



SCOTLAND OFFICE
VOTER FOCUS GROUPS (GOULD)

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35 ENDELL STREET • LONDON • WC2H 9BA • TEL: 020 7240 7200 • FAX: 020 7240 7201
Email: quadstaff@qcl.co.uk • Website: www.qcl.co.uk

MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

Following difficulties encountered during the 2007 Scottish Parliament and local government elections, and subsequent criticism of the process, an independent elections consultant, Ron Gould, has conducted a review and made recommendations for future elections. A consultation paper, "Sorting The Ballot", was subsequently published and received a number of responses from interested parties but not from the general voting public. This research was therefore proposed to explore and understand their views on the Scottish Parliament elections.

A series of enlarged focus groups were conducted in Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow among 99 respondents. A further two groups were conducted among respondents with special needs (impaired vision and learning difficulties) resulting in a total of 112 respondents. This approach has resulted in a mix of both quantitative and qualitative findings.

Key findings are:

1. Overall voters have a preference for overnight rather than next day counting.
2. Ballot designs using alphabetical listings with candidates' surnames shown first are the preferred option.
3. Ballot designs showing party names without party descriptors but including party symbols are preferred. (N.B. The term "party descriptors" was used during this research in place of "party descriptions", however both terms refer to the same thing).
4. The view that the 2007 elections knocked confidence in the Scottish electoral system among voters is clearly supported.
5. Problems due to the introduction of the Single Transferable Vote system run alongside a more conventional first past the post election resulted in considerable confusion and appears to be the driving factor behind many spoiled papers. To help address this and improve confidence in the Scottish electoral system:
 - ⊕ Future elections should be run individually where contrasting formats are to be used.
 - ⊕ Clear communication needs to be developed, evaluated and then undertaken both before and as part of the election process to educate voters about the Single Transferable Vote system.
6. While electronic voting systems may make voting easier for some the overall view is that they can be more prone to both tampering and failure, hence traditional pencil and ballot paper systems should be maintained for the present.
7. Electronic counting machines are generally accepted by voters providing they are able to accommodate folded ballots and are tested for accuracy versus manual counting ahead of elections.
8. Easier wheelchair access to polling stations as well as brighter lighting and lower shelf options in polling booths should be provided to meet issues identified by special needs voters.

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1 BACKGROUND

The May 2007 Scottish Parliament and local government elections were beset with difficulties and led to robust criticism of changes that had been made to ballot paper design and the procedures for election administration. An independent review of the experience of the 2007 elections was carried out by Ron Gould, a Canadian elections' expert, and reported in October 2007. Mr Gould made a number of recommendations for improving the way in which elections are run. The Scotland Office has already agreed to some of these recommendations and has consulted recently on the others. The consultation paper, "Sorting the Ballot", was made widely available but received only 39 responses, none of which were from members of the public. As one of the key criticisms of Gould was that the voter was "treated as an afterthought", Scotland Office ministers have decided that a more targeted approach to soliciting the views of voters should be made.

1.1 Policy Context

The Scotland Office is responsible for the policy and legislation governing the Scottish Parliament elections. For the most part, law regarding the administration of elections is consistent across all sets of European, UK, Scottish Parliament and local government elections (though the latter is the responsibility of the Scottish Executive). Consistency has been considered important to avoid voter confusion and enhance efficient delivery.

For the May 2007 Scottish Parliament elections, a combined ballot paper was designed to replace the previous 2 separate ballot papers (one for the regional list and one for constituency candidates), in line with a recommendation from the Arbutnott Commission on Boundary Differences and Voting Systems. The combined ballot paper appears to have confused a small percentage of voters (4%) and the decision has been taken to return to separate papers.

However, the Gould report makes a number of recommendations about the design and ordering of the ballot papers, concerning use of party names vs descriptions and the ordering of parties and candidates. The Scotland Office consulted on these recommendations and now wishes to seek voters' views on them.

Counting of ballot papers has traditionally taken place overnight, immediately after the polls have closed. Mr Gould recommended that this should cease, and that counts should take place during the day following the election. His view was that this should lead to a better count process. Opinion on this recommendation is divided, broadly between politicians, on the one hand, who are eager to get results as soon as possible and electoral administrators, on the other, who favour a daytime count as it affords a rest to those involved in elections. The views of voters on this issue are not currently known.

There is evidence from research that was carried out by academics at Glasgow University that the confidence of voters in elections has taken a dent. The current working assumption is that voters are quite conservative in their attitudes to electoral administration, and that a return to the way in which elections were run in 1999 and 2003 would be preferred.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- ⊕ To obtain a quantitative evaluation of voters' responses to key questions on the overnight count and ballot paper design.
- ⊕ To develop a qualitative understanding of voters' reasoning behind their responses to the above issues.
- ⊕ To explore voters' personal experiences of elections both in 2007 and in previous years.
- ⊕ To make an assessment of the level of confidence voters currently have in the electoral system and the likely impact of the proposed changes / solutions on their confidence in the short and medium-term future.
- ⊕ To explore additional electoral issues, specifically:
 - Voters' experiences of the voting process, i.e. how easy do they find it?
 - Postal vs. personal voting.
 - Voters' experiences of their contact with electoral staff.
 - To what extent the different approaches for different types of elections make the process confusing.
 - Methods by which voting could be improved / made easier.

3 METHOD DISCUSSION

Normally quantitative and qualitative research are approached differently and separately. Hence to meet the objectives of this study it could have been proposed that two phases be considered; one qualitative to explore voters' understanding and reasoning, with a second quantitative phase to assess "how many?" prefer each of the alternatives.

However, the time constraints for this study meant that a two phased approach would result in severe limitations to each phase. Hence the selected method was for a combined approach which, while not being strictly conventional, was felt to best address the study objectives within the proposed budget.

4 METHOD

The method chosen was a series of focus groups. Enlarged focus groups (up to 17) were used for voters without special needs allowing for a mix of quantitative data collection as well as exploration of qualitative responses. Standard focus groups (base size of up to 8) were used for voters with special needs in order to allow more time to elicit responses from each voter.

Sample structure was not intended to provide a perfectly representative population in terms of demographics, but to elicit information from a broad base of respondents in terms of geographic location, social group, gender, age and individual special needs. Hence sample structure was:

- ⊕ 6 enlarged focus groups (recruited 17 for each) among voters without special needs
 - 2 groups each in Aberdeen (34 attended), Edinburgh (34 attended) and Glasgow (31 attended), such that:
 - 1 group in each location was from A,B,C1 social groups (48 attended)
 - 1 group in each location was from C2, D, E social groups (51 attended)
- ⊕ 2 standard focus groups (recruited 5-8) among voters with special needs
 - 1 group of visually impaired voters (8 attended)
 - 1 group of voters with combined learning and physical difficulties (5 attended)

This resulted in a total base size of 112.

All respondents were recruited to fulfil the following quota requirements:

- ⊕ Aged 23 + (in order to have been eligible to vote in 2003 elections)
- ⊕ A spread of ages was recruited for each group with two in each enlarged group being at least 65 years old.
- ⊕ Had voted in 2007 and the 2003 and / or 1999 elections
- ⊕ c.50 / 50 mix of men and women in each group.

A minimum of 2 and a maximum of 3 respondents in each of the enlarged groups lived in villages or rural communities outside of the city. Remaining respondents were recruited from the city and suburbs.

Groups among voters with special needs were organised and conducted through RNIB Scotland and Capability Scotland – to whom we extend our sincere thanks for their help, support and active participation in the research.

