Community Council Activity in Scotland: Explaining Patterns of Local Civic Participation – A Thesis by Tom Oldham

Abstract

This thesis uses a binomial regression test to establish a link between Community Council (CC) inactivity and rising levels of deprivation, using the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD). It finds that, although there is a strong relationship, it is not the key predictor to determining the likelihood of CC inactivity. Instead, it finds that while there is a substantial relationship on a national level, institutional factors (whether that be neglect or support) or the salience of other community projects in the area can supersede the impact of deprivation both positively and negatively. Purposive case studies are utilised to examine an array of outcomes that generally reflect the national picture, show high levels of CC inactivity, and show zero CC inactivity. This research not only fills a gap in the literature linking deprivation and CC activity but also provides policy implications for upcoming proposed reforms to CCs. Co-operation between CCs and local groups needs to be promoted, institutional support enhanced, and inequality reduced to effectively increase CC activity.

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1. Introduction

Community Councils (CCs) were created through the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 to bridge the gap between communities and local authorities. Regular citizens living in the area make up the membership, volunteering to support their communities. There are over 1300 CC areas, covering the entirety of Scotland. CCs are assisted by Community Council Liaison Officers (CCLOs), acting as a direct line of communication to the council (Paterson et al., 2019: 32). The Improvement Service acts as the national manager of CCs across Scotland, doing so on behalf of the Scottish Government (Improvement Service, n.d.). CCs can be involved in many aspects of community life, including but not limited to education, healthcare, safety, leisure and recreation, and the environment (Paterson et al., 2019: 7). Thus, the role which they can play in Scottish democracy is vital, acting as an open, democratic, hyperlocal voice of communication to the local authorities regarding issues in their community.

CCs acting as an additional layer of representation is especially necessary since Scotland has the highest average population per local authority of any developed country, with a ratio of one councillor representing 4,270 citizens (Davies et al., 2022: 363). In contrast, the ratio in Germany and Finland is one councillor per 500 and 400 citizens respectively (Davies et al., 2022: 363). Local authorities consult CCs on planning, licensing, and use of communal property and assets (Duncan, 1990: 9; Paterson et al., 2019: 7). This is to say that throughout their existence, CCs have had minimal powers. Many Community Councillors have been consistently disappointed by the level of transparency from local authorities and the available influence they get regarding decision-making at that level (Paterson et al., 2019: 25). As

David McCrone et al. stated, they have had ‘no statutory functions, and no responsibility for service provision, nor the power to levy rates’ (1993: 10). As of 2026, approximately 1 in 5 CCs are inactive. All of this has led some scholars to argue that Scottish local democracy is practically inexistent (Escobar, 2014: 9). However, are these failures random, or are they linked to socio-economic inequalities?

This thesis aims to answer the research question: to what extent, and in what ways, is area deprivation associated with Community Council inactivity in Scotland? It hypothesises that there is indeed a link between more deprived areas and inactive CCs, but that this will not wholly explain CC inactivity nationwide. It is also found that institutional weaknesses contribute to CC inactivity. Literature has demonstrated that deprivation can impact organised volunteering participation rates, showing a strong but not overly significant relationship. This is explored further in *Chapter 3.2*. This paper therefore hypothesises that this relationship will also be found when examining CCs. To explore this, CCs will be studied both nationally and through purposive case studies, ensuring a comprehensive scope.

This potential link will be examined through secondary data analysis of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), which assesses deprivation in every area of Scotland using seven metrics (Scottish Government, 2020). Using mapping software, SIMD decile averages were then overlaid onto the CC boundaries, with the population weighted by data zone centroids. Binomial logistic regression tests were then run on this data, using the CCs' activity statuses to assess the size, strength, and direction of the relationship between deprivation and CC activity. This established the links as it returned a statistically significant and consistent relationship between deprivation and CC inactivity. However, it also showed

that deprivation accounted for only a modest proportion of the overall variation in activity status. Finally, these results are displayed and examined at both national and local levels, utilising a purposive case-selection method outlined by Seawright and Gerring (2008).

While this link has been explored anecdotally (Scottish Government, 2012: 5-6), these datasets have not been combined at this scale, making this a completely novel research project in this regard. Exploring this link is, however, important because CCs deserve to be protected and promoted. They are the most hyperlocal form of democracy in Scotland, being open to all citizens, allowing them to participate in politics without party polarisation and communicate more closely with public authorities, all democratically (Paterson et al., 2019: 3). This needs to be protected in Scotland specifically, having the highest number of citizens per local authority in any developed country (Davies et al., 2022: 363). If people living in deprived areas don't have the same opportunities for democratic engagement as those in wealthier areas, that is a concern and needs to be addressed.

Previous research has examined persistent CC inactivity, but there has yet to be a systematic review of its causes utilising quantitative methods such as regression tests (Duncan, 1990; Cruickshank et al., 2014; Paterson et al., 2019). An abundance of literature establishes the relationship between deprivation/inequality and volunteering/civic engagement, but this is yet to be tested on CCs (Brady et al., 1995; Schroder & Neumayr, 2021; Lancee & Van de Werfhorst, 2012; Volunteer Scotland, 2025). In fact, in 2005, the Scottish Executive published a paper titled ‘What can we do to help Community Councils fulfil their role’; ‘deprivation’, ‘poverty’, ‘inequality’, or any other related terms are never mentioned (Scottish

Executive, 2005). This is all to show that the extent to which deprivation could impact CC activity is a noticeable gap in research.

Working alongside Scotland's Regeneration Forum (SURF) strengthened this project's reliability, allowing findings to be fact-checked against an organisation with considerable expertise in the field. This results in better research as this collaboration brings together academic analysis with SURF's grassroots expertise (Smith et al., 2018: 67-68). As research has shown, particularly in Scotland, conducting research on deprivation alongside those with empirical experience can lead to better results (McKendrick et al., 2021). Thus, working with SURF has helped to incorporate the lived poverty dynamics through their fundamental focus on alleviating poverty and deprivation, and increasing democratic engagement both nationally and locally.

This research is particularly important to academics too, as the literature on Scottish devolution heavily focuses on the Holyrood-Westminster relationship. At this level, there is a distinct gap in the literature. In fact, recent devolution literature has focused on 'Metro Mayors', a scale far above the hyperlocal level examined here (Clelland, 2025). Studying literature on this topic has shown that most CC literature was published prior to the formation of the Scottish Executive, demonstrating how further research is needed in a post-devolution context. This paper aims to contribute to that.

CC reform is now more specifically on the political agenda, and so these findings have the potential to be directly relevant to an active area of Scottish Government policy. In phase two of the Democracy Matters report by the Scottish Government published this year, it is made

clear that they are open to enhancing and reforming CCs (2026a: 7). The Scottish Government are repeating their 2012 Survey of Local Authority Community Councils this year (Scottish Government, 2012). This will not include a quantitative analysis of the relationship between deprivation and CC inactivity. Establishing whether deprivation levels need to be accounted for in this survey is therefore crucial, and this piece can provide substantial support for that. Enhanced devolution is currently more prominent on the UK political agenda following Andy Burnham's appointment as Prime Minister (Pabst, 2026). This makes establishing whether deprivation should shape CC reform particularly timely.

The structure of this thesis is as follows. *Chapter 2* discusses the methodological steps that were taken in the research section of this thesis. *Chapter 3* reviews the literature surrounding this research question, examining the history of CCs as well as the relationship between deprivation/inequality and volunteering/civic engagement. *Chapter 4* presents and explains the data findings from the logistic regression tests. First, it examines the national model, then the City of Edinburgh Council as a data-backed case study, followed by a range of other significant findings from various local authorities. Finally, *Chapter 5* discusses these findings. The City of Edinburgh Council is used as an example of how urgent local issues can drive CC participation, whereas similar external organisations, such as development trusts, may reduce it. East Lothian and Midlothian are used to show how institutional and financial support drive CC activity, while Dundee shows the opposite, with CCs being practically replaced institutionally.

2. Methodology

This thesis examines the relationship between Community Council (CC) inactivity and levels of deprivation in Scotland. To do this, pre-existing datasets were brought together and analysed for this novel data analysis project. This chapter discusses the steps taken in conducting this research, the project's importance, and the benefits and limitations of my research methods.

