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Emulation and the Spread of Voting Support for the Scottish Nationalist Party

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EMULATION AND THE SPREAD OF VOTING SUPPORT
FOR THE SCOTTISH NATIONALIST PARTY

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of Scotland, thus limiting the problems of defining the study area. Finally, the SNP operated in a political system where party labels rather than candidate characteristics were generally of paramount importance.

Community Contextual Factors

Community activity and beliefs have been considered as a possible influence on behavior patterns of inhabitants of a given area. Spatial diffusion processes that have been elaborated include the concept of the "neighborhood" effect whereby the sequence of adoptions of a given product, idea, or behavior pattern is related to spatial proximity. ¹ A particular product or activity, once present, will in fact often be mostly quickly adopted by those persons closest in space to the original adopters. A saturation stage may in fact be reached in the areas nearest the originating adopter or adopters while the level of adoption is still low or non-existent in peripheral areas. ² This view thus holds that physical proximity, an useful surrogate for community in relatively homogeneous societies, may be an important component in the spread of adoptive behavior, and such might be the case for the spread of some political phenomena. Cox, for example, noted that contact between individuals in a political communication network was an important influence on the voting decisions of individuals, and such contact is a function of intervening distances. ³ It should be noted, however, that such a component in political behavior does not stand alone. Clearly, an underlying predisposition to accept the political activity in question must exist, although the processes by which such behavior spreads could be greatly influenced by spatial relationships.

The effects of spatial proximity or a community context in the idea of a neighborhood effect may only be an intervening or underlying variable. Distance may reflect the probability and/or intensity of meaningful contact and communication between individuals in the same areas or different ones. Distance is thus a surrogate for or component of communication networks. On the other hand,
direct communication may not be necessary for the spread of such phenomena. Voters may be influenced by printed or broadcast information or news items on Members of Parliament of a party and decide to emulate the behavior of others in the community or other nearby areas in the future. Even visual manifestations that appear during a campaign may be relevant. For example, in West Germany the density of bumper stickers favoring a party was found to be positively correlated with favorable voter perceptions of different parties. Within wider areas, voters may also be willing to emulate previous patterns when such patterns occurred in nearby areas where there was a greater perceived similarity of issues and conditions than would be the case in areas further distant.

The idea that contextual factors, including implicitly or explicitly the spatial one, might be important if voting behavior has been considered previously. Voting support for LaFollette, the Progressive Party's presidential candidate in 1924, displayed distinctive spatial patterns. In some states his support decreased in relatively smooth gradients from a core of strength, and urban-rural differences as well as differences in social, economic, and occupational characteristics were insufficient variables for explaining the differential levels of support. The same types of patterns were observed in later years for a number of primary election campaigns in American states in which a candidate ran for statewide office for the first time. Smoothly decreasing gradients were discovered that centered around the candidate's home residence (except when another candidate's support centered around his home area and thus led to a mixed pattern). This phenomenon, however, disappeared in a candidate's later efforts to achieve statewide office. A study of mayoral elections in Indianapolis directly tested for such spatial effects, but with inconclusive results. Other studies of American voting patterns within social contexts have also implicitly argued for the presence of a neighborhood effect. Foladare found that working class individuals who normally had voted Democratic increasingly voted Republican after moving to heavily Republican suburbs. Putnam tested this
"suburban conversion" thesis in conjunction with tests for the impacts of other variables. While he found other factors to be important, he also discovered that community influence was an effective input for some groups, including new residents. He also noted that the predominant community attitudes could inhibit the spread of new partisan beliefs while reinforcing old ones.

Segal and Meyer had similar results in their study of contextual factors in the United States.