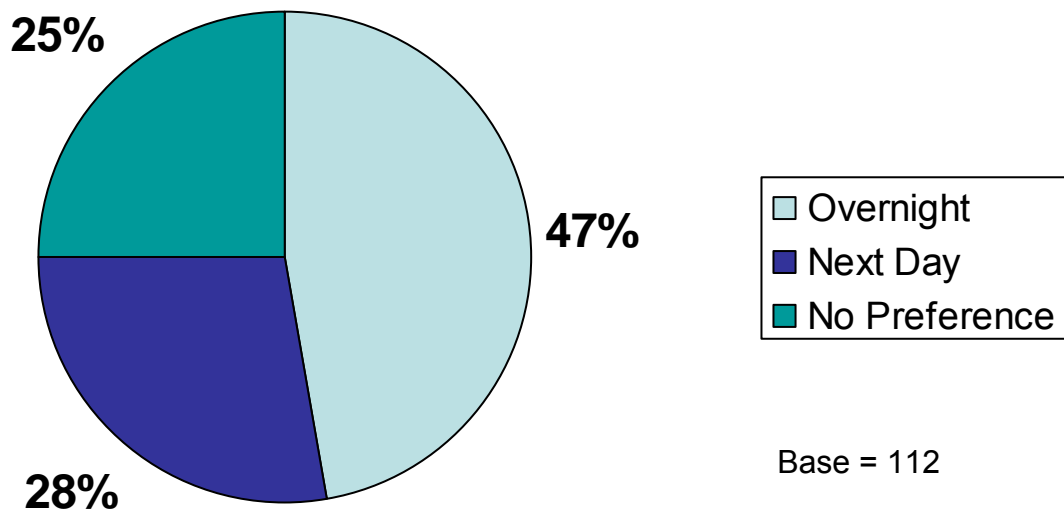
Groups lasted c.1½ hours and were held in conference room facilities (conventional focus group studios not being large enough to accommodate the enlarged groups).

All groups were audio recorded for analysis purposes only.

All groups were conducted between 28th May and 13th June 2008.

5 FINDINGS

5.1 Overnight vs. Next Day Count



Voters overall expressed a clear preference for an overnight count with 47% choosing this option and 28% next day. 25% expressed no preference.

Where preferring the overnight count two key reasons emerged from the discussions:

1. Part of the excitement of the election process
 - "It's part of the buzz. I get a kick out of taking part in the election and waiting up to hear the results."*
 - "It's tradition, it's exciting. Watching Peter Snow with his 'swingometer' perhaps I'm sad but for me it all adds to the excitement of an election."*
2. Less chance of tampering
 - "I'm for anything that prevents fraud. I think if the process is continuous it is easier to oversee. If the boxes are locked away overnight, anything could happen to them."*

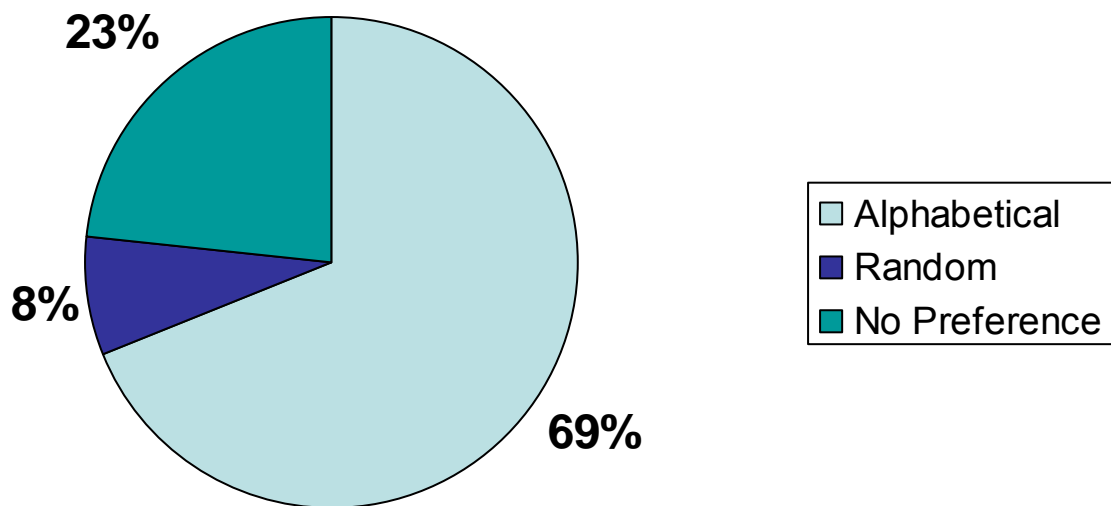
Where next day count was preferred respondents cited accuracy over speed.

- "I don't care how long it takes I would rather the end result is correct."*
- "If people are working all day and then counting into the small hours, of course there will be errors. Better to count when everyone is fresh."*

5.2 Ballot Paper Design Options

Ballot paper design options were presented to respondents for evaluation prior to any discussion. These ballot paper examples were provided to assist discussion on Ron Gould's recommendations, they were not provided to test specific designs intended for actual use. All party names, descriptors and candidate names used were entirely fictitious (see appendix, pages 35-43). Respondents were asked to vote for Peter Martin Douglas of the No Change Party, comparing the different ballot paper design options pair-wise for ease of finding candidate / party. Once all preferences were collected, discussions ensued on reasons for choosing each option.

5.2.1 Candidate Name, Alphabetical vs. Random Listing



Base = 112

A strong preference was expressed for alphabetical listing of candidate names with that option being chosen by 69% of respondents. Only 8% chose the random option, with a further 23% expressing no preference.

Those who chose the alphabetical option felt that when scanning to identify a name, alphabetical listing was much easier and more instinctive for them.

"It depends how you search. I know who I'm going to vote for and scan down the list looking for that name. If they are in alphabetical order I can skip to that point in the list. It's faster and easier for me."

"That's how you are used to searching for names. Alphabetical order is what you expect to look for."

Those who chose the random approach did not appear to have a particular reason for preferring that system, they had just found the candidate's name on the random list more easily.

"I found it quicker on sheet 'B'"

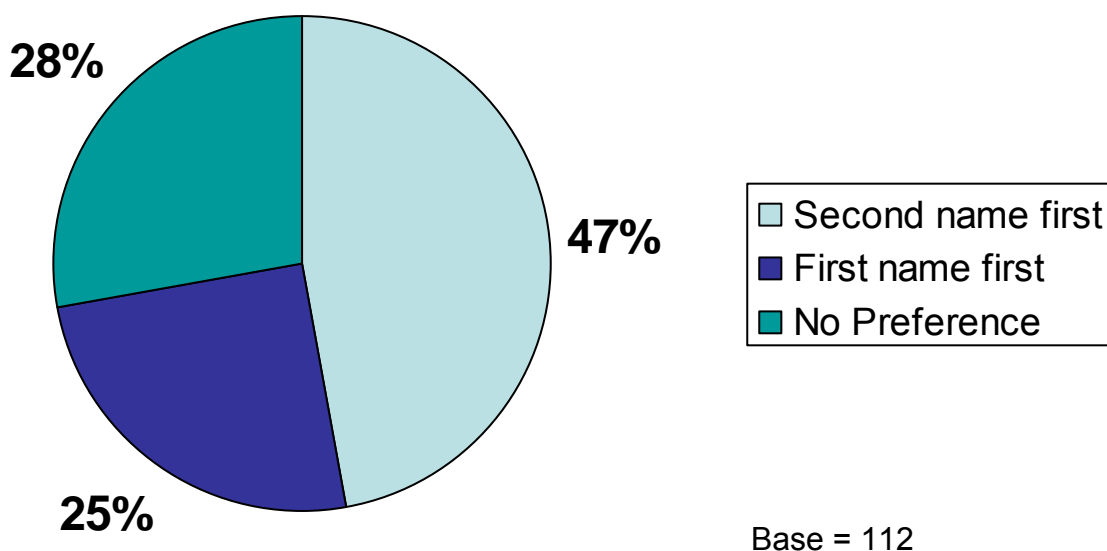
The subject of bias due to alphabetical listing was not raised spontaneously in any of the groups. When probed as an issue the vast majority either didn't feel any bias would occur or, if it did, that the convenience of alphabetical listing outweighed any potential bias.

