

'We' in Scotland?

Scottish Conservative & Unionist Party discourse over the past decade

Dr Murray Stewart Leith

Reader in Politics

School of Media, Culture and Society

University of the West of Scotland

Paisley Campus, Paisley

PA1 2BE

Tel: (0)141 848 3953

This chapter considers the rhetoric of Scottish Conservatism through the lens of the party manifestos issued for the Scottish and UK parliamentary elections of 2010 through 2017. Beginning with a short consideration of why Scottish Conservatism slipped away from its historical highpoints within the electoral uplands of Scotland, the chapter illustrates the importance of both ideology and identity and their interplay, as influences on Party fortunes. The chapter then considers the importance of leadership and continuity before emphasising manifestos as examples of considering both rhetorical changes and continuities within parties. Then, the analytical aspects of the chapter illustrates the rhetorical emphases within Scottish Conservative Party Manifestos during the last decade. The final conclusion is that while the Scottish Conservatives are clearly differentiating their discussion in Scotland, they remain firmly wedded to the wider UK party rhetoric during British electoral events, which may leave them at the mercy of wider happenings.

Ideology and Identity as Drivers of Contemporary and Historical Change

Any work considering the changing fortunes of Scottish Conservatism would be amiss to not consider the rhetoric behind the party fortunes of late. After all, with a more positive shift and change in the electoral support for the Scottish Conservatives, considering if such a shift is down to changes within and emphasis of the rhetoric of said Scottish Conservatives is a valid question. Yet, before moving to consider the contemporary rhetorical emphases of Scottish Conservatives over the last decade, we must actually move further back into contemporary history and consider (briefly and in a limited fashion) the driving changes that led to the decline of such support in the first place. The rationale for doing so is in the historical patterns and currents that can be discerned, and which continue to have an influence today.

Even a very limited analysis 20th century Scottish political history points to the strength and presence of Scottish conservatism throughout Scottish society and politics for much of the 20th century and yet the end of that Century, when Scottish politics burst onto the scene with a distinct political stage all of its own, we witnessed the very electoral nadir of the party within Scotland. While many may point to devolution which, of course, the party firmly opposed, and which clearly had some impact upon subsequent poor electoral results and showings, wider patterns can be discerned long before the 1990s, and it is the argument of this work that these patterns are still in play today, and can be witnessed within the rhetoric of Scottish Conservative manifestos.

There have been numerous discussions around the cause of the decline of Conservative support and electoral success in Scotland, many drawing on distinct themes – and not all of them in agreement. However, one popular point made by several scholars was the decision in the 1960s to change the party name (from the Scottish Unionist party, to the Scottish Conservative and Unionist party) and for the previously quite autonomous entities of Scotland to incorporate into the UK Conservative Party (Seawright 1999, Kidd 2008, Torrance 2017). Obviously, as a result the name change was more than simply that – there was a significant organisational and behaviour changes as further consequence. In fact, it is argued that these changes resulted in the Scottish Conservatives becoming a firmly territorial element of the wider Conservatives (Deschouwer 2003) rather than a distinctly Scottish party in its own right. At the same time, we should not overplay this as a clear subservience. While this territorial arm relationship remains as such today, The Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party is a territorial party with a ‘high degree of autonomy’ (Convery 2016) – even if it does not always exercise that autonomy fully.

One interesting argument that also investigates the decline in Conservatism in Scotland and that initially seems to point to slightly differing reasons for the changing electoral fortunes during the end of the 20th century actually does result in a very similar and also very significant conclusion. Kendrick and McCrone (1989) highlighted the interplay between economic and ideological factors, with the move to a Thatcherite approach creating conflict between the rising rhetoric of Britishness and Scotland having needs as a particular economic and policy case. Thus it is not only the ideologically driven change in Conservatism that has a negative impact, but the emphasis on identity, and specifically a ‘national’ identity of Britishness. Seawright (1999) also touched upon this change as a driver of fortunes, as he highlighted the conflict created between the move towards the Thatcherite ideology of the right, and the Scottish electorate either becoming, or perhaps just remaining, more left wing. While Seawright significantly played down the national identity issue, it is clear that ideology was one key factor, and identity another.