The above studies dealt with elections or voter behavior in the United States. It is quite possible that reference group attitudes and locational effects might operate differentially or be more important in the United States than in other countries. Studies of European voting behavior, however, have had similar results in some cases. In German villages where one party was overwhelmingly favored by the voters, individuals who by occupation or economic status more often voted for other parties had a clear tendency to vote with the majority. London in the 1960s also provided evidence of the "suburban conversion" thesis. Cox found that constituencies in the outer ring of the Greater London area with Conservative majorities maintained these majorities even when there was an influx of individuals from areas that had previously supported Labour. Cox concluded that either the more Conservative-oriented voters were the ones who moved to the suburbs or the new residents were conforming to the views of the established residents. Of course, if the voters who moved were changing their class status, they might be expected to change their party affiliation (although the Liberal Party has often served as a transition for persons changing party affiliation rather than the individuals taking the route of direct conversion). In one non-voting case, attitudes in the United Kingdom did not show evidence of any impact of community context or emulation. Studies of attitudes of residents toward non-white or New Commonwealth immigrants found little evidence to support the idea that attitudes were influenced by any contextual impacts or spatial proximity, even in areas with a relatively high level of New Commonwealth immigration.
Some evidence for impacts of community context has been found for the areas of the United Kingdom where nationalist parties have been active in recent times. Kellas noted the impact of contextual factors in Scotland in that if an area is strongly working class, the proportion of working class individuals supporting the Labour Party candidate was higher with a concommitant decrease in support for Conservative candidates. Another study discovered support for community contextual factors in the spread of voting support in a spatial context for Wales. Changing levels of support for the Plaid Cymru, the Welsh nationalist party, were found to be related to spatial relationships and there was an indication that contextual factors were relevant. These findings were for the most recent British general elections that were used for the present study; therefore, they were quite relevant. While the relationships were not tremendously strong ones on the average, they still indicated the possible impacts community of context on the spread of support for a new nationalist party. Since the Welsh nationalists were clearly the nearest analogue to the SNP, it was thus very possible that similar impacts were operative in Scotland.

The previous studies of voting behavior have indicated that community contextual factors were at least potentially important in voting decisions. Contextual influences, when and if they have been present, cannot be considered to have been the sole determinant of voting behavior by any means. Thus an analysis of possible contextual effects as measured by a variable based on spatial propinquity as was the case in the present study could only have been expected to find a partial relationship at best. The changing levels of support for the SNP through the last four general elections, however, provided an excellent opportunity at least to determine whether the community context was an operative factor in this area of the United Kingdom.
Scots Nationalism and the Scottish Nationalist Party

Scottish nationalism is not exactly a new phenomenon in the United Kingdom. Since the Act of Union a separateness has been maintained between the southern and northern parts of Great Britain. Unlike Wales, which was almost totally incorporated, Scotland maintained a separate legal system, established church, educational system, and other distinctly Scottish institutions. Thus, the idea of Scotland as a separate entity retained at least a minimum vitality over time. The SNP, however, represented a relatively new political manifestation of Scottish nationalism. Although there have been previous parties or occasional independent candidates who advocated autonomy, home rule, or even separatism, the SNP in the 1970s mobilized a large measure of voter support. The Scottish Covenant Movement, which was in effect a massive petition drive for a Scottish Parliament, was the only preceding effort that attracted major support, and the movement eventually lost its momentum.

The SNP has been in existence since 1925 and has occasionally polled impressive vote totals, particularly in by-elections. Until the late 1960s, however, the party was clearly a fringe party with little impact. In early 1967, however, the nationalist candidate made a strong showing in a Glasgow by-election. Later in the year, the SNP candidate won the by-election in nearby Hamilton. It has been suggested that the strong showing in Glasgow gave the SNP as a party a greater credibility as a real choice in an election. It was also possible that the by-election victory by the Plaid Cymru candidate in Wales in 1966 was an important factor in the SNP’s victory in Hamilton since the Welsh outcome demonstrated that a nationalist candidate could win. Although the Plaid and the SNP have different goals in many respects, victories by one have strengthened not only the winning party but the other nationalist party as well. This probability of mutual interaction and support, while not a community impact, does imply the presence of emulative voting behavior. In any event, these strong
nationalist showings helped the SNP prepare for the general elections of the 1970s when the party became an important factor in British politics.