"I know when I go in who I'm going to vote for. I wouldn't just vote for the first person on the list. I look through to find the candidate I want to vote for."

"I can't imagine people vote for the first on the list just because of that. No, that would be stupid. It's more important to be able to find who you are looking for and that means the list in alphabetical order."

During this aspect of the discussion one respondent did raise an example, from the local government election, of where a labour candidate in Edinburgh had won over a second labour candidate who fell further down the list alphabetically. The belief was that in this case voters were looking for the party name and the first Labour candidate picked up more votes as a result of occurring earlier on the list. This example currently only applies to the Scottish local government elections which are the only elections run under the Single Transferable Vote system and is therefore not relevant to the Scottish Parliament elections. However, despite this example of potential bias the group still strongly backed alphabetical listing.

5.2.2 Candidate Name, Second Name First vs. First Name First



A strong preference was expressed overall for the format using second name first with 47% choosing that option and only 25% preferring first name shown first.

Those who picked the second name first option felt that the focus tends to be on the second name and that is what they remember and look for on the ballot paper. In addition, several commented that this format is that used by the returning officer when announcing results and so it keeps the approach consistent.

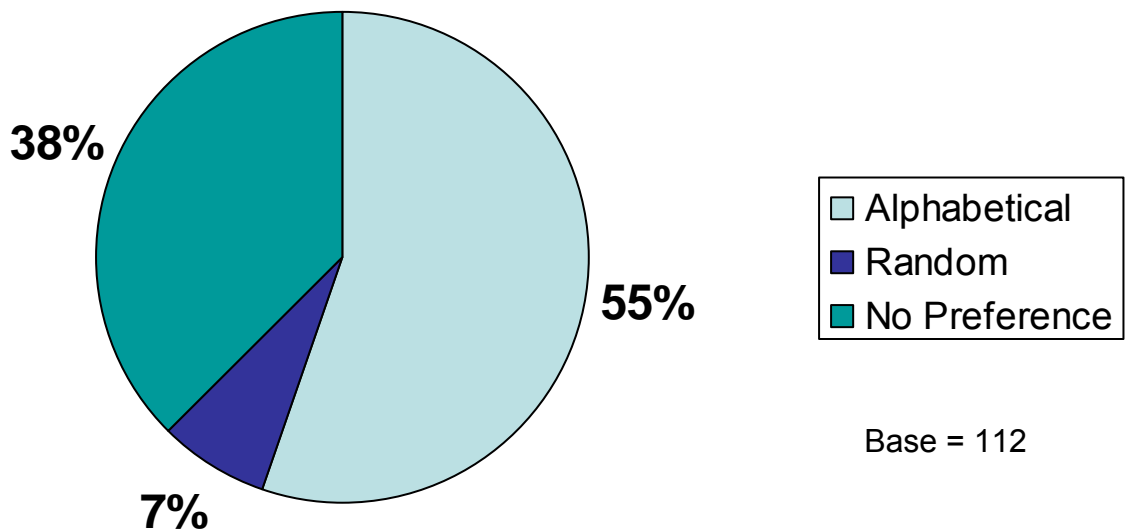
“I look for the party first and then the surname. It’s the surname you see on all the posters and that’s what I remember.”

“Keep the format the same the returning officer announces it that way.”

Those who picked the first name first option felt that the flow was better and more consistent with how names are normally presented.

“It’s how you normally read a name. It flows better, like you’d say it yourself.”

5.2.3 Party Name, Alphabetical vs. Random Listing

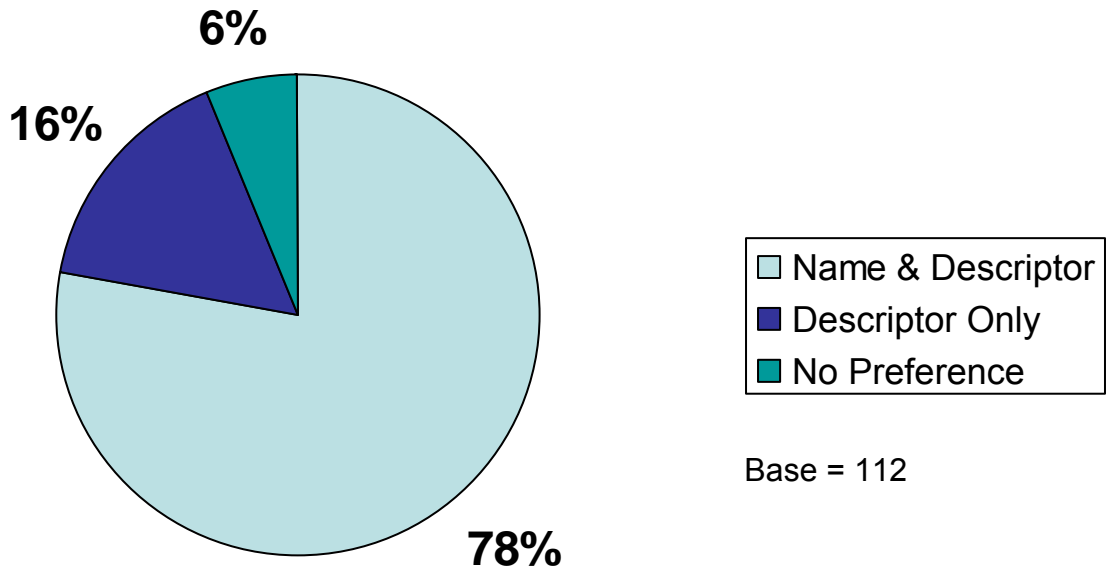


As with the candidate names, a strong preference for alphabetical listings was expressed for party names with 55% choosing alphabetical listing over only 7% for random listing.

Identical reasons for listing in alphabetical order were given for this comparison as for the candidate name listings in section 5.2.1 above.

Slightly more respondents gave a no preference response for the party name listing than for the candidate names (38% vs. 23%). Reasons given for this were that the alphabetical ordering appeared more obvious to them on the candidate list than it did on the party listing.