The first step in conducting this research was to gather a comprehensive list of active and inactive CCs. While most local authorities list this on their websites, research found that many are very outdated, updating only when elections occur. Some have been updated recently, such as Fife, while others, such as South Lanarkshire, had very little information listed. However, when the information was outdated, local Facebook groups proved a useful source. Almost every CC utilised this as their main form of communication, and, with only a handful of exceptions, all were public. On here, Community Councillors would regularly post official meeting agendas and minutes, making this a reliable source for gauging their activity. These findings were also sent to the Improvement Service and circulated within the CCLO network, with accuracy checks given from over half of the local authorities.

Inactivity for the sake of this thesis has been defined by whether a mandatory Annual General Meeting has been held, as well as being on track to reach the minimum of six meetings in a year. This is in line with the Model Scheme of Establishment published by the Scottish Government (2023a: 8). West Dunbartonshire Council notably label a CC as inactive 'if [it] does not hold a meeting for a period of 3 consecutive prescribed meeting dates, or if its

membership falls below the prescribed minimum' for the same period (2022: 17). While this may be applicable to this specific area, this is not a suitable framework nationwide as the frequency of meetings can vary by region. There may not be enough issues to address at certain points in the year, or facilities may be unavailable (Escobar, 2014: 20). Thus, it was decided that greater leniency should be afforded in the definition of inactivity.

This study was largely based upon secondary quantitative data analysis using publicly available data sources. CC boundaries were the foundation of this, with other datasets overlaid to ensure a focus on CCs. The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) was the focal data source, examining the extent to which an area is deprived across multiple domains, such as income and housing. In this study, however, the focus is on each area's overall average to examine overall deprivation broadly and comprehensively. The SIMD Index was last published in 2020, making it somewhat outdated. While they aim to publish an updated version every four years and this has been delayed, the previous versions have not changed substantially when compared to each other. It is therefore an accurate source for this project, and the most reliable available. Data zone centroids, collected by the Scottish Government, which show where the highest population density is in each area, from 2022 were also used. The limitations of its age and the reasons for its use in this thesis are identical to those listed for the SIMD. However, the centroids are also beneficial because they ensure that where SIMD areas straddle two or more CC boundaries, the area in which it is counted is based on population density.

These datasets were brought together using QGIS, a geographic information system used for analysing geospatial data. First, the SIMD areas and Community Council boundaries for all

of Scotland were combined, with the software accounting only for SIMD areas that lay entirely within CC boundaries. To account for SIMD areas that straddle multiple CC areas, both datasets were combined with the data zone centroids. Using this new layer, the program was set to examine the uncounted SIMD areas in accordance with the data zone centroids, only counting an SIMD area within the CC boundary where population density is the highest. This prevents certain large areas with low population density from being overrepresented in the data by counting them across multiple boundaries.

These links were established through binomial logistic regression between the SIMD deciles and CC activity statuses. This method was chosen because it is frequently used in research to explain or predict outcome values when linearity is not perfect, especially in linking inequality to political engagement (Harris, 2021: 1; Schroder & Neumayr, 2021). It also provides multifaceted views of the data, with odds ratios indicating the magnitude and direction of the relationship, and R^2 values indicating how much of the outcome the model explains. However, these values should be interpreted cautiously rather than as straightforward measures of predictive accuracy or variance explained. The software Jamovi was used to analyse these figures due to its free access and its plethora of data analysis capabilities.

Deciles, rather than overall scores, were chosen as the better metric for this thesis, with 1 being the most deprived and 10 the least. This results in more transferable findings for future research outside the scope of the SIMD in a population-grounded study, as SIMD areas are deliberately designed to hold similar population sizes. SIMD deciles and quintiles are also the most common metrics in Scottish deprivation research, so this aligns with the conventions of

this field (Scopazzini et al., 2023; Morrow et al., 2024). It is acknowledged that treating deciles as an interval-level variable in the regression model is a simplification, and that averaging decile values across data zones assumes comparable intervals between bands. However, this is representative of a limitation common to much SIMD-based research.

Case studies were chosen with reference to the methodological literature, namely Jason Seawright and John Gerring's influential 2008 piece on case-study analysis in quantitative and qualitative studies (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). Edinburgh was chosen as the 'typical' case study, as it is broadly representative of the national relationship between area deprivation and CC inactivity, and can be used as a confirmatory (Seawright & Gerring, 2008: 297). 'Extreme' cases were then utilised, as this is feasible with such a large sample size and is useful for exploring the area (Seawright & Gerring, 2008: 297). Dundee has an extremely high inactivity rate, and although the regression test returned unstable results due to its small sample size, its raw, descriptive inactivity rate is the reason for its selection. The joint study of East Lothian and Midlothian serves as both an 'extreme' and a 'most similar' method, as these areas are geographically close and both have zero CC inactivity (Seawright & Gerring, 2008: 297). A binomial logistic regression test was not possible for East Lothian and Midlothian because the outcome variable showed no variance. As a result, they were selected and analysed instead as descriptive 'extreme' cases.

There are, of course, limitations to my methodology, with the main one being the age of the datasets. However, they are as reliable and up to date as possible. The activity statuses of the CCs have been manually checked, which has limitations of human error, but have been self-checked twice. The results were also sent to the Improvement Service and circulated within

the CCLO network for verification, with thorough feedback given on my analysis. It has been crucial in the data analysis to ensure that the links were examined as relationships rather than direct causality. Inferring causal direction from a cross-sectional research design would be too presumptuous when the inverse relationship is outside of the scope of this thesis (Bryman, 2012: 643; Sutton & Rafaeli, 1988). While it is highly unlikely that CC inactivity leads to deprivation due to their low political salience, this cannot be reliably dismissed. Future research should explore this relationship in more detail. The limitations of the other datasets were listed at the beginning of this section upon their introduction.

3. Literature Review

This section evaluates the existing literature surrounding my research question. As stated, this research area has not been examined in depth, so there is no direct literature to expand upon. However, there is literature on Community Council (CC) activity and funding, as well as literature examining how deprivation and income inequality affect both civic engagement and volunteering across a range of areas. The following literature has assisted this research and has been used to contextualise the secondary data analysis by providing historical context of fluctuating CC activity and institutional attitudes towards them. The literature has also provided theoretical backing for why deprivation may cause CC inactivity and has shown consistent results on how deprivation negatively affects different forms of civic engagement. Finally, a report by Volunteer Scotland demonstrates that these global results are also transferable to Scotland, providing substantial academic context for the findings of this secondary data analysis.

3.1. Community Councils: Their Activity and History

Much of the literature on CCs demonstrates that they have consistently struggled with activity rates, and that this is not a recent phenomenon. CC activity has consistently fluctuated throughout their histories. Tom Duncan's 1990 piece closely examined the CC activity as of 1983, with an 80% activity rate nationwide, not dissimilar to today's of approximately 82% as found through my independent data analysis (Duncan, 1990: 8). He also showed that activity rate has always varied per local authority, with Glasgow having a 96% activity rate but Edinburgh's only being 40% (Duncan, 1990: 9). More recent literature by Peter Cruickshank et al. has shown that approximately 80-85% of CCs are inactive, and that two-thirds of CC elections are uncontested (2014: 489, 496). Research from 2019 found that approximately 2,000 places may be unfilled within active CCs (Paterson et al., 2019: 7). This has led to many disgruntled Community Councillors, feeling unheard and ignored by local authorities (Escobar, 2014: 11). In fact, a survey by Andrew Paterson et al. found that 71% of Community Councillors wanted a national campaign to promote CCs (2019: 11).

Recent research has shown that increased institutional financial support for citizen-led initiatives has led to higher activity rates worldwide (Igalla et al., 2019: 1185). Both the aforementioned pieces by Duncan and by Cruickshank et al. allude to, but do not directly address, this issue. Duncan states that 'in Edinburgh, both the main political parties were lukewarm in their attitudes to community councils, and it was not until 1980, that a Scheme [of Establishment for Community Councils] was established' (1990: 9). Cruickshank et al. acknowledge that the average income for a CC is approximately £400 annually and that many European equivalents are better funded (2014: 491). The official line from the Scottish

Government is that CCs will receive an annual administrative grant from their local authority, although the amount is not specified (2023b: 35). The grants given to different local authorities by the Scottish Government do not hugely vary on a per person metric, aside from the islands due to their additional expenses (Scottish Government, 2026b: 6, 13). Crucially, however, the Scottish Government also outlines that CCs may generate external income towards expenditure that will not affect grants (2023b: 35). Although specific funding details are inaccessible, this shows the real possibility that community-level wealth could impact a CC's access to funds, since wealthier areas are more likely to donate to community-led organisations (Duncan, 2010: 575-576). This is even more significant when accounting for how low the £400 annual average grant per CC is, often just covering the cost of a monthly meeting room (Cruickshank et al., 2014: 491). In 2005, the Scottish Executive published a paper titled 'What can we do to help Community Councils fulfil their role'; at no point is 'deprivation', 'poverty', 'inequality', or any other related term mentioned (Scottish Executive, 2005). This is all to show that the extent to which deprivation could impact CC activity is a noticeable gap in research.