Various reasons have been put forward to explain the sudden successes of a separatist party in a nation which has had a long history of class-based political parties. Scotland has suffered along with England and Wales with the problems of a declining national economy, and in fact may have been harder hit along with Wales. Scotland has also generally had a lower standard of living on almost any measure that could be used. Perhaps even more importantly, with the British economic difficulties, there appeared to be little chance of improvement in these conditions. The resultant failure of both of the major political parties to deal with Scottish problems may have led to voters switching to the SNP as a protest against the inability of British parties to deal with Scottish problems. In fact, it has been argued that voters increasingly switched to support of the SNP after Labour took office since the Labour Party could no longer effectively be seen as an alternative that would rectify the "neglect" of Scottish problems. "Whatever the other parties might promise before an election, the [Scottish] National Party could be relied on to put Scotland's interest first." The discovery and opening of the North Sea oil fields, which are principally off the Scottish coast, undoubtedly enhanced the awareness of these economic difficulties since a potential solution had appeared. Thus, economic factors could have led to support for the SNP as a protest against the major parties. Protest voting however, is usually a short term phenomenon, and SNP support would not have survived and grown if protest voting were the underlying cause. Brand found that the SNP voters maintained their loyalty to the party over time; therefore, he discounted the protest explanation. The results of the 1979 general election, however, may have indicated that the protest element was present and that it simply lasted longer than similar protests elsewhere.
Related to the possibility that the support for the SNP was a result of protest voting, was the possibility that the SNP represented the dissatisfaction of the young in Scotland in particular. In effect, the established parties, including the Liberals, were seen as inappropriate vehicles for change by young voters, again especially after the Labour Party assumed office and accomplished no dramatic changes in British society. It was possible that the SNP was becoming the party of the present generation just as previous generations tended to be Labour or Conservative. Some surveys indicated that the SNP indeed had disproportionate strength among the young. In fact, youthful supporters of the SNP were noticeably among the party's activists in many areas. To the extent that the SNP did have an appeal to youthful voters and to the extent that Scottish voters tended to adhere to their youthful party loyalties, the SNP might have been expected to have a continuing political future in Scotland.

The Scottish economic difficulties and the rise of nationalism has been integrated into broader theoretical perspectives. Nairn argued that Scottish nationalism (neo-nationalism in his terminology) occurred because the decline of the British Empire led to a reorientation of capitalism in the United Kingdom to the disadvantage of Scotland. Included in the problem was the domination of much of the industry in Scotland by multinational corporations, often American. Rawkins, in a similar vein, argued that the rise of nationalism in Scotland and Wales was related to the displacement of corporate decision-making away from peripheral areas. Backwardness resulted from "uneven development and lack of interest or concern at the center" rather than deliberate neglect. Minority nationalisms, as represented by the SNP, thus were in a very sense a political response to the creation or formation of supranational economies.
There are some additional factors that may have explained some of the support for the SNP. While party policy was inchoate at times, there were distinct trends that placed the party within a broader political spectrum. The party had policy aspects related to populist movements and social credit parties in the Commonwealth and Western Europe. It thus had an appeal to individuals who were opposed to increased size, centralization, and the concentration of economic power, either in public or private hands. For the 1970 general election, the SNP may also have gained votes since it was the one party that clearly opposed the United Kingdom's entry into the European Economic Community. Various EEC policies would have threatened the well-being of Scottish fisheries and of some Scottish farmers. Thus, the SNP may have attracted some support due to the anti-EEC stands it took. It had also been suggested the SNP fared so well as a result of the disorganization and weakness of the Labour party in various parts of Scotland. In old Labour strongholds, the party had atrophied and was ill-adapted to facing the challenge presented by the nationalists. In addition, the conservatives had always been weakly organized. One factor that was not of apparent great importance was any desire by Scottish voters for an independent Scotland, a stated goal of the SNP. Polls have rather consistently shown that a majority of supporters of the SNP did not subscribe to a wish for an independent state.

The above consideration of reasons for the support of the nationalists in the 1970s did not indicate that any one cause for the party's rise to prominence existed. In fact, it would appear to be the case that a number of factors were relevant to the support gained by the party. While no direct attempt was made to comment on the various possibilities discussed above, it would have been possible for community contextual factors to have an impact even if there were one clear cause for the increase in nationalist voting.
Contextual factors do not so much explain why support appeared (other factors accounting for its appearance in many cases), but they could aid in explaining how support spread to new areas if such a spread was present. In effect, contextual factors are more related to the process of political changes in voting patterns than to the underlying causes.