5.2.4 Party Name With Descriptor vs. Descriptor Only



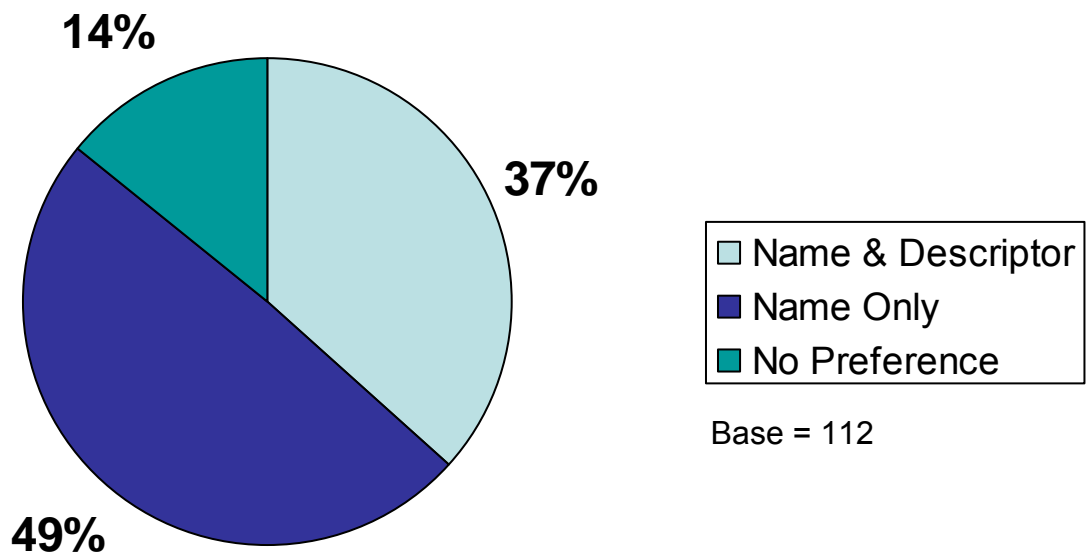
A very strong preference was expressed in favour of the party name plus descriptor with 78% choosing that option, versus 16% for the party descriptor only. Reasons given for the party name with descriptor option was that this provides all the information. For the vast majority, party description only was viewed as inadequate.

“Just the description is not enough. You have to remember what they stand for instead of the party name. I’d want the party name to be sure.”

The few who did prefer the descriptor only felt that detailing a party’s key policy was more useful than the part name itself.

“Means you know what they stand for That’s what people need to know.”

5.2.5 Party Name With Descriptor vs. Party Name Only



A preference overall in favour of party name only was expressed by 49%. However, a relatively large proportion, 37%, selected the party name with descriptor combination.

Those who chose the party name only, did so for two key reasons:

1. The listing is then more clear / less cluttered
"That one is too crowded, too cluttered Makes it more difficult to read."
2. The party name is what they know and remember rather than the descriptor
"I look for the party name. I'm voting for the labour candidate so that's what I look for, I don't want all this other stuff."

Those who chose the party descriptor with name combination felt that the extra information was useful to them.

*"It's confirmation it helps to confirm that you've got the right one."
"Means you can see what they stand for. I'd like to see even more about their policies down here."*

5.2.6 Party Symbols

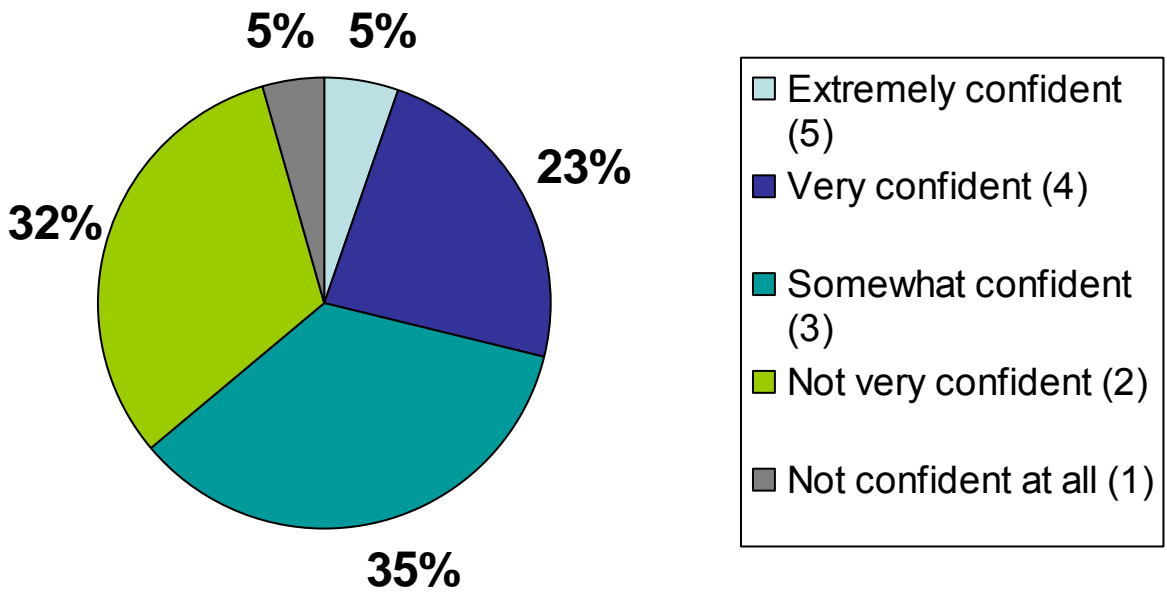
Although not shown on the ballot papers used for the above exercise, since all the parties were fictitious, the subject of party symbols was discussed in all groups. Nearly all felt that the symbols were useful in that they provided additional confirmation of the party.

"It's another way to find your party it confirms you've got the right one."

Many felt, even if they did not use the symbols themselves, that for voters with limited reading skills the symbols would be an essential aid to finding the party they wanted to vote for. In fact one respondent from the learning difficulties group said that he found them very helpful and might struggle without them.

"For people unable to read I imagine it's essential."

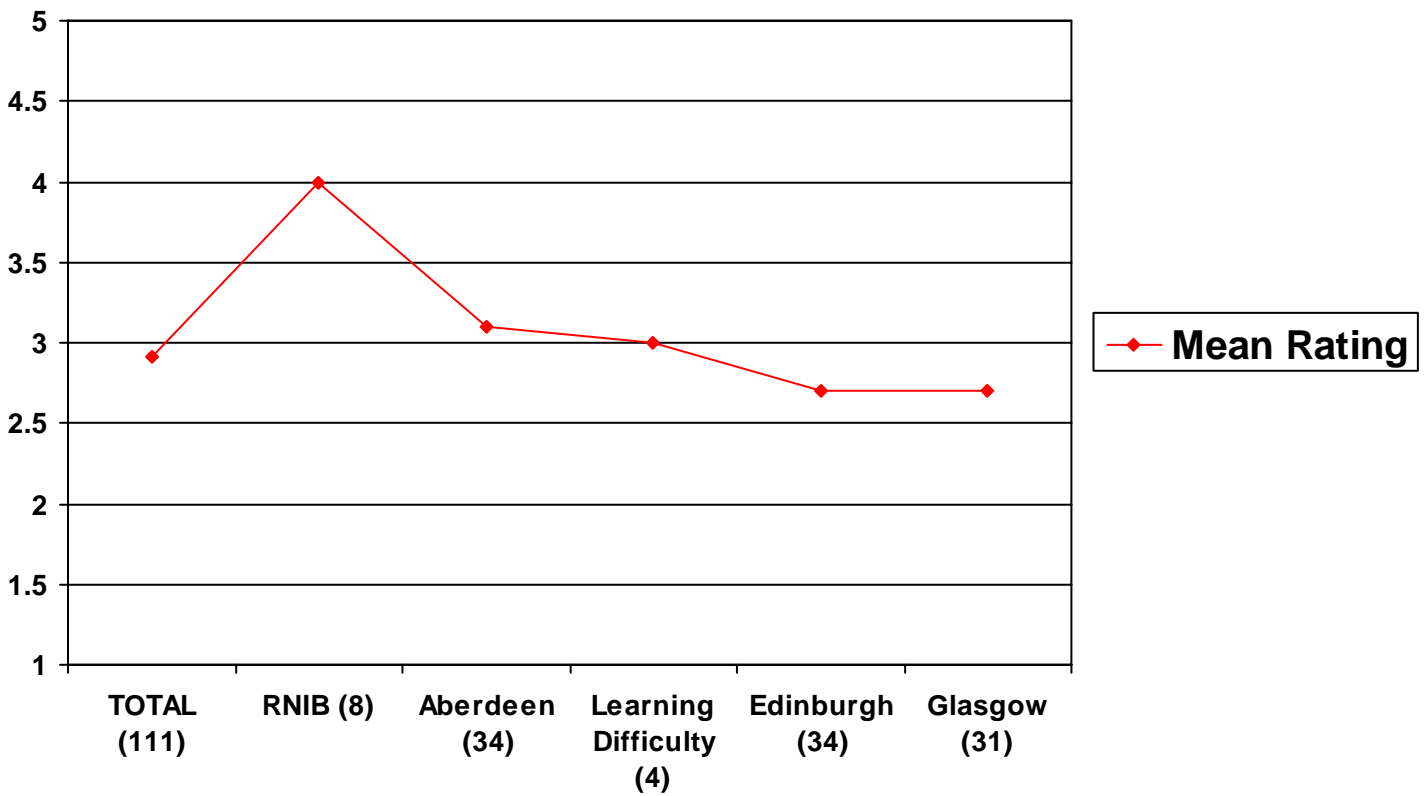
5.3 Voters' Confidence In Scottish Electoral Process