3.2. Deprivation, Income Inequality, Civic Engagement, and Volunteering

Deprivation is a crucial factor to examine when researching political participation of any sort, and this is theoretically well anchored by Henry Brady et al. (1995). Brady et al. asked why people do not take part in politics and concluded three different answers: 'because they can't, because they don't want to, or because nobody asked' (Brady et al., 1995: 271). The argument that 'they can't' refers to a lack of resources, and, as shown in the paragraph above, CCs are under-resourced, only reinforced by a reliance on external funding to cover any costs

aside from the bare necessities. ‘They don’t want to’ and ‘nobody asked’ both refer to very similar issues: a lack of interest in politics and insufficient ‘recruitment networks through which citizens are mobilized to politics’ (Brady et al., 1995: 271). CCs have low political salience, as they largely have insignificant powers (Duncan, 1990: 9; Paterson et al., 2019: 7; McCrone et al., 1993: 10). The position of a Community Councillor is also unpaid, and CCs are generally seen to be unrepresentative of their communities and powerless, not making the role particularly appealing (Hall et al., 2019: 3; Naysmith, 2012; Paterson et al., 2019: 14-17, 20). Given their low political salience, many are unaware of the benefits of a CC, reinforcing the ‘nobody asked’ aspect of the theory (Paterson et al., 2019: 3, 37-38). Thus, Brady’s theory is directly applicable to CCs and is further explored in *Chapter 5*.

Although the link between CCs and deprivation has not been studied specifically, the link between inequality and civic engagement has. Consistent links have been documented in prior research between rising inequality and reduced rates of volunteering worldwide, particularly in Europe (Schroder & Neumayr, 2021: 665; Veal & Nichols, 2017: 380; Hooghe & Botterman, 2012: 125). Since Community Councillors are unpaid and, by definition, volunteers, this is directly applicable. Income, poverty, and inequality in similar organisations, such as voluntary neighbourhood associations in Canada, have also been found to be a definite but somewhat small predictor in membership (Duncan, 2010: 585). Interestingly, however, Andrea Filetti and Jan Germen Janmaat found that although rising income inequality reduces participation, overall economic contraction does not (Filetti & Janmaat, 2018: 327). In a slightly different scope, Bram Lancee and Herman Van de Werfhorst found that both income inequality and lack of resources were the main drivers of lowered participation across 24 European countries (2012: 1166). These sources all show that income inequality consistently influences voluntary participation rates worldwide, although

the significance of economic contraction is contested. In England, a direct correlation was observed between levels of deprivation and the prevalence of local voluntary organisations focussed on community development and other community purposes, but not a substantial one (Clifford, 2012: 1155; Mak et al., 2022: 4). This is especially significant as this is a similar study also examining a country within the United Kingdom, finding similar results to my own secondary data analysis of CCs. Thus, the clear link between income inequality, and therefore deprivation, and voluntary participation shows that my hypothesis is reasonable that this would be transferrable to Scotland.

Since a stronger link is found between deprivation and formal volunteering specifically, the literature suggests that there is a greater likelihood of a link between deprivation and CC inactivity. Colin Williams found that in England and Wales, there is an 18-point gap between the percentage of people participating in formal volunteering in the most and least affluent areas (2003: 288). This is compared to a 12-point gap when examining informal volunteering (Williams, 2003: 288). Additionally, Matthew Hill found that '8% of the population are responsible for 49% of all volunteering hours and 40% of charitable giving' (2012: 2). This shows that formal voluntary participation and increased expendable income are intrinsically positively linked. CC membership is unambiguously a form of formal volunteering as it is undertaken as part of an organisation (Volunteer Scotland, 2023: 3; Williams, 2003: 286). Thus, this shows that wider participation literature predicts that CCs would exhibit a larger deprivation effect than the civic engagement literature suggests.

The importance of studying this link in Scotland specifically is also evident in the literature. A 2025 report by Volunteer Scotland found, using SIMD quintiles, that the gap between the

most and least deprived in formal volunteer participation rates in Scotland have been present and consistent since 2007 (2025: 9). While this gap is narrowing, with a 23-point gap in 2007 to a 12-point gap in 2023 (Volunteer Scotland, 2025: 9), it is clear that deprivation levels are still a factor in formal volunteer participation rates in Scotland. Thus, this could be directly applicable to CC activity since Community Councillors are formal volunteers. There are, however, still additional factors that could undermine my hypothesis. Volunteer Scotland also found that although those who volunteer in SIMD Q1 do so in fewer numbers, the average number of hours per week they volunteer is approximately a third higher than those in Q5 (2025: 10). It is therefore possible that areas with active CCs that are more deprived could have more consistent activity. This is, however, outside the scope of this thesis, and I would recommend that it be examined in future research.

While this is a complication, the report still indicates a potential link between CCs and deprivation that remains unexplored. The remaining literature has shown that there are proven links between volunteering rates and civic engagement to deprivation and income inequality. The literature focussed specifically on CCs has not examined a wide range of issues, primarily focusing on their histories, activity statuses, and potential reforms of their powers. *Chapter 4* will open a new area of research, bringing together the reviewed fields that examine the links of deprivation/income inequality to volunteering/civic engagement within CC research. In doing so, this will provide an opportunity to assist current regeneration policy and expand the relatively small field of CC research, as these findings raise many further questions about CC activity.

4. Data Findings

This thesis used binomial logistic regression tests, which predict the likelihood that a data point will fall into one of two groups (in this case, 'active' or 'inactive'), to study the links between SIMD decile averages in Community Council (CC) areas and CC activity statuses. First, this section will examine the entirety of Scotland, explaining the significance of the statistics found. Next, it will focus on the data of the individual case study of the City of Edinburgh Council. Finally, it will examine other miscellaneous findings. Thorough analysis will follow in *Chapter 5*, and a table listing the results for each local authority is provided in *Appendix 2*.

4.1. The National Picture

Table 1.1 shows the model fit measures for every CC in Scotland, which assess the discrepancies between the SIMD decile averages and the CC activity statuses (Maydeu-Olivares et al., 2022: 262). Fundamentally, this analyses how well the SIMD decile average explains CC activity status variation.

The significant figures to analyse here are the R^2 values. R^2 values are the results of examining a null model that ignores deprivation completely and guesses the overall average inactivity rate for every council, against one that takes deprivation into account. Therefore, the R^2 values indicate the extent to which deprivation affects CC inactivity. When analysing McFadden's R^2 (R^2_{McF}), anything over 0.2 is substantial, with 0 showing no considerable

effect (Ugba & Gertheiss, 2023: 60). This figure never gets close to 1, but the other R^2 figures mathematically account for this. A McFadden's R^2 result of 0.0677 is therefore a significant but somewhat small improvement to the null model. Nagelkerke's R^2 (R^2_N) is adjusted so that a hypothetically perfect model can hit 1, and so 0.106 again shows a real but modest effect (Nagelkerke, 1991: 691). Tjur's R^2 (R^2_T), however, is the most easily legible. An R^2_T value of 0.0722 shows that the model's predicted probability of inactivity is, on average, 7.22% more accurate when accounting for deprivation than against the null model. While there is significant overlap, the model can identify a correlation between deprivation and CC activity.

Table 1.1: Model Fit Measures - Scotland

	R^2_{McF}	R^2_N	R^2_T
	0.0677	0.106	0.0722

Note. Models estimated using sample size of N=1336

Table 1.2 displays the likelihood ratio tests, which examine the same null model as the R^2 values but crucially examine the likelihood the correlation has happened by chance rather than the size of the relationship. At 1 degree of freedom (df), the standard χ^2 distribution table shows that the null model's hypothesis can be rejected when the value exceeds 10.83. Thus, a χ^2 value of 88.1 shows that there is a strong correlation between deprivation and CC inactivity rates. Furthermore, the p value being <.001 means the chance of seeing this result randomly would be less than 0.1%, which can largely be attributed to how large the sample size is. This reinforces that the relationship found is in fact reliable.

