey measures

Dealing first with the independent variables included in both coalition attitudes and ticket-splitting models, we include three socio-demographic control variables: sex, age on leaving full-time education, and a dummy variable for possession of a university degree.¹⁹ This dual approach to education enables us to assess whether its effect in this context is owed to something specific about higher education.

To assess the influences of partisanship, we include a series of dummy variables indicating respondent party attachment to the four main political parties contesting the Scottish parliament elections, leaving non-identifiers as the excluded category. In addition, we include a variable denoting whether a respondent identified as a supporter of a small party. We should note that, whilst we might be tempted to formulate hypotheses about ticket splitting amongst minor (versus ‘major’) party supporters, unfortunately the minor party identifier in the split-ticket voting equation merely acts as a control variable. As previously mentioned, the smaller parties ran candidates in only a handful of constituencies in 2007. Therefore our minor party identifier variable is included to account for the fact that these voters had no choice but to ‘split’ their vote between a minor and major party (if they were to vote sincerely on the regional list and to vote at all in the constituency).

Like partisanship, political awareness is at the heart of these models. Following Price’s (1999) advice, we use a measure of factual knowledge to operationalise this variable. The index

¹⁷ Data available online at <http://www.scottishelectionstudy.org.uk>.

¹⁸ This is in itself a noteworthy finding, reflecting confusion about the names and perhaps the roles of the different votes.

¹⁹ In an earlier version of the models we included age, on the basis of a speculative hypothesis about older respondents having been more solidly socialised into the adversarial model of Westminster politics. Age had no impact on either dependent variable, and has been excluded from the models presented here.

is constructed by combining responses to a series of knowledge ‘quiz’ items designed to assess respondents’ understanding of the MMP electoral system used in Scotland as well as their knowledge of contemporary Scottish politics. The square of this index is also included, allowing a test for the curvilinear relationship posited in the discussion of ticket splitting above.

We also set out to test Karp and Bowler’s intuition that a preference for one-party government is most likely found amongst those individuals seeking “specific and possibly quite radical policies” (2001, 63). To do so we built an additive index which combined respondent issue positions, measured on eleven-point scales, on whether government policies should be ‘tough on criminals’ or “tough on the causes of crime”, and whether the “government should cut taxes a lot and spend much less on health and social services” or the “government should raise taxes a lot and spend much more on health and social services”. Folding the additive index, we derive a dichotomous measure that divides ‘ideologues’ (those with more extreme policy positions) from ‘moderates’ (those clustering around the midpoints of these issue dimensions).

To test the speculation that second-order election effects might encourage individuals to split their tickets (Curtice 2006a) – and perhaps even to be more open to coalitions – we include two measures of subjective importance of Scottish parliamentary elections: first, reported interest in the 2007 election; second, respondents’ more general assessments of how much it matters who wins Holyrood elections.

Turning now to the unique predictor in each of the models, the first is needed to test Karp and Bowler’s (2001) hypothesis that general coalition attitudes are in part a function of evaluations of the performance of specific recent coalition governments. We construct an additive index of respondents’ evaluations of the 2003-07 coalition executive’s performance on six issues: crime, health, education, the economy, transport, and the environment. Second, for the ticket-splitting model we include a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent reported that she cast a constituency vote “for a particular candidate, regardless of party”. This controls for the personal vote effect.

Coming finally to the two dependent variables, coalition attitudes are read off responses to a question asking respondents “which do you think would generally be better for Scotland nowadays: to have a government in Edinburgh formed by one political party on its own; or to have a government in Edinburgh formed two political parties together in coalition.”²⁰ As reported above, 59% of respondents reported a preference for coalition governments. The derivation and construction of the ticket-splitting variable is self-explanatory, save to note that those who reported casting only one vote (whether on the constituency or regional ballot) were excluded. As both of these dependent variables are dichotomous indicators, the equations estimated and reported below are standard logits with robust standard errors.

Results

Coalition attitudes

Table 1 presents the results from the equation predicting coalition attitudes. The table reports odds ratios, z-scores for each coefficient, and in the case of significant effects an estimate of the percentage change in the odds of favouring a coalition associated with a unit shift in that independent variable.

²⁰ “Don’t know”s were coded as missing.