Mean rating = 2.9

Base = 111
(1 x Don't know)

Overall level of confidence in the Scottish Electoral Process was at about the "Somewhat confident" level (i.e. mid-point on a 5 point scale). Interestingly, very few gave either of the extreme responses with only 5% saying "Extremely confident" or "Not confident at all".



Highest levels of confidence were among the RNIB group (sight impaired) with a mean of 4.0 on the five point scale, while confidence among the learning difficulties group at 3.0 was close to the total mean of 2.9.

Levels of confidence were higher in Aberdeen at 3.2 compared to Edinburgh and Glasgow, both at 2.7. This was reflected for other topics too with a number of the Aberdeen respondents expressing more no preferences and being less concerned by some of the issues relative to the Edinburgh and Glasgow participants.

However, across all groups, the vast majority said that their level of confidence was much higher in the past but had taken a knock specifically as a result of the 2007 election.

“Purely as a result of the last election. A fiasco!”

“It was embarrassing! The rest of the world must have been laughing at us.”

Confidence had been knocked for most by personal experience of the election with confusion both among respondents themselves and observed among other voters. Two distinct issues caused confusion for respondents or were cited as likely to confuse others, these were:

1. Two separate elections taking place at the same time
2. Two entirely different election formats being run in parallel

Specifically the Single Transferable Vote system used for proportional representation was new and unexpected to most voters.

“I thought I knew how to vote. You know, cross in a box and you’re done! When I found I’d got two papers and one asking for one to five rankings it took a bit of working out.”

Some felt that this resulted in many spoiled papers. Some of the respondents realised after the election that they had completed one or more ballots incorrectly and so would have contributed to the spoiled paper count. Others were unsure whether their votes would have been valid or not.

“I put a cross on both papers, like I usually would. Afterwards I found out that it shouldn’t have been a cross for one of them. I was definitely one of those spoiled ballots.”

“I honestly don’t know to this day whether or not my votes counted. I think I did it right but I’m not certain.”

In addition to personal experience and talking with other voters, subsequent media reporting reinforced the above concerns and added further issues that reduced confidence levels even further. While none of these may be entirely accurate they have become part of the ‘urban myth’ surrounding the 2007 Scottish elections and as such drive down the confidence of many voters in the Scottish electoral process.

Specifically cited were:

- ⊕ Machine counting, meaning:
 - Ballot papers not counted if folded
 - Ballot paper spoiled if even a small part of the indication strayed outside of box limits
- ⊕ Ballot paper spoiled if all choices were not indicated on Single Transferable Vote ballot. N.B. Even respondents who had limited their selection to less than the maximum because they felt that was correct on the day seemed unsure in the groups whether their ballots would have counted or not.
- ⊕ Ballot boxes being counted onto ferry boats from the islands with a different number being counted off.
- ⊕ Unopened ballot boxes from the Scottish Elections being found subsequently in other parts of the UK

However while confidence is lower than it was previously, as a result of the 2007 electoral experience, most respondents felt that future elections will be valid and confidence improved if:

- ⊕ Ballot paper formats are not mixed, i.e. one election at a time
 - ⊕ Instructions are clear
 - ⊕ More communication and guidance given ahead of the election
- all leading to significantly lower proportions of spoiled papers.

5.4 Voters' Experiences Of Elections

Most of the respondents experienced at least some confusion as a result of taking part in the 2007 election as described above in section 5.3. A few however had either researched the process before polling day or had received more information ahead of time.

"I knew exactly what I was doing. I'd researched it on the net and read the papers carefully before I went to vote."

"Actually a councillor came to our day group and explained everything to us very well so I was probably one of the few people who knew what they were doing on the day."

Some claimed there was no information available beforehand but most felt they had ignored much of the communication ahead of the election, feeling confident in their own knowledge about how to vote, but then finding themselves confused once in the polling booth.

"No I didn't see anything at all."

"I think there were things in the paper and we did receive pamphlets but they went straight in the bin. At the end of the day it was an election ... I thought how hard can that be?"

“People were milling around outside trying to tell you about what to do but I just pushed past them thinking it was the usual candidates wanting your vote. When I got into the booth I realised things were different to normal. All the officers were busy with people and people were starting to queue behind me for the booth. I felt pressured and didn’t have time to really work it out properly.”

Interestingly, all felt they would pay more attention to communication ahead of the next election, having had the experience of 2007.

The main cause of confusion at the 2007 election was a combination of two elections being conducted at the same time with different voting formats for each. In particular the Single Transferable Vote ballot requiring a ranking system had not been seen before by most respondents and clearly wasn’t expected by many. Even those who correctly understood this ballot admitted to indecision in the booth.

“I had in my mind the top two I was going to vote for but for numbers three to five I had no idea going in. I was just looking for a party I recognised.”

A few who were prepared ahead of time also described their approach to tactical voting.

“I picked my first two choices and then looked for people who had no hope of getting in and then used the rest on them. That way I was not giving a vote to someone I actually didn’t want to get in anyway.”

Another source of concern, although less of an issue than those above, was the requirement not to fold the ballot papers. To some this meant it was more difficult to maintain a secret ballot while many folded their papers instinctively anyway.

“If you can’t fold it it’s not a secret ballot. I came out of the booth holding it to my chest like this looked a bit silly but it’s supposed to be a secret ballot.”

“I folded mine anyway. I always have. Just did what I’ve always done.”

Finally the sheer number of candidates seemed to overwhelm many, particularly in Edinburgh and Glasgow.

“The list was huge .. it just went on and on. Made it more difficult to find the main parties and the ones you wanted to vote for.”

Previous elections in 1999 and 2003 followed a format that voters were familiar with and so in comparison 2007 was felt to cause a lot more confusion and hence dented confidence in the Scottish electoral system as described in section 5.3.

Only a small proportion of the respondents had experience of postal voting. Where this had been used, the postal vote had been obtained easily and the process had been smooth. In fact one respondent who used a postal vote in 2007 was subsequently very pleased she had gone that route as it gave her more time to review instructions and, in particular, decide on her one to five ranking for the Single Transferable Vote ballot. The only negative response came from one respondent for whom the postal ballot had arrived too late for her to use, as a result of postal delay.

With each group we explored whether respondents would make use of postal votes in the future, if they were going to be unavailable for an election. While some said they would, most felt that the reasons for being unavailable, like holiday or illness, would take priority over the election for them personally and as a result they did not expect to make use of the postal option.

Most felt that staff at polling stations were helpful without being intrusive. In fact there was some discussion about the fact that polling staff need to be slightly detached in order not to be seen to be directing a voter. On the whole this balance appears to be achieved.