Table 1.2: Likelihood Ratio Tests - Scotland			
Predictor	χ^2	df	p
SIMD Decile Average	88.1	1	<.001

Table 1.3 displays the model coefficients table, with the most significant figure being the odds ratio (OR). An OR is a measure of association between an exposure and an outcome (Szumilas, 2010: 227). In this case, it is examining the odds of CC inactivity per one SIMD decile increase. Thus, a figure below 1 would show a negative relationship (i.e. CC inactivity increases per one SIMD decile decrease) (Szumilas, 2010: 227). While the intercept predictor row is there for mathematical grounding, the second row shows significant results. An OR of 0.713 shows that the odds of CC inactivity decline by approximately 28.7% per SIMD decile increase. Conversely, this means that the odds of CC inactivity increase by approximately 40.3% per SIMD decile decrease. This is a major, and previously undiscovered, finding that shows a strong national relationship between increased deprivation and CC inactivity.

The confidence intervals (CIs) show that the model is extremely confident that, even with a margin of error, these results would be replicated with a maintained, strong statistical relationship. Thus, the CI being 0.662-0.767 here is significant. The upper value shows that the least generous relationship the model finds to be plausible is a 23.3% drop in activity rate per decile increased. This, alongside another p value of <.001, further reinforces the reliability of these findings.

Other figures on this table stand to add academic rigour to these outcomes. The estimates column and its corresponding CIs simply show the raw data version of the odds ratio discussed known as log-odds. The Wald test results, listed as Z on Table 1.3, acts similarly to the likelihood ratio test in Table 1.2. This examines the log-odds listed as the Estimate on Table 1.3, and divides it by the Standard Error, which is SE on the same table, giving the Z value (Liu, 2016: 75). With a Z value of zero showing a null hypothesis, -8.98 is substantial and reinforces the existence of a relationship between CC inactivity and increased deprivation. Throughout this thesis, however, the focus will remain on CIs as the Wald test sometimes encounters mathematical errors when dealing with smaller sample sizes, known as the Hauck-Donner effect (Yee, 2022: 1763).

Table 1.3: Model Coefficients - Activity Status – Scotland

		95% Confidence Interval						95% Confidence Interval	
Predictor	Estimate	Lower	Upper	SE	Z	p	Odds ratio	Lower	Upper
Intercept	0.551	0.153	0.949	0.2030	2.71	.007	1.735	1.165	2.582
SIMD Decile Average	-0.339	-0.413	-0.265	0.0377	-8.98	<.001	0.713	0.662	0.767

Note. Estimates represent the log odds of "Activity Status = Inactive" vs. "Activity Status = Active"

Figure 1 and Table 1.4 take the OR from Table 1.3 and display it in further detail. There is a notable decline in inactivity rate as the SIMD decile average increases. At decile 3.73,

determined by the program as being somewhat more deprived than typical, the model predicts a 32.9% chance of inactivity compared with an 11.4% at 7.66, which is somewhat less deprived than typical. These statistics also act as an explanation as to why, despite there being a clear relationship between the two factors, it is nonetheless found to be somewhat modest. As seen in Figure 1, although the likelihood of a CC being inactive is the highest at the lowest average SIMD decile, it is still little over a 50% chance. Thus, the average SIMD decile of a CC is not able to wholly explain CC inactivity, even if the correlation is apparent. It is therefore important to analyse different factors and adjust the scope of the data analysis to explore this relationship.

Figure 1: Predicted probability of CC inactivity by SIMD decile average in Scotland

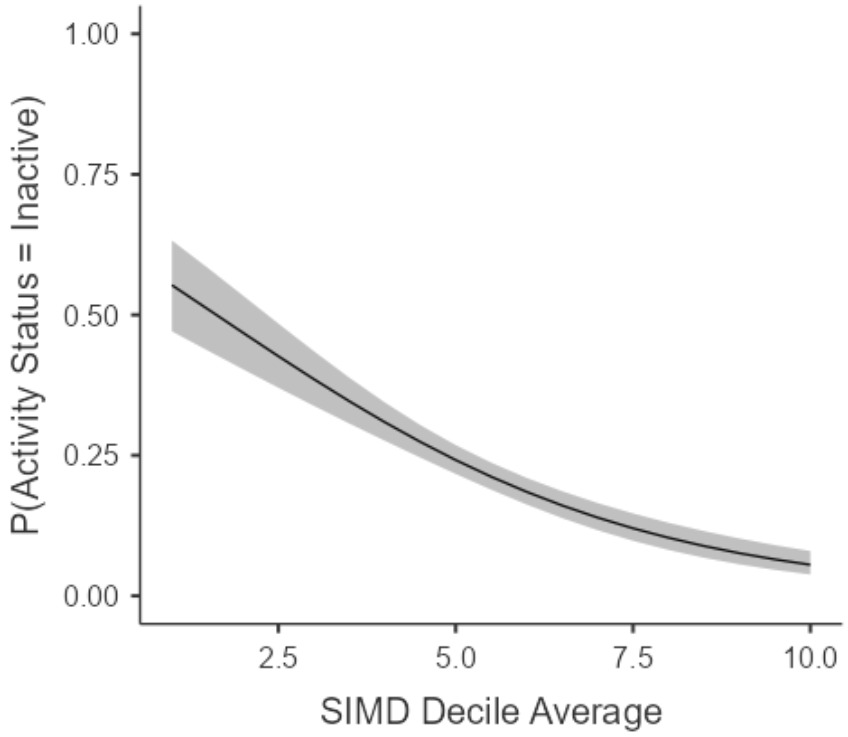


Table 1.4: Estimated marginal probabilities of CC inactivity at representative values of SIMD decile average in Scotland				
			95% Confidence Interval	
SIMD Decile Average	Probability	SE	Lower	Upper
3.73^{-}	0.329	0.0192	0.2925	0.367
5.70^{μ}	0.201	0.0121	0.1784	0.226
7.66^{+}	0.114	0.0124	0.0924	0.141
Note. $^{-}$ mean - 1SD, $^{\mu}$ mean, $^{+}$ mean + 1SD				

4.2. City of Edinburgh Council

The City of Edinburgh Council has been chosen as a case study for data analysis for two main reasons. Firstly, it shows a strong relationship between increased deprivation and inactivity of CCs, with the R^2_T value in Table 2.1 showing a 12.6% more accurate relationship when accounting for deprivation than against the null model. This is a considerably stronger relationship than the 7.22% nationwide, and therefore worth examining. The OR in Table 2.3 shows that the odds of CC inactivity declined by 33.2% per SIMD decile increase. Conversely, it also shows that the odds of CC inactivity increased by 49.7% per SIMD decile decrease. There is also evidence within the literature that there has been a lack of institutional support historically for CCs in Edinburgh, which makes this valuable in multiple areas (Duncan, 1990: 9). These areas will be expanded on further in *Chapter 5.1*.

Secondly, the likelihood ratio tests and CIs in Table 2.2 and Table 2.3 respectively are reliable. There are multiple other councils that follow the national picture, as can be seen in *Appendix 2*, but have too small a sample size to be reliable within a margin of error. The CIs

in Table 2.3 show that the test is confident that there is some form of a relationship here, albeit a very small one at the upper end. This therefore makes Edinburgh a reliable area to examine. The likelihood ratio test in Table 2.2 reinforces this, with the p-value indicating an approximately 2.4% chance that this relationship occurred by chance. Furthermore, the χ^2 value exceeds the level to reject the null hypothesis, following the standard χ^2 distribution table.

Table 2.1: Model Fit Measures - Edinburgh

	R^2_{McF}	R^2_N	R^2_T
	0.129	0.181	0.126

Note. Models estimated using sample size of N=47

Table 2.2: Likelihood Ratio Tests - Edinburgh

Predictor	χ^2	df	p
SIMD Decile Average	5.12	1	.024

Table 2.3: Model Coefficients - Activity Status - Edinburgh									
		95% Confidence Interval						95% Confidence Interval	
Predictor	Estimate	Lower	Upper	SE	Z	p	Odds ratio	Lower	Upper
Intercept	0.773	-1.480	3.0269	1.150	0.673	.501	2.167	0.228	20.634
SIMD Decile Average	-0.403	-0.777	-0.0287	0.191	-2.110	.035	0.668	0.460	0.972
Note. Estimates represent the log odds of "Activity Status = Inactive" vs. "Activity Status = Active"									

Figure 2 and Table 2.4, however, reveal some limitations to reducing the sample size. The grey area on Figure 2 shows the CIs, which span a wide range especially toward the lower decile averages. While this makes examining the City of Edinburgh Council noticeably less reliable than the nationwide level, it is nonetheless worth noting that at no point does the model predict a null or negative relationship with the hypothesis. The strength of this relationship can be debated, but its existence cannot.

