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Documentation to accompany the archived datasets

Background

The Scottish Election Study (SES) 2007 was a major survey of Scottish voters before and after the Scottish Parliament elections on 3 May 2007. It was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (REF. 000-22-2256) and was based in the Department of Government at the University of Strathclyde. Modelled quite closely on recent British Election Studies (BES), the project's aim was to explain the electoral decisions of Scottish voters, both whether and how to vote. As well as voting behaviour, the survey questionnaires also cover the following topics: attitudes to parties and leaders; issue opinions and evaluations; national identity; constitutional preferences; socio-demographic characteristics. The principal investigators on the project were Robert Johns (University of Strathclyde), David Denver (Lancaster University), James Mitchell (University of Strathclyde) and Charles Pattie (University of Sheffield).

Data collection

The SES 2007 was conducted via the internet. As with the web components of recent BES, the fieldwork was undertaken by YouGov, Britain's leading internet survey agency. The initial sample was drawn randomly from YouGov's panel of subscribers resident in Scotland.

The SES was originally designed as a two-wave panel survey, with the same respondents surveyed before and after the election. These two waves are the basis for investigating electoral behaviour in 2007. Then, in the light of the unforeseen problems surrounding the elections – in particular, the soaring number of rejected ballots - the ESRC agreed to fund a third wave of data collection. In December 2007 we returned to our panel respondents in order to explore their perceptions of the elections and the problems that arose, and to investigate – some time after the furore had died down – whether what happened has had a lasting impact on public attitudes. The table below summarises the key information about each wave of data collection.

Wave	Prefix in datasets	Fieldwork dates (% in first three days of period)	N	Response rate (denominator)
1 – pre-election	'pre_'	17-23 April 2007 (86%)	1,872	71.5% (contacted respondents)
2 – post-election	'post_'	4-10 May 2007 (90%)	1,552	83% (pre- respondents)
3 – follow-up	'post2_'	12-24 December 2007 (80%)	1,166	62% (pre- respondents) ¹

¹ For the follow-up wave we sought responses from all pre-election respondents, even if they had not participated in the post-election wave. That 62% is an overall figure, representing 66% response among pre- and post- respondents, and 47% response from pre-only respondents.

Datasets

Two SES datasets have been archived. (A wider variety of datasets, for example individual files for each wave of the survey, are available from the project website.) The two datasets are:

- ❑ 'SESPanel': the full panel dataset, including data from all three waves of the survey
- ❑ 'SESagg': the full panel dataset plus constituency-level data for aggregate/contextual analyses

The structure of the datasets is simple and chronological: i) a few background variables (e.g. age and gender); ii) pre-election data; iii) post-election data; iv) follow-up data.

In the second dataset this is followed by v) the constituency-level data. There are two types of such variables in 'SESagg', both based on the Scottish Parliament constituency in which the respondent lives. The political variables are drawn from results of the three Scottish Parliament elections (2007, 2003, and 1999), and from the 2001 and 1997 general elections. (There are no data from the 2005 general election, because a reduction in the number of Scottish constituencies meant that the old Westminster/current Holyrood boundaries were redrawn.) The socioeconomic and demographic variables are drawn largely from the 2001 census.

The datasets are in SPSS (.sav) format. They can be transferred into other programs in a number of ways, e.g. via Stat/Transfer, or by saving them as tab-delimited (.dat) files. If users experience problems in converting the datasets into a familiar format, please contact the SES team (details below), and we will endeavour to help. Please also let us know if you spot any errors or omissions in the archived datasets. We can then alert other users to these mistakes, and upload corrected versions of the data to the project's website.

Variables

For ease of use, variables are labelled according to the wave of the survey in which that question was asked. Hence variable names beginning with 'pre_' are from the pre-election survey, those beginning 'post_' are from the post-election survey, and those beginning 'post2_' are from the follow-up survey. Some variables do not have these prefixes: these are standard demographic variables or the aggregate data (see above) which are collected independently of the surveys.

Aside from the prefix indicating the wave of the survey, the variable names include numbers reflecting the order in which those questions were asked in the questionnaires. The variables and values are fully labelled in the datasets; any further information needed can be obtained with reference to the questionnaires (also archived).