None of the respondents had experience of dealing with local electoral officers outside of the polling station itself.

5.5 Ways To Improve The Electoral Process

In nearly all groups the use of technology was suggested as a way to improve the electoral process, specifically voting by:

- ⊕ internet
- ⊕ telephone
- ⊕ text
- ⊕ electronic / computerised system at polling station

While all felt that use of remote voting systems would improve turnout most had concerns about potential abuse.

“No matter how secure you make it there will always be hackers able to get in.”

“We’ve seen what’s happened voting by ‘phone and text on TV shows. Just shows fixing is possible.”

Even stand-alone voting systems at the polling stations generated concerns.

“Computers crash! If it all goes down you’ve lost it. With the current system you can always go back to the papers and count them again.”

“It’s not like the government don’t lose data. Using technology is not necessarily safer.”

In most cases younger voters were more open to the use of technology for voting, but even they felt that older voters would not use it or even have access.

"I'm fine with it. I mean lots of us use the internet for banking and that has to be very secure."

"Older people often don't have access to the internet. It would put them off."

Older voters themselves agreed that the use of technology would not accommodate them or their generation and all had concerns about the security and validity of electronic systems.

"I'm suspicious of the internet. I wouldn't use it and lots of older people don't have computers."

Overall, all the groups concluded that the current "pencil and paper" approach is easiest for all age groups to understand, is easier to scrutinise and offers fewer opportunities for tampering, than electronic systems.

"Look at the last election in America. What was it, 'The hanging chads of Florida'? All very suspicious! Better to use what's proven and that's a cross in a box!"

Despite the overall concern about voting using electronic systems and despite the fact that counting machines were cited as causing some problems during the 2007 election, the use of counting machines was generally accepted, the caveats being that the machine count should be proven to be at least as accurate as a manual count and the system should be able to deal with folded ballots.

"I can understand using counting machines. As long as the machines have been tested to show they are as good as or better than humans then fine..... It's not a big deal like electronic voting. If the counting machines go wrong you still have the papers to count by hand. If a voting machine crashes you've lost everything."

"The technology should be adapted to us not us to them. Surely they can have a machine that can deal with a crease in the paper."

5.6 Additional Special Needs Findings

Findings from both groups conducted among voters with special needs (visually impaired and combined learning plus physical difficulties) reflected the overall findings reported above. However certain issues related specifically to their own needs are highlighted below:

5.6.1 *Visually Impaired:*

For voters who are partially sighted the availability of light can be critical. Several complained of polling stations being dark places, making it even more difficult for them to cast their vote unassisted. Comments were made about the positioning of booths being often away from or shielded from natural light, simply compounding the problem. Suggestions were for booths, even if only a few at each polling station, to be better lit or to have a powerful desk lamp fitted.

Only one in the group had ever made use of the Braille / raised figure overlay. Most of those who are partially sighted had made use of their own equipment (e.g. illuminated magnifying glass) or had been given assistance by officers at the polling station or an accompanying helper or relative.

5.6.2 *Learning and Physical Difficulties:*

All the voters with a combination of learning and physical difficulties in this study required wheelchairs for mobility and their specific needs focused mainly on the physical issues. Some described having occasionally encountered difficulty with wheelchair access to polling stations, particularly in terms of heavily sprung doors and restricted door widths.

However a greater problem reported was the lack of a writing surface at an appropriate height. Specifically, the shelf within a polling booth is designed to be at the correct height for someone standing up. If a voter is restricted to a wheelchair the shelf is too high to be usable. Suggestions were for a screened desk or angled surface to be made available for wheelchair users.

One did complain of polling staff addressing questions to the helper pushing the wheelchair rather than directly to her. However most found the electoral staff to be helpful and considerate of their needs.

6 CONCLUSIONS

- ⊕ Overall preference among voters is for the overnight rather than next day count. This is driven by two factors;
 1. The buzz or excitement of taking part in an election that some feel is enhanced by the immediacy of an overnight count with an early result.
 2. Others feel that making the election and count a continuous process allows for easier scrutiny and less chance of tampering.
- ⊕ Ballot paper design options explored in this research have shown clear preferences among voters as follows:
 - Alphabetical listing of candidates, using the format of surname first followed by first names
 - Party names shown with party symbols but without party descriptors
- ⊕ Findings from this research clearly support the view that confidence in the Scottish electoral system has taken a knock as a result of the 2007 election.
- ⊕ Actions that reduce potential confusion, and so reduce the level of spoiled ballot papers, will be welcomed by the voting public and go some way to regaining previous levels of confidence. Specifically:
 - Isolating elections so that two different formats are not run at the same time.
 - Providing clear instructions on ballot papers and in booths to clarify exactly what is required for the election type being run.
 - The single vote approach (i.e. 1st past the post system) is universally understood, is expected and is felt to be the least confusing option among voters.
 - Where a Single Transferable Vote format is necessary (i.e. proportional representation) clear communication about its use, both prior to the election and at the polling station, is clearly required. Given the experience of 2007, voters will be more open to learning about this system than they were before the last election.
- ⊕ Voters have an awareness of electronic systems that could be used for voting and many feel that this would make voting easier. However the overall view is that these systems are more liable to tampering and / or failure. As a result their preference is to maintain the traditional pencil and ballot paper approach for now.
- ⊕ Despite criticism of electronic voting systems, electronic counting is generally accepted providing the machines are proven to be at least as accurate as manual counting and able to accommodate issues such as folded ballot papers.
- ⊕ Several issues were identified by the special needs groups included in this research which, if addressed, would assist them by making their voting process easier. Specifically by ensuring:
 - Brightly lit booths are available for voters with impaired vision.
 - Wheelchair access is not restricted by heavily sprung doors or by doors with limited width.
 - A booth with shelving at wheelchair height or a screened desk be made available.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend the findings from this research be viewed in conjunction with Gould's recommendations and feedback from the consultation paper, "Sorting the Ballot".

However based on this research alone, we recommend that in future elections:

1. Overnight counting be utilised.
2. Ballot designs use alphabetical listings with candidates' surnames shown first.
3. Party names without descriptors, but with party symbols, are used on ballot papers.
4. Future elections are run individually where different voting systems are to be used.
5. Clear communication is undertaken both before and as part of any election process involving the Single Transferable Vote system to educate voters about how that system is to be used.
6. Communications be developed and evaluated to ensure understanding by the electorate.
7. Traditional pencil and ballot paper system be maintained for the present.
8. Electronic counting machines be able to accommodate folded ballot papers, and are tested for accuracy ahead of elections.
9. Easier wheelchair access to polling stations as well as brighter lighting and lower shelf options in polling booths be provided to meet issues identified by special needs voters.

8 APPENDICES

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LASER Marketing Research Ltd.

Voter Groups (LE 1337)

RECRUITMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

"Good morning/afternoon, I'm with *LASER* Marketing Research and we are conducting a survey about the process of voting in Scottish elections and would like to include your opinions."

RECORD GENDER

Male 1 - } **CHECK**
Female 2 - } **QUOTA – EVEN SPLIT REQUIRED**

1. "Which of the following groups includes your age?" (READ LIST)

"Under 23" X - **THANK RESPONDENT, CLOSE INTERVIEW**

"23-34" 1 } **RECRUIT A**

"35-44" 2 } **GOOD SPREAD**

"45-54" 3 } **FOR EACH GROUP**

"55-64" 4 }

"65 +" 5 } **CHECK QUOTA - 2-3 NEEDED FOR EACH**

GROUP

Refused X } **CLOSE INTERVIEW**

2. "Have you, yourself taken part in any type of market research study in the past twelve months which lasted more than ten minutes or not?"