The Analysis

Parameters of the Study

The results for the Scottish constituencies for the four most recent general elections—those of 1970, February 1974, October 1974, and 1979—were included in the present study. These elections were the only ones in which the SNP ran candidates in at least 65 of the 71 Scottish constituencies. Any analysis of earlier elections designed to interpret the impact of community contextual factors would have been misleading given the bias induced by selective candidate presentations. By-elections, notwithstanding their importance to the fortunes of the SNP, were not included in the analysis. Personalities of candidates and local factors could have been more important in what often were essentially local contests. The general trend in British politics has been for the ruling party to lose ground in by-elections, and minor parties in the United Kingdom has historically polled better in by-elections.33 General elections, however, when national campaign issues were paramount and control of Parliament might be at stake, were more apt to be true indications of continuing support given to parties, although there might still have been some fluctuations due to the quality of the candidates involved.

The key measure for the impacts of community contextual effects was based on a measure that reflected the spatial closeness of support for the SNP in the immediately previous general election. Support was measured in terms of the percentage of the vote polled by the SNP candidates in each Scottish constituency. These results from the previous election were weighted by the
distance from each constituency to the other 70 constituencies in Scotland. The distance was measured from the major city in a district in the case of the more rural areas and geographic centers in the case of the urban voting districts. The impact of previous voting for the SNP was assumed to be a summation of the constituency vote percentages by constituency in the previous general election weighted by the distance between constituencies. The resulting additive measure was assumed to reflect community context with greater weight placed on nearby areas. The following formula was used to derive this weighted measure of community context.

\[
C_i = \frac{\sum_{j=1}^{n} \frac{1}{d_{ij}} \times (100.0)}{\sum_{j=1}^{n} \frac{1}{d_{ij}}}
\]

where \(C_i\) = contextual impact on constituency \(i\),
\[d\] = distance in kilometers, and
\[V\] = vote percentage in constituency \(j\) in the previous general election.

This measure provided an indication of pro-SNP voting in the previous election throughout Scotland. It was weighted by the inverse of the distance since previous studies have found such a distance decay function to be operative in the spread of various phenomena.\(^{34}\) The measure was divided by the total of the distance inverses multiplied by 100% to standardize the figures. Non-standardization would have biased the measure since some of the Scottish constituencies were much more centrally located in space. In particular, the constituencies in the Glasgow area would have had very high absolute values given the large number of small, and therefore physically close, constituencies.
in the area. The weighted measure can perhaps most easily be conceived of as the modified, contextually relevant percentage of votes given the SNP in the last general election with the value varying for each individual constituency. The higher this average percentage figure, the greater the likelihood, it was expected, of the SNP attracting support in the new election if contextual factors were indeed relevant to voting decisions.¹³

The percentage figure thus arrived at from the above formula was correlated with a number of other variables. Most importantly, the value derived based on the previous general election results, was correlated with the current SNP vote percentage in each constituency in each of the four general elections in the study.¹⁴ Since the weighted percentage was based on previous elections, the measurement of community context was longitudinally based rather than a static measure. Thus, it measured potential political processes rather than a simple association. Since the Liberal Party has traditionally favored a more decentralized form of government for the United Kingdom, including Scotland, the measure was also correlated with the vote percentage of candidates of the Liberal Party. The weighted measure was also correlated with the changes in the percentages polled by candidates of both parties. Vote percentages for the Liberal candidates were potentially more biased since the Liberal Party contested a varying number of the Scottish constituencies in the four elections. The Liberals did not even consistently present candidates in the same constituencies in many cases. The vote levels achieved by the SNP candidates in a given election were also correlated with Liberal polls to test for any association. Finally, the SNP levels in an election were correlated with the levels achieved during the previous election as an indication of the presence of contextual factors within constituencies as well as between them.