In discussing these, and other works, Convery focuses strongly on both the identity and the organisational change aspects of such arguments, stating that this ‘entrenchment of an ideological shift under Thatcher combined with earlier organisational changes to create the impression that a once distinctly Scottish party had started to become ‘alien’ and ‘English’ (Convery 2016)’. He also clearly draws a link between the organisational changes of the 1960s and the ideological changes of the 1970s/80s when he points to the arguments made

by Murdo Fraser in the 2011 leadership campaign. Fraser argued strongly that the Scottish Conservatives needed to disband, and reconstitute themselves as a new right wing Scottish party under a different brand and name – seeking to detoxify the party within Scotland with this seemingly radical rebranding. However, as Convery points out Fraser’s campaign ‘drew explicitly on the pre-1965 organisation of the party to argue that a separate Scottish party merely returned the Scottish Conservatives to their natural state (2016).

Such a move to re-brand right wing ideology within Scotland seems to indicate thinking along the lines that the problem is not the ideological ground upon which the party argues, although this clearly was not resonating with Scottish voters during the first two decades of devolution, but rather more with the identity aspects of the brand. This may play down the ideological antipathy among Scottish voters slightly too much, of course – but then the narrative Scots like to hold of themselves as more left wing is also slightly suspect. A firm move back to a firmly independent and organisationally distinct Scottish (Conservative) Party would seem to be in line with history and even perhaps contemporary wishes. Indeed, in retrospect, the organisational and structural (and name) changes in the 1960s was a move against the currents of electoral and socio-political transformation, as this was the very period when a sense of national identity would begin to stir itself as a clear political party statement within Scotland. The shift of the SNP from a fringe player to a more central player (foreshadowing the latter, similar shifts in the devolution era) began in Scottish politics with the initial election of a large number of local councillors in the late 1960s and then the tumultuous Westminster elections of the early 1970s. When in 2011 Murdo Fraser urged a move (back) to a party organisation and name that was distinctly Scottish, he was reviving an approach that had clearly worked for his predecessors before, albeit in a different time, if not place. Could such a turn have led to an even greater revival of a right wing, re-branded/named party fortunes in Scotland of late?

It must be stressed that since the advent of devolution, and especially during the last decade of Scottish politics, the importance of both ideology and national identity and the relationship between the two, cannot be underplayed as a driving force within the socio-political realm. The years and electoral events since 2007 witnessed the increasing rise of the SNP as *the* party of Government in Scotland, as the party also grew into becoming the largest contingent of Scottish MPs in Westminster, with its stunning success in 2016 the best example of such. Furthermore, in 2014, the referendum on potential independence for Scotland, and the subsequent 2016 UK wide referendum on British membership of the European Union, ensured that issues of identity and ideology remained firmly at centre of wider public and media debates.

Previous works (Leith 2006, Leith and Soule 2011) have shown the strength and importance of national identity and ideology as a factor within wider Scottish politics. It must always be remembered that all political parties operating in the Scottish context are engaged in a constant and often underlying (and just as often obvious) debate not just around politics, but around national identity and this is even more so in the contemporary period. While it seems clear from previous research that a conflict between ideology and identity drove

Scottish Conservative fortunes in an ever downward direction for several decades, we must consider whether they have been behind recent upturns in such fortunes.