Yes 1 – **ASK Q.3**

No 2 – **SKIP TO Q.4**

3. "What was the subject of the research?"

_____ | - **WRITE IN**

IF POLITICAL OR ELECTORAL RESEARCH CLOSE INTERVIEW, OTHERWISE CONTINUE.

4. "Do you, or does anyone in the family or any close friends work..." (READ LIST)

	Yes	No
"for an advertising agency?"	X	1
"in marketing research?"	X	1
"in the media?"	X	1
"for a political party?"	X	1
"for a government or local authority department involved in administration of elections?"	X	1

IF "YES" TO ANY, THANK RESPONDENT, CLOSE INTERVIEW

5. "Did you personally vote in last year's (2007) election in Scotland?"

Yes 1 – **CONTINUE**

No X - **CLOSE**

6. "In which of the previous two elections in Scotland did you personally vote, those during 2003, 1999, both or neither of these?"

2003 only 1 }
 1999 only 2 } **CONTINUE**
 Both 2003 and 1999 3 }

Neither X – **CLOSE**

7. "Which of these best describes the area where you currently live?"

"City / town centre" 1 - } **CHECK QUOTA**

"City / town suburbs" 2 - } **14-15 PER GROUP**

"Village or rural community
 outside of town / city" 3 – **CHECK QUOTA, 2-3 PER GROUP**

8. "What is your occupation....?"

|_____| - **WRITE IN**

9. "Are you the head of your household?"

Yes 1 - **CLASSIFY AND SKIP TO Q.11**

No 2 - **ASK Q. 10**

10. "What is the occupation of the head of household?"

|_____| - **WRITE IN & CLASSIFY**

CLASSIFY:

C2, D, E 1 – **RECRUIT FOR 18:15 GROUP**

A, B, C1 2 – **RECRUIT FOR 20:15 GROUP**

11. "If you could have dinner with any famous person, living or dead, who would you choose and why?"

LOOK FOR A FULL RESPONSE. ENSURE RESPONDENT IS ABLE TO VERBALISE REASONS AND CAN BE EASILY UNDERSTOOD.

12. "The reason I am asking these questions is that we are conducting some research on behalf of The Scotland Office. We would like you to participate in a consumer focus group at 18:15 / 20:15 on *Tuesday 3rd June / Wednesday 4th June / Thursday 5th June* at *The Parliament House Hotel / The Swallow Hotel / The Thistle Aberdeen Caledonian*. You will not be asked about your political opinions, the research is about the mechanics of Scottish elections. You will not be asked to buy anything nor will you be contacted in the future as a result of taking part in this research, we are only interested in your opinions. The discussion will be informal and last up to one and a half hours. We will give you £40 in cash as a thank you for taking part.

Would you be able to take part in this discussion group?"

Yes 1 – **BOOK GROUP TIME AND RECORD
NAME, ADDRESS AND PHONE NUMBER BELOW
NOTE ON BOOKING SHEET.
GIVE / SEND RESPONDENT AN INVITATION
LETTER**

No X - **THANK RESPONDENT, CLOSE INTERVIEW**

Name: _____

Phone: _____ (land-line)

Address: _____

Phone: _____ (mobile)

I certify that this interview was conducted following the questionnaire and according to the instructions for this study and that the answers recorded are as given to me by this respondent. I also realise that a proportion of my work will be back-checked with respondents for verification.

Interviewer's name: (Please print) _____

Interviewer's signature: _____

Date of interview: _____

Voter Groups

Questionnaire

Please note that this is not a test, we only want to know your views so there are no right or wrong answers.

Before we start discussing the process of voting we would like you to record your personal opinions about 3 items on this short questionnaire.

1. How confident are you currently of the electoral process in Scotland? By this we are not referring to your confidence in politicians or political parties but rather your confidence that the mechanics of the electoral system result in the candidate(s) and party with the most votes winning the election.

Extremely confident

Very confident

Somewhat confident

Not very confident

Not confident at all

2. After an election, the ballot papers can be counted either

a. during the night of the election date – meaning results are normally announced around midnight or in the early hours of the following morning, apart from some of the more remote islands where there are transportation problems, and the winning party can normally be announced on the early morning TV news;

or

b. during the day following the election. – meaning the results are normally announced the morning or early afternoon of the day after the election and are available for the mid-day or evening TV news.

Of these two approaches when would you prefer the count be done?

During the night of the election with results available on the Friday morning.....

During the day following the election with results available on Friday lunchtime/afternoon

No preference between the two

3. Please review the mock-up ballot papers in front of you. Imagine yourself voting using each of these mock-ups.

On all the papers, please vote for Peter Martin Douglas, the No Change Party whose slogan is 'Let's carry on as we are'.

Please indicate, with an X in the appropriate box, which of each pair of ballot papers you would find easiest to understand and use to vote for Peter and the No Change party.

Constituency Ballot paper (**Tan** background)

Ballot paper A (Ordered alphabetically)

Ballot paper B (Random ordering)

No preference

Regional Ballot paper (**Green** background)

Ballot paper C (Ordered alphabetically)

Ballot paper D (Random ordering)

No preference

Regional Ballot paper (**Pink** background)

Ballot paper E (Registered party name and independents)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ballot paper F (Party description and independents)	<input type="checkbox"/>
No preference	<input type="checkbox"/>

Regional Ballot paper (**Yellow** background)

Ballot paper G (Registered party name and descriptor)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ballot paper H (Registered party name only)	<input type="checkbox"/>
No preference	<input type="checkbox"/>

Constituency Ballot paper (**Tan** background)

Ballot paper A (Alphabetically by surname)

Ballot paper A2 (Alphabetical by forename)

No preference

Gould Recommendations Research

Voter Groups

DISCUSSION GUIDE

		Timing
PHASE 1	Introduction	15'
PHASE 2	Questionnaire	10'
PHASE 3	Summarise findings and explore reasons.....	20' – 30''
PHASE 4	Personal experiences of elections	15' – 20'
PHASE 5	Additional points / wrap up	5' – 10'
TOTAL		65' – 85'

PHASE 1: INTRODUCTION (15')

- Introduction
 - Purpose of research – emphasise we are interested in the mechanics of voting, not in political parties or specific politicians.
 - Confidentiality
 - Opinions sought / no right or wrong answers
 - Audio recording
 - Introduction of respondents
 - First name
 - Voting experience (i.e. relatively new, experienced, or “seasoned”)

PHASE 2: QUESTIONNAIRE (10')

- Explain that initially we are looking for individuals’ responses. Hence this questionnaire contains a short series of questions about certain aspects of voting. Ask respondents to indicate their answer against each question without discussing it with anyone else. The discussion will follow. Emphasise that there are no right or wrong answers.
- Explain:
 - Overall rating of confidence in electoral system
 - Any preference between overnight count versus next day count
 - Preferences between order and description options

PHASE 3: SUMMARISE FINDINGS AND EXPLORE REASONS (20'-30')

- Collect key measures by show of hands.
 - Probe and discuss reasons for the different ratings / preference, specifically:
 - Confidence in electoral system
 - Why low / high?
 - What drives this?
 - Are there any areas of potential concern or what would boost confidence in the system?
 - Overnight count vs next day
 - Explore reasons for preference
 - Establish level of importance for respondents / voters in general
 - Would they prefer a quick overnight result possibly undertaken by tired counters or a slower next day count with fresher counters
 - Accuracy versus speed considerations
 - What type of person would push for one approach over the other? Why?
 - Ballot paper design
 - Explore reasons for preference
 - Probe for impact of:
 - Random versus alphabetic listings
 - Use of party descriptors rather than registered party names (Alex Salmond for first Minister example)
 - Inclusion / exclusion of descriptive line
 - Inclusion / exclusion of party symbols