Even if community contextual impacts were the only operative factor in voting decisions (a situation that obviously did not exist), the correlations
derived could not have been expected to approach unity. First, the measure used did not take into account contextual factors within a constituency. Obviously, such community impacts could have been great. A relatively isolated SNP stronghold would have tended to weight other nearby constituencies relatively heavily on contextual impact while the contextual factors on this voting district itself would have been understated. Second, the percentage of votes received by the SNP might have varied depending on the number of candidates in a given electoral district. A Liberal, for example, might have attracted some potential SNP supporters. The absence of a Liberal might have led to increased voting for the nationalists. The failure of the Conservatives or Labour to field a candidate might also have led to tactical voting that could have inflated the vote of the SNP in some areas, or even have deflated it in some circumstances. Finally, it is worthwhile to reemphasize that individual voting decisions clearly would have reflected other concerns and issues as well, and the normal occupational and socio-economic consideration that affect individual voting would also have been operative.

Results

The 1970 general election was the first one in which the SNP contested a vast majority of the Scottish constituencies. In the preceding 1966 general election, the nationalists had candidates in only 23 of the 71 districts, whereas in 1970, 65 candidates were fielded. Of course, after winning the by-election in Hamilton, the party did have its lone representative in Parliament when the election took place. The weighted vote measure was computed on the basis of the 1966 election results, which were of course a selective group of constituencies. The average weighted percentage impact from 1966 on the constituencies was 4.5%. In the 1970 general elections, the SNP fared reasonably well. The average vote per constituency was 11.8%, an improvement over 1966. Although the Hamilton seat was lost, an SNP candidate representing the Western
Isles was elected, thus maintaining the SNP's representation in Parliament.  

The competitiveness of the SNP in 1970 was largely unrelated to the support gathered in 1966 (see Table 1 for all results). The change in support for

| Table 1  
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<th>Correlation Results</th>
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<td><strong>r of Weighted Vote Percentage</strong> with</td>
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<td>Present SNP Vote Percentage</td>
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<td>Present Liberal Percentage</td>
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<td>Change in SNP Percentage</td>
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<td>Change in Liberal Percentage</td>
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| **r of Present SNP Vote Percentage** with |
| SNP Vote Percentage in Previous Election | .28** | .81*** | .92*** | .88*** |
| Present Liberal Vote Percentage | -.22* | -.41*** | -.34** | -.30** |

<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Summary Statistics</strong>¹</th>
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<tr>
<td>Average SNP Vote per Constituency²</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constituencies Contested</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average Liberal Vote per Constituency²</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constituencies Contested</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weighted Percentage Vote Average for Previous General Election</td>
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* Significant at the .05 level  
** Significant at the .01 level  
*** Significant at the .001 level  

¹ There are no significance tests involved for the summary statistics.  
² Average includes zero percent in the uncontested constituencies; therefore, the 8.6% gained on the average by the Liberals in 1979 represents much better showing in the constituencies that they contested than does the same 8.6% figure for October, 1974.
the SNP from 1966 to 1970 was actually negatively correlated with previous voting, reflecting in part the presentation of candidates in the new constituencies, particularly in the Highlands area. Support for Liberals was also unrelated to the weighted previous support. The vote levels in 1970, however, were positively and significantly correlated with support in 1966, and negatively and significantly correlated with support for Liberal candidates in 1970, even though Liberal candidacies were not as widespread.

The 1970 general election, thus provided no evidence for community context in the spread of support for the SNP except in the limited case of continuing and increased support in constituencies previously contested. The limited number of constituencies contested in 1966, however, made this first set of correlations somewhat problematic in any event. Thus, contextual factors that may have been operative could have been partially obscured given the data base.

There were a number of by-elections between the 1970 general election and the one in February of 1974. The SNP again had a number of strong showings in these contests, and in one case the nationalist won. The continuing appeal of the SNP became obvious in the February general election. Only the Orkney and Shetland constituency in the far north remained uncontested. The average poll for the nationalist increased to 22.5%, and seven seats were won. Surprisingly, the seat won the by-election was lost, although the SNP candidate did come close to retaining the seat. For this election, the nationalist appeal did turn out to be strongest in those areas that were nearer the previous areas of support as measured by the weighted vote percentage. More surprising, the appeal of Liberal candidates was even more closely associated with the level of previous SNP support. It would appear that previous support for the SNP generally encouraged deviation from normal voting patterns, be it for nationalists or
or Liberals. As might be expected, the 1974 vote levels were highly correlated with those of 1970 and negatively correlated, at a lower level, with vote percentages for the selectively presented Liberal candidates.