Figure 2: Predicted probability of CC inactivity by SIMD decile average in Edinburgh

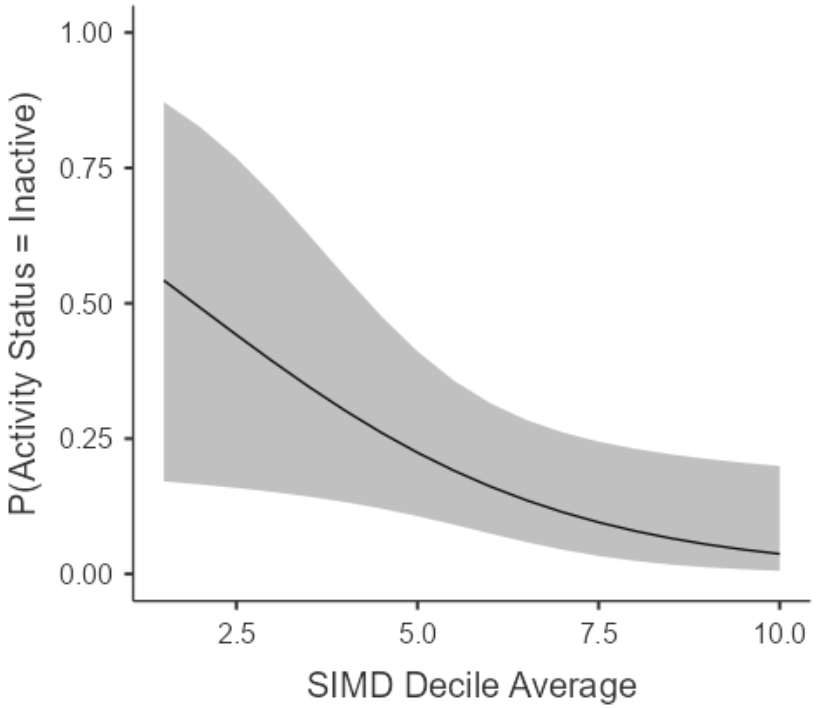


Table 2.4: Estimated marginal probabilities of CC inactivity at representative values of SIMD decile average in Edinburgh

			95% Confidence Interval	
SIMD Decile Average	Probability	SE	Lower	Upper
4.63^{-}	0.2508	0.0887	0.11720	0.458
6.99^{μ}	0.1145	0.0522	0.04503	0.262
9.35^{+}	0.0476	0.0383	0.00945	0.207

Note. $^{-}$ mean - 1SD, $^{\mu}$ mean, $^{+}$ mean + 1SD

4.3. Miscellaneous Findings

This section discusses significant findings beyond the above case study, focussing first on the 6 local authorities that returned CIs below 1. Next, it will examine the 4 local authorities with over 50% of their CCs inactive, before finally studying the 4 local authorities with no CC inactivity. The referenced results can be found in Appendix 2, except for facts about specific CC activity statuses, which were gathered through independent research. Further analysis will follow in *Chapter 5*.

The City of Edinburgh, Renfrewshire, North Lanarkshire, Perth & Kinross, Dumfries & Galloway, and the Highland Council returned CIs that showed a high degree of certainty that CC inactivity is associated with levels of deprivation. Aside from Edinburgh, these will all be discussed in this section in the order above. Finding 6 individual local authorities with confident relationships between increased deprivation and more likely CC inactivity is significant, since to achieve a CI below 1 with significantly smaller sample sizes than the national model requires a very strong relationship, thus reinforcing the national findings. Crucially, no local authority that showed a relationship between affluence and increased inactivity reported a reliable CI.

Renfrewshire was found to have a very strong relationship between deprivation and CC inactivity (OR = 0.49, CI = 0.248-0.969). In fact, all 5 inactive CCs were within the bottom 9 most deprived CC areas by average SIMD decile. The odds of CC inactivity declines by 51% per decile increase, while the CC inactivity rises by approximately 104% per decile decrease. North Lanarkshire also returned a strong correlation (OR = 0.707, CI = 0.542-0.922), with 14

of the 20 most deprived CC areas being inactive. In contrast, only 6 of the 20 least deprived CC areas are inactive. These local authorities, alongside Edinburgh, are the three that can reliably be labelled as urban councils, while the other three are more rural (Scottish Government, 2024: 22). This reinforces findings in other studies that show there is little rural-urban divide in participation in voluntary organisations (Hooghe & Botterman, 2012; Clifford, 2012). Crucially, this includes the Scottish Government's own 2012 survey on CCs (2012: 5).

Perth & Kinross is a mix of rural and urban areas, with approximately 55% of the population living in urban areas (Scottish Government, 2024: 22). It also shows the strongest OR (0.472, CI = 0.251-0.888) among local authorities with a reliable CI. The odds of CC inactivity here decrease by 52.8% per SIMD decile increase, whereas the odds of inactivity per decile decrease grows by 111.9%. There are 7 inactive CCs in Perth & Kinross, and 4 of these are in the 6 most deprived CC areas. In the top 15 most affluent areas, only 1 CC is inactive. Dumfries & Galloway is also both rural and urban, with approximately 56% of the population living in rural areas (Scottish Government, 2024: 22). With an OR of 0.574 (CI = 0.381-0.864), this means the odds CC inactivity decreases by 42.6% per decile increase and grows by 74.2% per decile decrease. Of the 20 most deprived CC areas, 13 have no CCs, whereas the 20 most affluent areas have only 4 inactive CCs.

The Highland Council is significant because the relationship between deprivation and CC inactivity is strong here, as is its confidence (OR = 0.511, CI = 0.345-0.758). This is also the local authority with the lowest p value reported (<.001), meaning that the model is most confident about this relationship. This is no doubt in part due to its large sample size of 156.

However, The Highland Council is also difficult to analyse thoroughly within the scope of this thesis. This research found that rural areas have less accurate SIMD scores due to their sparse populations. This means that many average scores of CC areas are based on less data than their urban counterparts. Additionally, the activity statuses of CCs within The Highland Council fluctuate often, with 13 interim CC elections called in September 2025 alone (The Highland Council, 2025). While there is a strong relationship, it will not be utilised in a case study or for further examination due to concerns about its overall accuracy. I would advise future researchers to assess whether there is a more efficient way to evaluate this relationship in more rural areas.

Other findings also stemmed from outside the binomial logistic regression test, such as the unusually high inactivity rates of Dundee, North Lanarkshire, West Dunbartonshire, and Falkirk, which were all found to have an inactivity rate of over 50%. Dundee, in particular, had a striking 15 out of 18 CCs inactive (83.3% inactivity rate). The 2 most affluent CC areas were also active, showing a possibly very strong relationship. However, the sample size of 18 is too small for this to reflect in the tests. As mentioned previously, North Lanarkshire was the only local authority with such a high inactivity rate to return a reliable CI in the tests ran, with 46 out of 80 CCs inactive (57.5%). Conversely, West Dunbartonshire, with 9 out of 17 CCs inactive (52.9%), showed an inverse effect to the hypothesis (OR = 1.03), but also had an unreliable CI (0.621-1.70) likely due to its small sample size. Finally, Falkirk was found to have 16 out of 23 CCs inactive (69.6%), with the CI going over 1, slightly weakening the claim of a relationship between deprivation and CC inactivity in this local authority (OR= 0.658, CI = 0.361-1.20).

There were 4 local authorities found to have no CC inactivity: East Lothian, Midlothian, Orkney Islands, and Shetland Islands. This resulted in further investigation into island CCs, which returned striking results. On islands with a sole CC, there is zero inactivity in Scotland. Of the 64 CCs representing islands, only 3 are inactive. While this is outside the scope of this thesis, it could be hypothesised that this is because the communal spirit in these areas is heightened compared with much of mainland Scotland. As these areas suffer from the same rural and, therefore, methodological issues mentioned regarding The Highland Council, I would recommend that future researchers explore this in an alternative way. Midlothian and East Lothian will be analysed further in *Chapter 5*.