RETRIEVE QUESTIONNAIRES

PHASE 4: PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF ELECTIONS (15'-20')

- Personal experiences of 2007 election
 - How easy or confusing was it for you?
 - What, if anything, confused people?
 - What would have made it easier?
- Compare to experiences of 2003 and / or 1999 elections
 - What better / worse? Why?
 - Impact of differences?
- In general, do the different ways of voting between different types of elections cause confusion? [Scottish Parliament Additional Member System; Westminster First Past the Post; European Elections proportional by region; Local Government Single Transferable Vote]
- Postal versus personal voting
 - Explore experiences
 - Used / not used? Why?
- Explore voters' experiences of their contact with electoral staff
 - At voting stations
 - By phone or other contact with local officers

PHASE 5: ADDITIONAL POINTS / WRAP UP (5'-10')

- How can the voting process be made easier?
 - Explore suggestions
- Any suggestions on alternative methods of voting
 - Voting in advance
 - Weekend voting
 - Voting online
 - Voting electronically in a polling station
 - Voting by 'phone
 - Voting over a longer period of time, say over 2 days
- If not mentioned explore specifically:
 - Electronic vs. hand counting
 - Electronic voting
- As a result of taking part in this discussion has anyone's views about the electoral system in Scotland changed? If yes, what specifically and why?

THANK GROUP – CLOSE

Scottish Parliament Constituency

VOTE ONCE ONLY (X)

<p>BROWN William Ian</p> <p>Environment Party [The]</p>	
<p>CRANSTON Helen</p> <p>Middle of the Road Party [The]</p>	
<p>DOUGLAS Peter Martin</p> <p>No Change Party [The]</p>	
<p>FRAME Donald Alexander</p> <p>New Political Party [The]</p>	
<p>MacDONALD Michael Gordon</p> <p>Independent</p>	
<p>WALLACE Walter Alan</p> <p>Scotland Alone Party [The] Party</p>	

Scottish Parliament Constituency

VOTE ONCE ONLY (X)

<p>MacDONALD Michael Gordon</p> <p>Independent</p>	
<p>WALLACE Walter Alan</p> <p>Scotland Alone Party [The]</p>	
<p>FRAME Donald Alexander</p> <p>New Political Party [The]</p>	
<p>BROWN William Ian</p> <p>Environment Party [The]</p>	
<p>DOUGLAS Peter Martin</p> <p>No Change Party [The]</p>	
<p>CRANSTON Helen</p> <p>Middle of the Road Party [The]</p>	



Scottish Parliament Region

VOTE ONCE ONLY (X)

<p>ENVIRONMENT PARTY [THE] For A Fairer, Greener, Better Scotland</p>	
<p>FREE HEALTHCARE FOR ALL Save our NHS</p>	
<p>MIDDLE OF THE ROAD PARTY [THE] Straight down the middle</p>	
<p>NEW POLITICAL PARTY [THE] Time to Change</p>	
<p>NO CHANGE PARTY [The] Let's carry on as we are</p>	
<p>OPEN ACCESS FOR ALL Freedom to roam</p>	
<p>SAVE OUR COUNTRY SIDE ALLIANCE Stop wind farms</p>	
<p>SCOTLAND ALONE PARTY [THE] We want to run ourselves</p>	
<p>SMASH THE ATOM PARTY No more nuclear power stations</p>	
<p>BARLEY Robert Anthony Independent</p>	
<p>MacLEOD Andrew Independent</p>	



Scottish Parliament Region

VOTE ONCE ONLY (X)

<p>SMASH THE ATOM PARTY No more nuclear power stations</p>	
<p>SCOTLAND ALONE PARTY [THE] We want to run ourselves</p>	
<p>NEW POLITICAL PARTY [THE] Time to Change</p>	
<p>OPEN ACCESS FOR ALL Freedom to roam</p>	
<p>BARLEY Robert Anthony Independent</p>	
<p>MIDDLE OF THE ROAD PARTY [THE] Straight down the middle</p>	
<p>SAVE OUR COUNTRY SIDE ALLIANCE Stop wind farms</p>	
<p>MacLEOD Andrew Independent</p>	
<p>NO CHANGE PARTY [The] Let's carry on as we are</p>	
<p>FREE HEALTHCARE FOR ALL Save our NHS</p>	
<p>ENVIRONMENT PARTY [THE] For A Fairer, Greener, Better Scotland</p>	



Scottish Parliament Region

VOTE ONCE ONLY (X)

<p>ENVIRONMENT PARTY [THE] For A Fairer, Greener, Better Scotland</p>	
<p>FREE HEALTHCARE FOR ALL Save our NHS</p>	
<p>MIDDLE OF THE ROAD PARTY [THE] Straight down the middle</p>	
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<p>SMASH THE ATOM PARTY No more nuclear power stations</p>	
<p>BARLEY Robert Anthony Independent</p>	
<p>MacLEOD Andrew Independent</p>	

Scottish Parliament Region

VOTE ONCE ONLY (X)

FOR A FAIRER, GREENER, BETTER SCOTLAND	
FREEDOM TO ROAM	
LET'S CARRY ON AS WE ARE	
NO MORE NUCLEAR POWER STATIONS	
SAVE OUR NHS	
STOP WIND FARMS	
STRAIGHT DOWN THE MIDDLE	
TIME TO CHANGE	
WE WANT TO RUN OURSELVES	
BARLEY Robert Anthony Independent	
MacLEOD Andrew Independent	



Scottish Parliament Region

VOTE ONCE ONLY (X)

<p>ENVIRONMENT PARTY [THE] For A Fairer, Greener, Better Scotland</p>	
<p>FREE HEALTHCARE FOR ALL Save our NHS</p>	
<p>MIDDLE OF THE ROAD PARTY [THE] Straight down the middle</p>	
<p>NEW POLITICAL PARTY [THE] Time to Change</p>	
<p>NO CHANGE PARTY [The] Let's carry on as we are</p>	
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<p>SAVE OUR COUNTRY SIDE ALLIANCE Stop wind farms</p>	
<p>SCOTLAND ALONE PARTY [THE] We want to run ourselves</p>	
<p>SMASH THE ATOM PARTY No more nuclear power stations</p>	
<p>BARLEY Robert Anthony Independent</p>	
<p>MacLEOD Andrew Independent</p>	

Scottish Parliament Region

VOTE ONCE ONLY (X)

ENVIRONMENT PARTY [THE]	
FREE HEALTHCARE FOR ALL	
MIDDLE OF THE ROAD PARTY [THE]	
NEW POLITICAL PARTY [THE]	
NO CHANGE PARTY [The]	
OPEN ACCESS FOR ALL	
SAVE OUR COUNTRY SIDE ALLIANCE	
SCOTLAND ALONE PARTY [THE]	
SMASH THE ATOM PARTY	
BARLEY Robert Anthony Independent	
MacLEOD Andrew Independent	

Scottish Parliament Constituency

VOTE ONCE ONLY (X)

<p>DONALD ALEXANDER FRAME</p> <p>New Political Party [The]</p>	
<p>HELEN CRANSTON</p> <p>Middle of the Road Party [The]</p>	
<p>MICHAEL GORDON MacDONALD</p> <p>Independent</p>	
<p>PETER MARTIN DOUGLAS</p> <p>No Change Party [The]</p>	
<p>WALTER ALAN WALLACE</p> <p>Scotland Alone Party [The]</p>	
<p>WILLIAM IAN BROWN</p> <p>Environment Party [The]</p>	