Following the Wave 3 ('post2_') variables, there are a few simple summary variables. All of these are fully labelled, with a clear indication of the survey questions from which they are derived. The 'most important issue' variables ('premi' and 'postmi') are derived from coding open-ended questions.

Filters and weighting variables

A few filter variables have been created to facilitate analysis:

- ❑ 'panel': in which waves of the survey did the respondent take part? (0 = pre-wave only; 1 = pre and post; 2 = pre and follow-up; 3 = all three waves)

- ❑ 'votedSP': did the respondent vote in the Holyrood election on 3 May? (0 = no; 1 = yes)
- ❑ 'votedloc': did the respondent vote in the council election on 3 May? (0 = no; 1 = yes)

There are five weighting variables included in the archived datasets:

- ❑ 'pre_W8': YouGov's standard weight for the pre-election sample
- ❑ 'post_W8': YouGov's standard weight for the post-election sample
- ❑ 'post2_W8': YouGov's standard weight for the follow-up sample
- ❑ 'revp_W8': YouGov's standard weight but adjusted by reported party choice to obtain a sample representative of the actual election results
- ❑ 'revt_W8': YouGov's standard weight but adjusted by reported turnout to obtain a sample representative of the actual election turnout

For analyses using only pre-election data, 'pre_W8' is the appropriate weight. For analyses using post-election data but not follow-up data, 'post_W8' is most appropriate. For any analysis using follow-up variables, 'post2_W8' should be used instead.

The 'reverse-engineered' weights, 'revp_W8' and 'revt_W8', are recommended only for simple analyses – e.g. frequencies or crosstabs – in which it is important to recreate the actual party choice or turnout marginals. These variables counteract the biases in the SES sample, which overstates turnout and voting for the SNP, and understates voting for Labour.

Ethical issues

SES respondents were supplied with information about the nature and purposes of the project, and had every opportunity to decline to participate. They were assured at the outset of the confidentiality and anonymity of their participation. These archived datasets are cleaned of any information whereby respondents can be identified and matched to their answers.

More generally, the SES research was reviewed by the University of Strathclyde's Ethics Committee, and was conducted in accordance with the University's Code of Practice on Investigations on Human Beings.

Mode comparison

Roughly the first two-thirds of the SES post-election questionnaire is a precise replication of the election module included in the 2007 Scottish Social Attitudes (SSA) survey. That enables a mode comparison between the internet SES and the face-to-face interviews of the SSA. At the time of archiving the SSA data were not yet available, but soon users will be able to compare the results from the two methods of data collection.

Publications

The SES team is currently writing a book-length report on the project, provisionally titled "*The Rise of the SNP: The 2007 Scottish Parliament Elections*", and due for publication in 2009. In addition, a number of articles based on the data have been submitted to journals. The bibliographic details are as follows:

Johns, R., Denver, D., Mitchell, J. and Pattie, C. (forthcoming), 'Valence politics in Scotland: Towards an explanation of the 2007 election', *Political Studies*, in press.

Johns, R. and Carman, C. (forthcoming), 'Coping with coalitions? Scottish voters under a proportional system', *Representation*, 44(4), in press.

Denver, D., Johns, R. and Carman, C. (under review), 'Rejected ballot papers in the 2007 Scottish Parliament election: The voters' perspective', *British Politics*, submitted June 2008.

Johns, R. and Carman, C. (under review), 'Attitudes to Coalitions and Split-ticket Voting: The Scottish Parliament Elections of 2007', *European Journal of Political Research*, submitted July 2008.

Johns, R., Carman, C. and Denver, D. (under review), 'Problem elections, process evaluations, and willingness to vote: The impact of the Scottish election in 2007', *Political Behavior*, submitted August 2008.

We are keen to hear from other users about their own papers and publications based on the data. Please contact the SES team (details below) with the details.

To find out more about the SES 2007, visit www.scottishelectionstudy.org.uk. If you have queries, comments or suggestions, contact Robert Johns via [e-mail](#) or on 0141 548 2668.