Thus, the national model shows strong and significant results, demonstrating a relationship between deprivation and CC inactivity. Six individual authorities independently reaffirm this direction, and, as a result, Edinburgh City Council will be examined further in Chapter 5.1 to study this relationship at a smaller scale. Conversely, the CC activity rates of many areas cannot be explained purely through a binomial logistic regression test. Dundee has extreme levels of CC inactivity but unstable returns in the analysis, and areas with zero inactivity cannot be examined with this method. Thus, *Chapter 5* turns to case-studies for discussion and analysis as deprivation alone cannot explain CC inactivity.

5. Discussion

The binomial logistic regression tests in *Chapter 4* established a statistically significant, moderate association between area deprivation and Community Council (CC) inactivity at the national level, with less deprived areas systematically less likely to have an inactive CC.

While this is crucial in identifying the strength and direction of the relationship, this does not explain the mechanisms that produce it. This chapter therefore turns to case-study analysis to explore these dynamics in greater depth, as well as other contributing factors.

Four local authorities have been selected for discussion, utilising a purposive case-selection strategy combining both extremes of the CC activity spectrum (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). Edinburgh is discussed as a typical case, closely mirroring the national picture in both direction and size, acting as a useful lens for how the broader relationship manifests at a local level. East Lothian and Midlothian are examined as a joint, positively extreme case, recording zero CC inactivity despite average deprivation rates. These are important to examine as the national model cannot explain this pattern. Likewise, Dundee is studied as a negatively extreme case, with 15/18 CCs inactive. While the regression tests for Dundee were unstable, this is being analysed solely on its raw inactivity rate. Together, these cases are used to explore the factors underlying the national-level findings, and to consider what causes beyond area deprivation may be contributing to CC inactivity across Scotland.

5.1. Edinburgh: External Organisations & Short-Term Motivation for Mobilisation

As stated and shown, the City of Edinburgh Council is both broadly representative of the national model and reinforced by strong and reliable data. This, however, also goes beyond the data shown in the figures and tables. With 7 inactive CCs, 4 are in the lowest 10 SIMD areas, 1 is amongst the wealthiest, and the other 2 sit around the average. This alone helps show that deprivation is a factor but not the sole explanation. Other factors are easier to examine in Edinburgh specifically, with information more readily available about the capital

city's areas than other parts of Scotland. Therefore, this section will first examine various factors related to inactive CCs. These factors are other community organisations (Davidson's Mains & Silverknowes, and Portobello) and having an animating reason for existence (Portobello). Finally, it will focus on how the changing history of institutional support has positively impacted CCs in Edinburgh.

Davidson's Mains & Silverknowes is one of the most affluent CC areas in Edinburgh. Despite this, it has been inactive since the most recent boundary changes in March 2025 (Ryan, 2025). The primary reason for this is likely because one does not feel needed. The main annual events in the community are the Christmas Market & Lights Switch On and the Children's Gala. The Christmas events are supported by volunteers, local scout groups, churches and businesses (Davidson's Mains Christmas Lights, 2023), while the Gala has its own 10-person committee that meets monthly (Davidson's Mains Children's Gala, 2024). Importantly, this is not similar to a CC; there is no democratic process, and tasks are strictly related to the annual Gala. However, this shows that a prosperous community can still exist without a CC, and that each area uses different mechanisms to face their challenges. The Gala is the pride of the community, with an immense number of events and attractions organised that day by volunteers (Davidson's Mains Children's Gala, 2024). Additionally, there appears to be the Davidson's Mains & Silverknowes Association (DMSA) acting to represent the community similar to a CC, although public information surrounding it is very limited (Pickering, 2024). Since these organisations, in some ways, fill the gap left by a CC, this would perhaps explain why there has been little drive to establish a CC in this area.

Portobello previously had a very active CC, due to a long, heated, public debate from 2004-2014 about re-siting Portobello High School on part of Portobello Park (BBC News, 2014). Those against the plan were able to prevent it from going ahead in the courts, albeit temporarily (BBC News, 2014). Eventually, the City of Edinburgh Council introduced a private bill to the Scottish Parliament to proceed with the build (City of Edinburgh Council (Portobello Park) Bill). The CC appeared to take a neutral stand on the matter, reflecting how divisive this was in the community, but eventually came out in narrow favour of the rebuild (Stephen, 2013). This division coincided with a bitterly contested 2013 CC election, in which 21 candidates stood for 14 seats (Talk Porty, 2013). In contrast, there were insufficient candidates to have a CC in 2025. During this period, Action Porty was established as a development trust in 2016, following the completion of Scotland's first urban community right to buy (Bellfield, 2021). It has also since taken ownership of a former police station and the management of Portobello Town Hall, in addition to fulfilling the roles typical of a CC (Bellfield, 2021). It could therefore be asserted that, like Davidson's Mains & Silverknowes, an organisation filling the gap of a CC therefore reduces the appeal of having one. Action Porty appears to be more active and has taken on greater responsibilities than the DMSA, and has been a success despite lacking the democratic mandate of a CC. This success of a CC equivalent, alongside the absence of a communal issue to invigorate citizens to participate, has coincided with increased apathy toward forming a CC.

Both development trusts and a lack of urgent issues to tackle at a local level are certainly factors in CC inactivity nationwide. For example, Glenlivet in Moray has an inactive CC, however the Tomintoul & Glenlivet Development Trust has proven successful in strengthening the local economy and building affordable housing (Tomintoul & Glenlivet, 2022). The proven success of this development trust is therefore not likely to incentivise

citizens to start a CC. It is important to note that this is not necessarily a negative. Effective community participation and action should be lauded and encouraged, and the absence of urgent local issues to address is certainly a positive. This thesis, however, suggests that CC activity should be encouraged so that democracy and accessible participation are at the forefront. This is the case for CCs but is not necessarily for other institutions not held to the same standards (Paterson et al., 2019: 3). CCs such as Dennistoun CC in Glasgow therefore provide an excellent example, as members regularly attend other local group and association meetings to foster collaboration (Paterson et al., 2019: 12).

Despite these factors, CC activity has improved over time, with a 40% activity rate in 1990, a 65% activity rate in 2004, and a current activity rate of 85% (Duncan, 1990: 9; The City of Edinburgh Council, 2004: 1). This also directly correlates with increased institutional support for CCs from the council. The 1973 Local Government (Scotland) Act required that local authorities draw up Schemes for Establishment; the City of Edinburgh Council did not complete its until 1980 (Duncan, 1990: 8-9). This transparently perceived lack of importance towards CCs is associated with high inactivity rates throughout the decade. While activity had risen by 2004, funding for CCs had decreased to their record lowest as more CCs were established, with the former Longstone Community Council receiving £765.64 p.a. in 1980 but £685 in 2003 (The City of Edinburgh Council, 2004: 1). In 2007, the Community Grants Fund was established, offering a grant of up to £5,000 for community-focussed projects that can be utilised by CCs (The City of Edinburgh Council, 2024). The current base grant is £672 per CC, plus 2p per person in the boundary area, bringing the total budget closer to its original despite an expansion in number of CCs (Community Councils, 2025: 18). While this cannot reliably be attributed as causation, there is an apparent correlation between increased efforts from the Council and CC activity. This link is however made clearer in *Chapter 5.2*.

5.2. East Lothian & Midlothian: Institutional & Financial Support

East Lothian and Midlothian are two of the four local authorities with zero CC inactivity, and since this research has found they share similar reasons for high activity, they will be examined together. These factors are support from their local authorities and external organisations, and increased political salience, often intertwined. East Lothian will be examined first, followed by Midlothian, and finally their key similarities and differences will be discussed.

East Lothian Council is unique in the fact that it has established six Area Partnerships, 'which are the local voice of community planning' (East Lammermuir Community Council, n.d.). Area Partnerships are composed of East Lothian councillors, local community groups, Pupil and Parent Council representatives, tenants and resident groups, and Community Councillors (East Lammermuir Community Council, n.d.). The local authority delegates a £200,000 annual budget to five of the Area Partnerships, and £250,000 to Musselburgh (Audit Scotland, 2023: 12). £132,000 was directly allocated to Community Councils in 2022/23 (East Lothian Council, 2023a), averaging £6,600 per annum per CC. Although comprehensive information about CC funding is scarce, this is significantly more than the 2014 average of £400 p.a., and Renfrewshire's 2019 annual admin grant of £600 per CC and an additional 3p per head of population (Cruickshank, 2014: 491; Renfrewshire Council, 2019: 33).