Table 1: Logistic Regression of Coalition Attitudes on Ideologues, Performance Evaluations, Partisan Affiliation, Subjective Importance, Political Knowledge and Demographic Predictors				
		Odds Ratio	Z	Percent Change
<i>Demographics</i>				
	University	1.45*	1.72	45%
	Terminal Education Age	1.12	1.63	
	Female	1.48**	2.00	48%
<i>Knowledge</i>				
	Politics Knowledge	1.08	1.22	
	(Politics Knowledge) ²	1.00	-1.22	
<i>Subjective Importance</i>				
	Election Interest	0.90	-0.93	
	Matters who wins?	1.00	0.00	
<i>Partisan Affiliation</i>				
	Conservative	0.64	-1.10	
	Labour	0.61	-1.22	
	Liberal Democrat	1.43	0.74	
	Scottish National Party	0.34***	-2.70	-65%
	Minor Party	0.65	-1.03	
<i>Ideological Position</i>				
	Ideologues	0.53***	-3.02	-47%
<i>Performance Evaluation</i>				
	Coalition Executive Perf.	1.10**	2.39	10%

N = 755, Pseudo R² = .11, weighted data, estimated with Stata 10.0, percent change in odds computed using S-Post commands

* p≤.10 ** p≤.05 *** p≤.01

Perhaps the most immediately noticeable feature in Table 1 is the paucity of significant effects. (This, along with a pseudo-R² value of 0.11 and a cases-correctly-classified figure of 65%, echoes earlier comments on the difficulty in predicting this dependent variable.) Certainly political knowledge seems to have no (linear or curvilinear) relationship with coalition attitudes, and the same is true of subjective election importance. The political knowledge result is particularly pertinent because it tends to refute our earlier speculation that an education effect – observed by Karp and Bowler (2001) and here too, at least concerning higher education – is due to an awareness of the party system and its implications for the likelihood of coalitions. Insofar as educated Scots were more favourable towards coalitions, this is not because they know more about Scottish politics, but is due to something more specifically educational.

The picture among the partisanship variables is more mixed. Predictably, the trend is for party identifiers as a group to be less favourable toward coalitions. More surprisingly, maybe, the only exceptions are supporters not of the minor parties but of the Liberal Democrats. This could well be due to likely status within a coalition: the Liberal Democrats are established as

coalition partners who, while junior, have played significant parts in the Scottish executive,²¹ whereas the minor parties could only hope to be makeweights in coalition negotiations. Such specifics of Scottish politics in 2007 help to explain why SNP identifiers are the only partisans significantly more disinclined toward coalitions: identifying with the SNP means a 65% decrease in the odds of preferring coalitions over single-party government. Although the polls suggested otherwise, the SNP repeatedly asserted its commitment to winning the election outright and governing alone. Labour's campaign was somewhat reactive, being based largely on warning voters about the possibilities of SNP government. Thus, from all sides, voters were presented with single-party SNP government as a realistic possibility. In addition, of course, the SNP's supporters – unlike Labour partisans – had not had the opportunity to accustom themselves to their party being in coalition government.

In line with the findings reported by Karp and Bowler (2001), we find that those individuals who rated positively the performance of the incumbent coalition government were significantly more inclined to favour coalitions generally. Substantively, this effect is moderate in size, with a standard deviation increase in evaluations of the previous governmental coalition leading to a 27% increase in the odds of favouring coalitions.²²

That leaves perhaps the two most interesting significant coefficients. First, we find that the odds of favouring coalitions are 48% higher among women. This quite large effect of gender, not observed in New Zealand (at least not in Karp and Bowler's (2001) data from 1998), is nonetheless consistent with the arguments of Childs (2004) and others that women tend to prefer a more consensual style of politics. Second, we find that ideologues are markedly less likely to support coalitions. If it is the case that coalitions are generally seen as having a moderating impact on policy, this finding makes sense. (Note that this effect would probably have been at least partly suppressed had we not controlled for minor-party support, since these partisans are more likely to be ideologues as well as less keen on coalitions.) The substantive effect for this ideological variable is of roughly the same magnitude as the effect of gender.

Split-ticket voting

In Table 2 we present the results from the ticket-splitting analysis. The model includes all of the predictors from Table 1 save for coalition performance evaluations, and with two added: the personal vote dummy, and the coalition attitudes variable predicted in our previous model.

²¹ The most prominent example, from the 1999-2003 term, is their demand that Labour abandon plans to require Scottish students to pay up front university tuition fees.

²² There is a parallel here with evidence on Scottish voters' constitutional preferences, which, as Brown et al. summarise, suggests that "Scots do not distinguish fundamentally between judging the effectiveness of policy and assessing the adequacy of the constitutional framework through which policy is made" (1999, 162). So, just as a decision on the powers of the Scottish Parliament are guided by the performance of that parliament and its executive, a judgement on the merits of coalitions is likely to be guided by the performance of particular coalitions.