Party Leadership and Party Voice in Manifestos

The leadership election of 2011, when the Scottish Conservatives chose a new party leader, was the first clear choice that had been presented in the devolution era, and a first step in a new direction for party democracy. Previous leadership changes had seen no contests, with Annabel Goldie being unopposed in 2005. The one member, one vote system that elected Ruth Davidson as leader in 2011 was both new and innovative, as proposed by the Sanderson Commission of 2010, itself created as a result of the poor showing of the Scottish Conservatives in the 2010. Yet it has been argued that this shift in leadership selection, and shift in leadership, did not lead to any major policy shifts (Convery 2016). Convery argues that while Davidson clearly represents a generational change, and a shift in some social attitudes, overall she was the 'no-change' candidate. While the Scottish Conservatives have clearly shifted in a pro-devolution direction, Convery argues that this was not clearly the path in 2011 and was more the message argued for and presented by Murdo Fraser. However, as Smith (2011) has argued, the realities of the situation left Conservatives in Scotland with little choice but to firmly engage with devolution.

So, during the majority of the past decade the Scottish Conservatives have had one leader, although it is important to note the continuities between her and her predecessor in many regards. This continuity of leadership is an important consideration. Being in opposition, and also one of several parties in a multi-party system, often leads to a focused emphasis on the leader of the party and a personalisation of the party around that leader. This has certainly been an operational tendency of the Scottish Conservatives in recent times. During the 2016 election Ruth Davidson was 'cleverly focused' perhaps due to her being popular as an individual as well as avoiding the ongoing 'branding problem' facing Scottish Conservatism (Anderson 2016). Indeed, it is fair to say that Davidson was more popular than her party for much of her early years, and recent successes are due to her 'strong leadership' (Wishart 2017) and that she should be 'justly proud' (Crines 2016) of her party's successes. However, while popular as an individual the party voice is wider than just one person, and the individual role of leader, while emphasised, should not be overplayed. Party fortunes may be influenced, and greatly, by the leadership, but the emphasis on manifestos is important as they represent 'the recognisable statement of policy, which has the backing of the leadership as the authoritative definition of party policy for that election' (Budget, Robertson and Hearl 1987 p18).

Of course, it is fair to say that 'only a small proportion of the electorate ever read the manifesto' (Brack 2000 p1) but the contents and the emphasis is widely disseminated through media, with constant analysis and discussion around election times. Furthermore, the ability of a government to rely on its 'electoral mandate', especially through the Salisbury Convention, and to push for manifesto commitments in the face of entrenched opposition within Westminster remains a key aspect of British governance. Manifestos remain the 'best-known documents' of political parties (Cooke 2000) as well as serving as the 'hymn-sheet' for all candidates of that party (Kavanagh 2000).

In another instance illustrating the importance of national identity within Scotland, from the 1970s onwards all major political parties, including the Scottish Conservatives, have issued distinct manifestos for Scotland (and Wales) – adding a distinctly Scottish voice to UK wide elections. Previous analysis of these documents has clearly illustrated differences between the ‘Scottish’ version and the ‘British’ ones. While the production of Scottish and Welsh manifestos indicate the remaining document is for England only, they are rarely, if ever, identified as such. Thus, the manifestos considered herein, remain firmly Scottish focused documents even when the election is a UK General one.

Conservative Party Manifesto Rhetoric in UK General Elections

We now consider the five manifesto documents issued for the 2010, 2015 and 2017 UK General Elections and the 2011 and 2016 Scottish parliamentary elections. Given the two distinct differences of the elections, and the nature of electoral events are analysed separately – beginning with the UK electoral documents of 2010 and 2015, and the Scottish documents of 2011 and 2016. Both of these sets of elections straddled the Independence Referendum of 2014. The 2017 General Election manifesto was held after the 2016 vote on Brexit and is considered separately as a result.