Area Partnerships have proven to be effective, not only in their participation rates. The Haddington and Lammermuir Area Partnership funded 20 projects through its £50,000 budget

in 2021-2022, and another 5 with £18,000 in Scottish Government funding for food provision (East Lothian Council, 2023b). The Area Partnership budgets have since majorly increased. Working within Area Partnerships means that CCs in East Lothian hold more 'budgetary influence over council services such as amenities or road services to reflect the locally-agreed priorities' (East Lothian Council, 2023a). Thus, Area Partnerships mean that CCs have greater political salience and a greater say in decision-making within their local areas, two driving factors that were found to affect CC participation rates (Escobar, 2014: 11).

It is not only through East Lothian Council, however, that CCs receive financial support. The Neart na Gaoithe (NnG) Community Fund, which began in late 2025, provides CCs with profits from nearby wind farms (Foundation Scotland, n.d.). This results in £183,600 in funding for East Lammermuir CC, and £86,400 distributed between 10 other CCs (Foundation Scotland, n.d.). Thus, this research can assert that both significant funding efforts and enhanced governance powers are major factors in East Lothian's zero CC inactivity.

However, Midlothian demonstrates that intensive funding is not necessary to have thriving CCs within a local authority. While detailed funding information is unavailable, the only evidence of external funding to CCs in Midlothian that could be found was from the Carcant Wind Farm Community Benefit Fund, providing £250-£1500 of extra funding to Moorfoot CC (Foundation Scotland, 2026). Midlothian CCs have, however, formed the Midlothian Federation of Community Councils (MFCC). This is an institution designed to encourage 'co-operation, shared learning and support amongst Community Councils within Midlothian', as well as 'to further the aims and interests of the Communities' (MFCC, 2021: 1). Minutes from their meeting in May showed that 11 out of 15 CCs sent representatives (MFCC, 2026:

1). Such is their activity rate and importance that the MFCC is even mentioned in the Scheme for Establishment of Community Councils, which is highly unusual (Midlothian Council, 2025: 8). The success of the MFCC can be seen with Midlothian still having zero inactivity in 2012, showing that this has been a consistently beneficial factor (Scottish Government, 2012: 5).

In addition, Midlothian Community Action (MCA) offers training sessions twice a year for Community Councillors, making the position more accessible (MCA, 2026). This is separate from the Communities, Lifelong Learning and Employability service (CLLE) that the Council offers. This also appears to be very active, with research into minutes finding that a CLLE representative was often present at MFCC meetings. Providing a direct line of communication to the local authority like this makes it easier to engage politically, creating greater appeal for CCs.

Midlothian and East Lothian CCs both share a crucially similar and significant factor that have coincided with their maintained activities: co-operation. The Area Partnerships in East Lothian have proven successful in increasing the political salience of CCs beyond that of any other local authority, and their participation rates reflect that. Although these Area Partnerships have far more funding than an average set of CCs, Midlothian has proven that this is not inherently necessary to have strong CC activity rates. The MFCC has created a centralised organisation for Community Councillors to discuss and debate local issues, in turn making communication with the Council easier and fostering co-operation across the area. While it is outside the scope of this case study, it is also important to acknowledge the Association of Shetland Community Councils (ASCC), which is similar in practice and ethos

to the MFCC (Shetland Islands Council, n.d.). This is important because the Shetland Islands also have zero inactive CCs. Thus, this thesis can assert that co-operation between CCs leads to improved activity rates.

5.3. Dundee: Institutional Replacement

Dundee City Council proved to be the local authority with the highest CC inactivity rate, with 15/18 inactive. With such a small dataset, the logistic regression test was statistically unstable. Nonetheless, the results were striking enough to warrant further examination. Thus, this section aims to use qualitative and historical evidence to explain a striking inactivity rate that the model alone cannot verify.

Dundee has historically struggled with CC activity, still having the lowest activity rate nationally in 2012 with 3/19 active (Scottish Government, 2012: 5). This 16% activity rate stands in stark contrast against the national average of 84% in 2012 (Scottish Government, 2012: 3, 5). With Dundee's CC inactivity rate more than five times the national average over a decade prior to the data utilised in this dissertation, this indicates a persistent rather than an emerging pattern.

This is largely because CCs in Dundee have historically had little to no institutional support. Instead, Dundee City Council formally recognises five Neighbourhood Representative Structures (NRS) similarly to CCs, both having equal rights and acting almost identically (Cruickshank et al., 2014: 502; National Data Library, 2020; Dundee City Council, 2009: 2).

Therefore, CCs have been effectively replaced by a different form of civic representation, making them less relevant and in turn less attractive to prospective Community Councillors. At least one CC has explicitly stepped aside to allow NRS and development trusts to take its place (Cruickshank et al., 2014: 502). This demonstrates how low the political salience of CCs in Dundee is. A low CC activity rate in this case, however, does not immediately translate to widespread civic disengagement, but rather institutional substitution that the data findings could not capture. Thus, assessing overall civic engagement is a limitation of a binary system, but is useful for assessing the significance of CCs in each local authority.

Dundee City Council can therefore be viewed as a case study linked to deprivation, with the added knowledge of the historical persistence of inactivity. It is also anomalous insofar as CCs have been institutionally substituted, which clarifies why the CC inactivity rate is so high here. Furthermore, this acts as an excellent case study in demonstrating the significance of institutional support when maintaining high CC activity rates. While a Scheme for Establishment still exists in Dundee and citizens can form a CC, many do not as the local authority has practically replaced them. This is therefore a significant case study in showing how perceived importance, stemming from local authorities, can impact CC activity rates.

5.4. Empirical anchoring to Brady et al.'s participation theory

In *Chapter 3.2*, this thesis discussed Brady et al.'s theory on the causes of political disengagement and broadly attached it to CCs (1995). Brady et al.'s reasoning as to why people do not politically participate was 'because they can't, because they don't want to, or because nobody asked' (Brady et al., 1995: 271). This refers to a lack of resources, a lack of

interest, or lacklustre recruitment efforts. Following the prior analysis in this chapter, this theory can now be posited more succinctly. This section will place these case studies within this three-part framework, although Dundee does not fit cleanly within any as such an anomalous case.

For the "can't" part of the framework, this can be demonstrated simply by the national regression results themselves. Since the most deprived areas consistently have the highest CC inactivity rates, this suggests that these people lack the means to participate. This could be time, since people living in deprivation often have less free time available to them (Brady et al., 1995: 274). This could also be money, by definition of being more deprived. Edinburgh's own funding trajectory is a primary example of how a lack of resources correlates with less participation. As was shown in *Chapter 5.1*, Edinburgh's CC activity rate increased as institutional and financial support increased, although the financial side was not entirely linear. CCs climbed from a 40% activity rate after the Council prolonged their establishment due to disinterest, to now 85% with increased funding and the opportunity for community grants. Overall, the national relationship is best read as a "they can't" story, with CC activity closely tracking institutional and financial support, as shown by Edinburgh as a whole.

Specific Edinburgh CCs Portobello and Davidson's Mains & Silverknowes fall under the "don't want to" section of the framework, however. In both of these cases, the civic work is largely handled by other groups. In Davidson's Mains & Silverknowes, this is the Gala committee to organise their large annual event and the Davidson's Mains & Silverknowes Association to represent the community. In Portobello, Action Porty tackles major local issues and has successfully secured sufficient funding to purchase a police station and

manage the town hall (Bellfield, 2021). The successes of these organisations in their respective areas disincentivise a CC from being established. These inactive CCs do not indicate a lack of resources, as both have thriving community groups and neither is a particularly deprived area. Instead, there is an absence of anything specific for a CC to do, thereby providing a rationale for their inactivity.

"Nobody asked" refers to insufficient 'recruitment networks through which citizens are mobilized to politics' (Brady et al., 1995: 271). East Lothian and Midlothian demonstrate how attractive recruitment networks lead to high levels of mobilisation. As discussed, both of these local authorities have zero CC inactivity, and this correlates with high levels of institutional support and co-operation amongst CCs and local groups. East Lothian's Area Partnerships structurally embed CCs in a significant, centralised organisation alongside other local groups, allowing them real budgetary influence (East Lothian Council, 2023a). Therefore, becoming a Community Councillor in East Lothian is more appealing as it is more likely your voice is going to be heard. In Midlothian, the Midlothian Federation of Community Councils (MFCC) adopts a stronger-together ethos that promotes collaboration. Additionally, the local authority communicates directly with the MFCC, streamlining efforts. Training is also offered by Midlothian Community Action, and the Communities, Lifelong Learning and Employability service also aid. This is all achieved with far less funding than East Lothian has, yet it still matches its activity rate. This is crucial because this means that it is mobilisation, not resourcing, that is working effectively in these two areas. This differentiates "nobody asked" from "they can't" more accurately than the national model alone is able to.