Table 2: Logistic Regression of Split Ticket Voting on Coalition Attitudes, Ideologies, Personal Constituency Vote, Partisan Affiliation, Subjective Importance, Political Knowledge and Demographic Predictors				
		Odds Ratio	Z	Percent Change
<i>Coalition Attitudes</i>	Prefer Coalitions	1.65**	2.19	66%
<i>Demographics</i>	University	0.90	-0.39	
	Terminal Education Age	1.19	1.55	
	Female	1.03	0.11	
<i>Knowledge</i>	Politics Knowledge	1.24***	2.66	24%
	(Politics Knowledge) ²	1.00*	-1.68	-0.4%
<i>Subjective Importance</i>	Election Interest	0.83	-1.37	
	Matters who wins?	0.68	-1.67	
<i>Partisan Affiliation</i>	Conservative	0.19***	-3.78	-80%
	Labour	0.37**	-2.50	-63%
	Liberal Democrat	0.34**	-2.24	-65%
	Scottish National Party	0.13***	-4.71	-87%
	Minor Party	3.33**	2.32	233%
<i>Ideological position</i>	Ideologies	1.61**	1.95	61%
<i>Personal Vote</i>	Voted for Candidate	6.58***	4.30	558%

N = 687, Pseudo R² = .20, weighted data, estimated with Stata 10.0, percent change in odds computed using S-Post commands

* p≤.10 ** p≤.05 *** p≤.01

If split-ticket voting is in part the behavioural result of a preference for coalitions, we would expect a positive relationship between coalition attitudes and split ticket voting. As Table 2 shows, this is indeed what we find. The effect is both statistically and substantively significant: the odds of ticket splitting are 65% greater among those favouring coalition governments. Furthermore, this relationship holds in the face of substantial controls. Hence it is not, for instance, an artefact of the tendencies of major-party supporters to be anti-coalition and to vote straight tickets: we have controlled for those prior variables.

This example leads us to the partisanship variables, which are all significant and in the expected direction: party identifiers are much less likely than non-identifiers to split their tickets. The glaring exception is minor party supporters, but since as discussed they had little choice in 2007 but to split their tickets, it is unsurprising that the odds of them doing so are a huge 233% greater. Another near-tautological result is that for the personal vote. After controlling for partisanship, ideological position, coalition attitudes and all other factors in the model, people who reported that they voted “for a candidate, regardless of his or her party” were vastly more

likely to split their tickets. And a third predictable finding is the overall positive association between political knowledge and the propensity to split the ticket. There is a nuance here, though, namely the evidence of a significant curvilinearity in that relationship. The negative coefficient for the squared knowledge variable indicates that, as foreshadowed in the earlier theoretical discussion, ticket-splitting is most common among those in the middle ranges of political awareness.

That leaves one more significant relationship to discuss: the greater willingness of ideologues to vote for two parties. This again is far from a negligible effect, being associated with a 61% change in the odds of ticket splitting. One notable feature of this variable is that it operates in opposite directions in the two analyses: moderates are more likely to favour coalitions but less likely to split their tickets. These relationships, particularly the ticket-splitting effect, seem highly likely to be party system-specific. In Scotland, competition between the major parties has been clearly centripetal, with more extreme positions the province largely of minor parties. That fact, allied to our controls for partisanship, suggests that the effect observed here is due to non-identifiers who use the regional vote to indulge their ideological inclinations, while casting their constituency vote for a viable major party. We discuss this further in the upcoming section.

Finally, we should note the null findings with respect to education and gender. While female voters and the degree-educated were more inclined to favour coalitions, they do not appear to see ticket splitting as a means of pursuing that goal.

Summary and implications

The main purpose of this paper was to formulate models of coalition attitudes and ticket-splitting behaviour in the Scottish elections of 2007. Rather than reiterating the lists of significant predictors in each analysis, here we want to highlight three related differences between the two models. First, ticket splitting is much more strongly influenced by partisan interests. Plenty of partisan voters expressed coalition attitudes that were ostensibly at odds with the interests of their party. Second, partly as a result of this, our model of ticket-splitting was more successful – in the simple sense of variance explained – than that of coalition attitudes. Third, coalition attitudes were shaped by less obviously (party) political variables, notably gender and education, that were irrelevant for ticket-splitting behaviour.