The February 1974 election indicated that community context was a factor in explaining increasing support for the nationalists. It also was even a possible factor that led to support for the Liberals. As a result, there was the possibility that the two party system was generally losing support in Scotland in a rather pronounced fashion. A willingness to vote for other parties was obviously spreading from the initial areas of support for the nationalists and generating increased support for those parties favoring greater autonomy for Scotland.

In the general election called in October of 1974 because of the lack of a party majority in Parliament, the nationalists again improved their showing. A candidate was even presented for the Orkney and Shetland constituency (and did rather poorly in this Liberal stronghold). The candidates averaged 30.6% of the vote per constituency and increased its parliamentary representation to eleven. The showing of the SNP candidates in the constituencies won in February, however, did not generally improve. One might expect that support would have increased in these constituencies since community contextual factors would be most operative, particularly since the nationalists had already proven their ability to win. In the four constituencies where Liberal candidates were presented in October, having been absent in February, the SNP increased its poll in two cases and lost ground in two. In the three cases where there was no change in the presence of a Liberal candidate, the nationalist slightly gained in one case and lost in percentage terms in the two others. The failure of the nationalists to consistently gain is particularly noteworthy since it has been found that in Scotland parties have tended to spend money and make the greatest efforts in the constituencies that they hold rather than making the greater efforts to win new seats, even those previously lost by a very close vote. 39
Notwithstanding these perhaps anomalous results for the seven constituencies won in February, support for the nationalist was again positively and significantly correlated with the weighted voting average in February. Again, the Liberal appeal was similarly positively correlated with the previous nationalist strength. There was also again a strong positive correlation with previous SNP vote percentages and a weakened correlation with the slightly higher Liberal vote totals (that reflected in part an increased number of candidates).

Again, contextual factors as measured by distance relationships had an impact. Community attitudes appear to have led to pro-SNP voting as well as support for the Liberals. The failure of the SNP to consistently improve its vote in constituencies it had previously carried in the first 1974 election was surprisingly since community contextual factors should have led to an increased nationalist vote in those areas. Perhaps the failure of the nationalist to solidify their support in these areas was an indication of the fate of the party in the 1979 general election.

The SNP faced the 1979 general election with some pluses and minuses. The party had proven that it had the ability to win, and it had surpassed the Conservative Party to become the second party in Scotland. In the elections to the European Parliament the nationalist candidate for the northwestern district of Scotland won and gave the SNP representation at the supranational level. In the referendum on the devolution of power to a Scottish Assembly, however, the party suffered what would have to be considered a defeat. Even though the party favored complete independence, devolution of powers would have been a step in the right direction. While over half the votes cast were in favor of the Scottish assembly, the issue failed to gain the votes of half the electorate by a very small margin. Thus, devolution failed. The impacts of these two elections were obviously mixed in relation to the party's strength in the general election.
The general election that was held in May as a result of the failure of the Labour government to win a vote of confidence was a disaster for the nationalists. The SNP again fielded candidates in all 71 constituencies, but the average constituency vote fell to 17.6% from the high reached in October of 1974. Nine of the eleven seats in Parliament were lost. In fact, the SNP vote percentage was lower in 70 of the constituencies compared to October of 1974, even in areas where the Liberals also lost votes or did not present a candidate. The newly formed Scottish Labour Party had only a marginal impact in this election. It presented only a few candidates, and only one drew more than a handful of votes. This candidate ran in one of the areas of weakest nationalist support in earlier elections; therefore, his impact in the constituency in question was not even a major one. Community context did continue to have an impact in this time of electoral defeat. The areas of remaining SNP support were highly and significantly correlated with such voter support in October of 1974. The correlation with the weighted measure was, in fact, the strongest one found for any of the four elections. Support for Liberal candidates was no longer significantly correlated with previous SNP support. As in other elections, the 1979 vote percentages were highly correlated with previous support and remained negatively correlated with Liberal polls.

The results for 1979 indicated that contextual factors were highly relevant in this period of decline, apparently more so than in the years of spreading voter appeal. Of course, there is no reason why contextual factors could not have been important in leading to continued support, albeit at lower levels, in times of electoral defeat. Nationalist support in 1979 appeared to have retreated back into its strongholds. The 1979 election did provide the strongest and most unambiguous support for the present of community contextual factors. It also indicated that the nationalist and the Liberal appeal had apparently come to a parting of the ways in terms of their support as
evidenced both by the number of seats won and the fact that Liberal vote percentages were no longer associated with previous support for the SNP.