Dundee acts as an exception to Brady et al.'s framework. As the five Neighbourhood Representative Structures (NRS) act as equivalents alongside the 18 CCs, although are practically a replacement. This can therefore act as a fourth mechanism to the framework of institutional substitution that falls outside of Brady et al.'s trichotomy. Their model assumes non-participation is a single channel, not accounting for the potential of participation being redirected into a functionally equivalent one (Brady et al., 1995). This is a limitation of Brady et al.'s model. This also perhaps indicates that co-operation amongst communities is more appealing to those wanting to participate at the local level. Given the activity rates shown in Midlothian and East Lothian where co-operation is key, it is entirely possible.

Regarding CC inactivity, deprivation operates primarily through the "they can't" lens of the framework and is therefore the overarching factor nationally. However, "they don't want to" and "nobody asked" are both able to supersede this on a case-by-case basis. This is why areas that are affluent such as Davidson Mains & Silverknowes do not follow the overall pattern of Edinburgh of increased CC inactivity as deprivation increases. This section has also extended Brady et al.'s framework into a new institutional setting, showing that institutional substitution can lead to decreased participation in those institutions (1995).

6. Conclusion

This thesis sought to answer to what extent, and in what ways, is area deprivation associated with CC inactivity in Scotland. Nationally, a strong relationship was found between increased deprivation and CC inactivity beyond any reasonable doubt ($\chi^2 = 88.1$, $p < .001$). However, this relationship was also found to be of moderate significance, not wholly explaining CC

inactivity (OR = 0.713, $R^2_T = 0.0722$). This was displayed in Figure 1, showing that although the relationship is there, the highest probability of inactivity, at SIMD decile 1, was only approximately 50%. Thus, this showed that deprivation was not deterministic in establishing an area's CC activity status but is a significant factor.

Institutional and financial support was found to seemingly significantly raise CC activity. East Lothian and Midlothian were the primary examples of this. The Area Partnerships in East Lothian show that when CCs collaborate, have a louder voice and greater funding, and can more easily communicate with the local authorities, they can be more successful. Area Partnerships are examples of the local authority giving more power and institutional support to their CCs, and this has caused high and steady participation. Midlothian proves that a major increase in funding is not necessary to maintain high CC activity rates. The Midlothian Federation of Community Councils (MFCC) acts as a centralised organisation that is formed of Community Councillors and represents every CC area. With the local authority formally recognising the MFCC, communication and therefore institutional support is improved. On a smaller scale, this was also apparent in Edinburgh. A correlation was shown of how the council institutionally supported CCs more over time, and the activity rate has risen alongside this.

On the other hand, Dundee is unique insofar as the council created an institutional equivalent to take CCs place. While 3 CCs live on, 15 are inactive. This demonstrates just how crucial institutional support above the bare minimum is to foster CC participation. This is also comparable to Davidson's Mains & Silverknowes, as well as Portobello, since other organisations have control over areas that CCs would otherwise control. Since a CC's powers

are already limited, further constraints on areas as to what they can accomplish without interfering with other groups' work lowers the incentives to establish one. So, while deprivation sets the odds for CC activity, institutional support and alternative civic structures can override them.

This thesis has contributed to the academic field in providing the first rigorous study into the relationship between deprivation and CC activity, filling a gap in the literature. It has also built upon previous research on CC activity, providing a modern and thorough analysis of how institutional support also assists CCs. For future policy, this is the first paper to provide robust evidence that deprivation is a key factor in determining CC activity. This should therefore be accounted for in further proposals regarding the assistance or reformation of CCs, including the upcoming survey on CCs by the Scottish Government.

The limitations of this thesis are the age of the datasets used, the extent to which a binary labelling of active or inactive can assess community participation, and the instability of the logistic regression tests when examining smaller local authorities. However, the datasets used are the most current available, the binary labelling is sufficient in a scope focussed solely on CCs, and an unstable logistic regression test shows that qualitative analysis is necessary, as was shown with the analysis of Dundee. Another limitation was the SIMD's inaccuracy in more rural areas, hence the largely urban focus. A more accurate way of assessing the deprivation and CC inactivity link in rural areas should therefore be studied as a future research topic. Furthermore, islands represented by one CC having no inactivity should be studied, possibly in tandem with the rural areas. Other open questions this thesis leaves to future researchers are whether CC inactivity could itself impact deprivation levels, with a

potentially lower level of community care. Additionally, Volunteer Scotland found that although those in SIMD quintile 1 volunteer in fewer numbers, those who do contribute more hours (2025: 10). Thus, the longevity of activity of CCs should be studied to examine whether there is a link between deprivation and sustained CC activity rates.

Overall, this study demonstrates that deprivation substantially impacts CC activity rates but cannot explain the activity crises occurring in some local authorities. Instead, analysis into institutional factors elucidates the issues facing CCs in different areas. Nonetheless, deprivation acts as a backbone that underpins the odds of inactivity nationwide. With CCs designed as a hyperlocal institution to augment local democracy within vast local authorities, it is those at the bottom who need it the most. Therefore, the topic of deprivation is now indispensable from the conversation of CC reform, which will no doubt improve CC activity.

7. Appendices

Appendix 1: Binomial Logistic Regression of Community Council Activity Status on SIMD Decile Average, by Local Authority (Source: Author)

In using a binomial logistic regression test, it had to be ensured that there were only two possible outcomes (‘active’ or ‘inactive’). For this reason, CCs that are in abeyance at the time of research have been classed as inactive. While this is a limitation of using binary classifications to define CC activity, classing CCs in abeyance as inactive is sensical since, by definition, they are inactive until further notice.

Local Authority	Inactive/Sample Size (N)	Odds Ratio	95% CI	p	R^2_T
Aberdeen City	3/30	0.864	0.5505-1.35	.523	0.0130
Aberdeenshire	2/70	248	0.0692-892178	.187	0.260
Angus	4/25	0.433	0.0677-2.77	.376	0.0335
Argyll & Bute	2/56	0.455	0.1021-2.03	.302	0.0153
Clackmannanshire	2/9	0.0791	4.62e-4 – 13.5	.334	0.302
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	3/30	1.003	0.166-6.06	.998	3.08e-7
Dumfries & Galloway	30/83	0.574	0.381-0.864	.008	0.104
Dundee City	15/18	0.143	0.00973-2.09	.155	0.631
East Ayrshire	5/35	1.044	0.6567-1.66	.855	0.00123
East Dunbartonshire	1/12	4.39e-23	0-Inf	.999	1.000
East Lothian	0/20	n/a (All Active)	n/a (All Active)	n/a (All Active)	n/a (All Active)
East Renfrewshire	3/11	1.5972	0.644-3.96	.312	0.106
Edinburgh	7/47	0.668	0.46-0.972	.035	0.126
Falkirk	16/23	0.658	0.361-1.20	.172	0.0908
Fife	25/105	0.774	0.594-1.01	.058	0.0408
Glasgow City	15/96	0.747	0.556-1.00	.052	0.0442

Highland	26/156	0.511	0.345-0.758	<.001	0.127
Inverclyde	1/11	1.1557	0.511-2.62	.728	0.00633
Midlothian	0/15	n/a (All Active)	n/a (All Active)	n/a (All Active)	n/a (All Active)
Moray	5/20	3.17	0.797-12.59	.102	0.185
North Ayrshire	5/17	0.447	0.176-1.14	.091	0.209
North Lanarkshire	46/80	0.707	0.542-0.922	.010	0.0908
Orkney Islands	0/20	n/a (All Active)	n/a (All Active)	n/a (All Active)	n/a (All Active)
Perth & Kinross	7/52	0.472	0.251-0.888	.020	0.181
Renfrewshire	5/25	0.490	0.248-0.969	.040	0.242
Scottish Borders	12/69	1.1802	0.64204-2.17	.594	0.00473
Shetland Islands	0/18	n/a (All Active)	n/a (All Active)	n/a (All Active)	n/a (All Active)
South Ayrshire	6/27	0.757	0.4184-1.37	.357	0.0336
South Lanarkshire	24/57	0.840	0.610-1.16	.286	0.0213
Stirling	7/42	0.973	0.6646-1.42	.889	5.87e-4
West Dunbartonshire	9/17	1.03	0.621-1.70	.915	6.843-4
West Lothian	9/40	0.898	0.6103-1.32	.583	0.00815

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