Titled as ‘Invitation to Join the Government of Britain’ the 2010 manifesto front page did not provide the party name as the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party (unlike the other four documents considered here) but was instead carried the wording ‘The Conservative Manifesto for Scotland 2010’, the page was mostly blank, apart from the small Conservative Party (UK) logo of a stylised tree. Also, leaving aside the leader forewords, the first by David Cameron, and the second by Annabel Goldie and David Mundell, the very first word of the document was ‘Britain’. This is distinct to the 2015 General Election manifesto, which carries the title ‘Strong Leadership A Brighter, More Secure Future’ and which featured pictures of David Cameron and Ruth Davidson, side by side, under the small heading of The Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party manifesto 2015. The words Scottish Conservative and Unionist with the stylised X logo, reminiscent of the St Andrews cross, was at the bottom middle of the cover page. However, the text of the main document had the words Britain in the first two sentences, with the word Scotland not appearing until page 12 – when it also mentioned England and cities such as Glasgow and Aberdeen.

The signifiers used in the documents are centred on the idea of Britain or the UK. There are few if any indications that the ‘we’ regularly employed means the people of Scotland, let alone Scotland the country. The country mentioned is Britain, and the ‘we’ usually a loose discourse that could mean the Conservative party (or UK Government in 2015) or the people. While it could be argued that the geographical term is Great Britain or Britain, and the political or sovereign term the United Kingdom or UK, such rather academic differentiations are not present – the Scottish Conservative Party in both 2010, and 2015 seem to focus on the concept of the whole country as being Britain and the people British, with these terms quite frequent throughout both documents. This is also the case for visual images. There are no real representations of Scottishness in these two documents – the images that are employed could, with one or two minimal exceptions, be UK wide. Unless one knows Glasgow well, the bridge pictured on page 12 could be anywhere. Also, while the

Forth Road Bridge on page 14 is iconic to many, it would mean little outside of the Travel section in which it is employed.

Likewise the term nation is used somewhat loosely and without direct reference on many occasions. It is rarely linked to Scotland or Scottish in both documents and terms such as 'we as a nation should not be piling up and passing on unaffordable levels of debt to the next generation' (Scottish Conservative & Unionist Party 2015) clearly indicate a UK level perspective. This is, of course challenging to anyone who considers their national identity as Scottish. It has previously been argued that the people of Scotland can clearly differentiate between their national identity (Scottish) and state identity (British) (see Leith and Soule 2011) but the Scottish Conservatives clearly play fast and loose with these terms in their UK Election manifestoes. The national finances are the UK, as are the national legacy of sports (Commonwealth and Olympic).

Interestingly, the word Scottish and Scot are used – but sometimes linked to wider discussion on devolved policy (and direct reference to Scottish parliament elections are often made on the same pages, or closer within the text). It would seem that, at times, the Party is employing a very Scottish centric view. This could be taken to mean the party emphasising their Scottish distinctiveness or basis. However, they oftentimes, almost within the same paragraph, if not page, switch to a British perspective without any clear delineating lines. The section on travel – which is a fully devolved policy for rail and roads employs a distinct Scottish rhetorical focus, but the next section on Broadband is firmly 'UK and 'Britain'. Likewise, Big Ben/Westminster and the Old Bailey appear as images, reinforcing that British connection in 2015.

The 2014 referendum event seemed to drive the Scottish Conservatives to give a more British centric view post 2014 than prior, as even while the 2015 document employs the term Scotland regularly, it is often in a territorial sense, or referring to sub-groups of the population (young people in Scotland, or Scottish youth) The term Scottish appears regularly – but mainly because it is a part of the party title or self-referencing 'Scottish Conservatives'. It is also used to refer to such places as Scottish towns and cities and the parliament in Holyrood. The term is thus territorially or institutionally employed rather than as an identifier of a people or a national identity per se. While the saltire does make an appearance, it is alongside the Union flag.

Interestingly, any sense of European Identity is also absent at any level. Again, the term Europe or the European Union/EU is noticeable by absence, or if used is often employed as a slightly negative activity to be legislative against. Migration and other specific policies are most often the reason when the EU does come up.