One immediate inference to draw from all this is that, in Scotland at least, coalition attitudes are not politicised. This may be a temporary state of affairs: the parties may come to adopt clear stances with respect to coalition or single-party government. In 2007, the SNP showed a strong preference for single-party government, and judging by our findings this was enough to convince most of its supporters. However, with ebbs and flows of support in a clearly multiparty system, it seems more likely that the SNP and its competitors will maintain flexible and less strident approaches to coalition government. In addition, of course, there are plenty of non-partisan voters who are less inclined to take party cues anyway. The absence of this kind of politicisation leads to the question of how voters form these attitudes. One possibility is that they will evaluate the performance of specific governments. Assuming that the SNP administration lasts the term, voters in 2011 will have relatively recent experience of both coalitions and single-party (albeit minority) government, affording them the opportunity to

compare. Here we found, via evaluations of the incumbent coalition, that such judgements are already part of the story.

Yet, to pursue the metaphor, much of that story is yet untold. Our capacity to explain variance in coalition attitudes was rather limited. This can probably be attributed in part to a nonattitudes hypothesis: given the relative novelty of the Scottish Parliament, its proportional electoral system, and its multiparty politics, many Scottish voters are probably yet to form meaningful attitudes to coalition government. A different explanation for the considerable unexplained variance is that important factors went unmeasured. As mentioned earlier, it is impossible to do more than speculate on this, but the significant effects of gender and education might point to coalition attitudes being the manifestation of a more general consensual or 'anti-tribal', approach to politics. This is not just about disclaiming identification with a particular party, but about parties in general being less prominent in some voters' political thinking.

Such conjecture is also relevant for split-ticket voting, because that too is evidently liable to be more common among those for whom party is less central. This readmits the possibility that at least part of the observed relationship between coalition attitudes and split-ticket voting – one of the more striking findings in this study – is spurious, being caused by some prior attitude or perspective that influences both variables. Another prior variable that could play a similar role is multiple partisanship. A voter who supports two parties with roughly equal intensity can reasonably be expected to favour a coalition, because it would allow them both to govern, and of course to split the ticket between those two parties. This should be explored further in subsequent research, which would need to be based on survey measures better tailored to multiple identifications (e.g. Garry 2007) than those available in the SES 2007.

One aspect of these arguments involving prior variables and spurious correlation is that, unlike the idea of a direct causal arrow from coalition attitudes to ticket splitting, they do not involve the notion of an irrational instrumentality, with voters mistakenly believing that splitting their ticket is more likely to bring about coalition governments. However, this does not render the direct effect implausible: the literature on ticket-splitting provides plentiful evidence of less than strictly rational behaviour. The idea that ticket splitting increases the likelihood of a coalition is so intuitive that a voter would need detailed knowledge of the workings of the MMP system to recognise in practice how tenuous the link is. All the evidence on voter psychology suggests that voters are more likely to rely on the simple intuition than to have the sophisticated understanding (see, e.g., Lau and Redlawsk 2001). More generally, our findings on ticket splitting – and in particular its curvilinear relationship with political knowledge – add to the evidence that this behaviour, while not always conforming to strict definitions of rationality, is nonetheless basically a strategic approach to voting. Research attention could be profitably focused on the different heuristics used by voters when considering whether and how to split their tickets, rather than on repeatedly testing behaviour against *a priori* yardsticks of rationality.

Finally, the evidence on ideologues and moderates presented here dovetails neatly with Kedar's (2005) findings about voters' behaviour in multiparty systems. The starting point for that research was the fact that, in multiparty systems, policy outcomes are often watered down (that is, moderated) by coalition bargaining. Kedar demonstrates that voters with a particular ideological or policy stance are inclined to support parties with a more extreme stance in that same direction, anticipating that these parties will pull policy in the desired direction, but safe in the knowledge that the restraints of coalition government will prevent too drastic a shift. In line with the watering-down point, we found that ideologues were markedly less likely to favour coalitions. In line with Kedar's findings about voting behaviour, we found that ideologues were

more likely to split their tickets, quite probably in the hope that representation for small parties would exert at least some centrifugal force on policy. (The least minor of the minor parties in Scotland are the Greens and various brands of socialists, and there is evidence that plenty of supporters of the major parties would welcome a greening or reddening of policy.) The suggestion, then, is that ideologues' antipathy towards coalition government may disappear, or at least ease, if such coalitions seem likely to include more ideologically driven parties. One difference between Kedar's and our results is that she emphasises this as a strategy deployed even by moderate voters, while we found ticket splitting to be less common among moderate voters. However, it would be premature to place much weight on this apparent divergence, pending a scrutiny of the specific ticket-splitting combinations chosen by Scottish voters, and a more sophisticated measure of voters' issue positions. Indeed, such more detailed scrutiny would shed more light on many of the questions raised in this exploratory study.

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