
SNP Breakthrough: What, How, and Why this Matters for British Politics

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Decades of Minority SNP Status at UK level

- 1920s to 1960s = <5% (0 MPs elected GE)
- 1970 = 11% (1/71 MP)
- 1974 (Oct) = 30% (7/71 MPs)
- 1992 = 22% (3/72 MPs)
- 1997 = 22% (6/72 MPs)
- 2001 = 20% (5/72 MPs)
- 2010 = 20% (6/59 MPs)
2015 Westminster ‘Tsunami’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>2015 % (MPs)</th>
<th>2010 % (MPs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SNP</td>
<td>50 (56)</td>
<td>20 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lab</td>
<td>24 (1)</td>
<td>42 (41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con</td>
<td>15 (1)</td>
<td>17 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lib Dems</td>
<td>8 (1)</td>
<td>19 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3 (0)</td>
<td>2 (0)</td>
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It Happened Over Time (HoC + SP)...
NB the Scottish Parliament Dividend
Explaining the 2015 ‘Tsunami’: Scottish Referendum (18/09/14)

• Until late Summer 2014, pollsters predicting a 2/3\textsuperscript{rd} NO vs 1/3\textsuperscript{rd} YES. And then...51% YouGov Yes Poll 09/14

• Result = 55% No vs. 45% Yes (84% turnout)

• Biggest city, Glasgow, voted Yes

• Binary choice, binary understanding? What flavour is NO? What flavour is YES?

• Yes dominated by SNP, No = a 3 party hybrid muddle
Social Media Campaigns: Precursors to Poll Shift?
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Binary Choices = ↑ Indy Support as Zero 3rd Option: Devo-Max

Source: [http://unitedkingdompollingreport.co.uk](http://unitedkingdompollingreport.co.uk); don't knows excluded.
‘extensive new powers for the Scottish Parliament’ if independence rejected
The Reward for No Voters

‘We have heard the voice of Scotland - and now the millions of voices of England must also be heard. The question of English votes for English laws–the so-called West Lothian question–requires a decisive answer.’

(David Cameron, 19/09/14)
SNP in the Scottish Parliament

- 2007 to 2011 = minority government
- 2011+ = majority government

Populist policies:
- Free prescriptions
- Scrapped university tuition fees
- Frozen Council Tax

+ perceived governing competence = ↑ SNP credibility & support
Westminster Voting Intention
Post-IndyRef SNP Bounce

@50% divided by 1 party vs. @50% divided by 3 parties

FPTP electoral system rewards the party with the most votes per constituency

• @50% vote divided by 1

  vs

• @50% vote divided by 3

= Labour/Con/LD wipe out
What has Happened to Labour?

- ↓ class in politics (traditionally w/c voted Labour)
- ↓ traditional industries (e.g. shipbuilding on Clyde)
- ↓ unions (halved in number since 1979 high)
- ↓ state housing (>50% in the 1960s to @15% today)
- ↓ local government control (STV 2007+)
- Scottish Parliament 1999+ (= a platform for SNP) ↓ religion in politics (Catholic vote Labour, Protestant vote Conservative)
- Labour & ↑ gay rights = ↓ Catholic vote
- New Labour (Blair) = most at odds with Scottish Old Labour (e.g. introducing university tuition fees + Iraq debacle)

See: Hassan & Shaw (2012) *The Strange Death of Labour in Scotland*
Labour Dilemmas 2015

Lost the rhetoric (especially in the press):
• Viewed as too far right-wing in Scotland (‘Red-Tories’). Better Together pact hurt Labour
• Viewed as too left-wing in south of England
• Some English voters feared a Labour deal with the SNP (especially UKIP voters returning to Conservative Party, but not returning to Labour)

Reality = pretty centre/left
Problems for Labour of Multi-Level Governance

A succession of Scottish Labour leaders, many frustrated with London control:

Alexander (2007-08)
Gray (2008-11)
Lamont (2011-14)
Murphy (2014-15)
Dugdale (2015+)

Jim Murphy
In Jim Murphy, Labour finally has a strong leader in Scotland. But support there has crumbled http://econ.st/1z0omra
Labour Losing the Tabloid Battles

30/04/15
Meanwhile, Same paper, Same Day... but in England...

30/04/15
Fear of UK Labour being in the pocket of the SNP (likely junior partner)

March 9th 2015:
Marketing Progressive ‘Us’ Politics: Voting SNP Makes a Labour Win More (Old) Labour and More Scottish

(SNP poster launched on 30/04/15)
Forces of SNP Momentum

- **Social media** advances during the #indyref which continued for the 2015 GE campaign:
  
  Sturgeon: 163,000 mentions, 71% positive. 
  Cameron: 145,405 mentions, 64% positive. (Source: Adoreboard quoted in *Herald* 10/05/15)

- **Membership** (25k 09/14 to 100k+ 03/15) = more party in the organisation getting the message out to voters... (Scottish Labour = @20k)
SNP Euphoria – Why?

• Alex Salmond + Nicola Sturgeon + brand Scotland
• New, not Westminster (2009+ expenses scandals)
• SNP competence in Scottish Government 2007+ (not about independence for many)
• Out-Laboured Labour (2015 manifesto post-Labour + @identical + extra: scrap Trident)
• Rhetoric is ‘progressive’, reality of many policies = ‘regressive’ (e.g. Council Tax freeze + free university tuition fees benefit wealthy > poor). Result = capture a lot of voters from left + right.
Do the SNP Matter at Westminster?

- SNP hope was to hold balance of power with minority Labour government.
- Reality = hope too strong

- Impact of 56 MPs?
  - 2\textsuperscript{nd} party of opposition = PMQs platform for agenda setting (entitled to 2 questions)
  - Chair of select committees (Scottish + Energy & Climate Change)
  - Given N=16 working majority, if a few Conservatives dissent + the opposition unites, the SNP can have policy impact (e.g. Evel, fox hunting ban repeal, scrapping Human Rights Act)
SNP – Realignment in Scotland?

Sundquist’s (1983) Scenario 4: Realignment Through the Replacement of One Major Party

• New issue (progressive politics/independence)
• Old issue (power struggle with Conservatives)
• Labour voters split: to SNP for progressive politics; and some to Conservatives for union
JC of a Spanner in the Works

If Jeremy Corbyn wins the Labour Leadership...

Labour would now out-left the SNP & take back the progressive mantle

Realignment averted? Scottish Labour?

Or if SNP vote holds up, Scotland becomes a relatively moderate/centrist haven?
SNP to Sweep the Board in 2016 Scottish Parliament Elections?

• Corbyn effect? (+ what will Dugdale do?)
• Not possible due to the electoral system: AMS (73 FPTP and 56 PR) = Labour’s lifejacket.

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