Conclusions

Community context clearly did have an impact on the electoral fortunes of the SNP in the 1970s given the above results. During the two 1974 elections, the presence of nearby previous support for the nationalists appeared to facilitate the party's ability to gain new votes. In the period of decline, represented by the 1979 general election, the presence of previous support in October of 1974 played a role in the party's ability to cut its losses to some extent. It would be expected, therefore, that the party would on the average make its best showings in the future in those areas near its remaining areas of strength, mainly in the Highlands and the other constituencies north of Glasgow. The nationalists have been consistently weak in Edinburgh, where the Liberals have had some strength. They have also been generally weak in the Glasgow area, although there have been pockets of support. Whether the electoral fortunes of the party improve or decline even further in the next general election will result from other factors than community context, but community contextual impacts will help the party either expand if it is again on an electoral upswing or hold some of its remaining support if it suffers continued decline.

It is possible that the support for the SNP was ultimately in the nature of a protest vote. After all, in the SNP's rise to prominence in the two elections of 1974, the Liberals also seemed to gain by the presence of the former support for the nationalists. They held their portion of the vote in 1979, even though they contested fewer constituencies (thus in effect improving their showing since the average constituency vote in Table 1 includes zero percentage for noncontested constituencies). Perhaps the ultimate impact of the SNP's appearance as a major party in Scotland may be the provision of
additional support for the Liberal Party, be these new supporters previous supporters of the major parties or former non-voters. The protest character of the SNP may finally have declined in 1979 as a result of the difficulties of the Labour government. The government was a minority government for the last part of its term, passing legislation only with the support of the Liberals or more rarely the Northern Irish representatives or the Welsh and Scottish nationalists. This experience may had led Scottish voters to abandon protest and to return to support of the two major parties and the Liberal Party as a better known third choice.

The preceding analysis, of course, cannot yet be generalized. Community context was relevant in the spread of support for the nationalists. Whether such an impact is present for nationalist movements in other countries remains to be determined. Community context might, in fact, be most relevant for support for nationalist or regional movements where a feeling of community might logically be more salient. Community context might also be present for other parties as well, perhaps including some of the populist movements in Europe with which the SNP has some similarities.

Scotland as a whole, as a périphéry of the European "heartland," gives scope for comparative work with the other "smaller European democracies." Countries of between five to ten million people, with a high degree of sophistication of political culture, are an alternative model of development to the giant states of western Europe and America. Finally, community context may also be relevant for major national parties in democratic countries that have had shifting areas of strength or have gone through periods of decline or increase.
NOTES


10. Ibid., 652.


23. Ibid, 3, and Dalyell, Devolution, 75.


28. Hanham, Scottish Nationalism, 175, and Harvie, Scotland and Nationalism, 234.


33. For examples of by-election results cf. F.W.S. Craig (ed. and compiler), Minor Parties at British Parliamentary Elections: 1885-1974 (Chichester: Political Reference Publications, 1975). Dalyell, Devolution, 79, mentions a number of local issues that were important in a by-election in Hamilton, the first SNP victory, that would have had limited impact in a general election. McCrone, Scotland's Future, 7-8, noted that many SNP supporters in by-elections indicated that they would return to voting for major parties in a general election.


35. It should be noted that the results for each constituency were not weighted by either eligible voters or turnout. While British constituencies are roughly equal in population, there are major deviations at times since the United Kingdom lacks a strict one-man, one-vote principle. Scotland is, in fact, overrepresented in the House of Commons based on its population. It was not assumed for the analysis that voters would discount or enhance electoral results, including SNP victories, on the basis of turnout or numbers of eligible voters in a constituency.


37. A popular local figure won this seat, perhaps as a result of local concerns. Cf. Harvie, Scotland and Nationalism, 253.

38. Lutz, "The Spread of the Plaid Cymru," did have some positive results in a similar analysis where the Plaid did not contest all constituencies in the 1966 general election.