Overall, the sense of identity, the sense of belonging, and the 'we' regularly employed by the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party in 2010 and 2015 manifestos is a political one and a British one. It is 'we have done so much' when referring to Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and England all together, and it is 'we' when a popular or effective policy outcome is highlighted. Likewise the reference to place is general UK or British in focus – only twice does it specifically seem to indicate Scotland – and as often it could mean the wider UK. This

could be interpreted as an indication of a multi-layered identity, or it could be a deliberate attempt to not openly differentiate. Whatever the motivation, the end result is a firmly British document, issued by a Scottish political party, but for a British General Election.

Conservative Party Manifesto Rhetoric in Scottish Parliament Elections

In 2011, entitled *Common Sense for Scotland*, with the sub title *Scottish Conservatives*, and the stylised tree logo, the manifesto was less than half the size of the UK document issued a year earlier. It does not have a picture on the cover of any individual (a road sign with an arrow for 'Common Sense' serves as the image. The forward does have an image of the leader Annabelle Goldie. The 2016 document '*A Strong Opposition – A Stronger Scotland*' is half as long again, but still shorter than its Westminster election counterparts, and does carry a picture of Ruth Davidson. One very fascinating aspect of this document is noted by Anderson (2016) 'Strangely for a political party, the Scottish Conservatives began their electoral campaign conceding defeat to the SNP. Instead, they sought to put forward a case for a strong Conservative opposition with Ruth Davidson at the helm holding the SNP to account and focusing on bread-and-butter issues rather than constitutional matters' (p560). This was clearly outlined in the foreword to the manifesto, illustrating that documents places the flagship vessel of the campaign, carrying the core message. The document also reflected the realities of the Scottish political system at the time. The SNP were going to win (it stated on page 6), but the Tories sensed a second place as the formal opposition in the Scottish Parliament – a position they could only have dreamed about 10 years before. This also impacted the rhetoric.

Obviously, given the nature of the elections, the focus is firmly Scottish, with the first page of text in 2011 mentioning Scotland in the first sentence, and Scottish in the second – although the UK is mentioned in the same. The third paragraph begins 'With the help of the Conservatives at Westminster...' but does reference Scotland, and mentions it as 'a more prosperous nation'. There is no ambiguity about what the nation is or where we are in this document. Likewise 2016, but with a twist. 'Scotland', the Scottish Conservatives' are present, but so is Ruth Davidson (twice - ...and her strong Scottish Conservative team... and it is 'Ruth Davidson's Conservatives'. The United Kingdom is also in the second sentence. In fact, it is quite a personalised document – Kezia Dugdale (Labour Leader) is mentioned by name, and the First Minister is discussed but NOT mentioned by name.

The size of the 2011 document may be ascribed to either the limited aspirations, or the limited opportunities, of the Scottish Conservatives in 2011. The policy differences between this document and earlier manifesto can only be considered 'limited and incremental' (Convery 2016) and the ideological emphasis is firmly in line with the wider UK Conservative party and distinctly out of sync with the other Scottish political parties. The manifesto argued for a review of the Scottish NHS structure (but no longer advocated an internal market as per England) and also pushed for a graduate contribution to University Fees – a long standing element. The imagery of the document as also very limited – there are no internal images, other than the picture of the party leader in the foreword. Again, firmly out of step with manifestos for other elections.

It bears great similarity to the UK election manifestos in that, overall, the sense of identity, the sense of belonging, and the 'we' regularly employed by the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party in 2011 manifestos is a political one first, and a Scottish one, second – and that second by some distance. The document keeps a firm sense of audience in that it is appealing to Scottish Conservatives – not Scots per se as the sense of 'we' is clearly political party. Ultimately is a Scottish Conservative Party document with a very conservative sense of reach and aim. The rhetoric appeals firmly to an audience the party seems to have accepted that it would reach – and not much further beyond.

This is firmly not the case of the 2016 document. It began with the words 'This is not a normal foreword, nor is this a normal manifesto' (p2) and that claim is firmly supported. As pointed out by Anderson (2016) and discussed above, the party was seeking to be the formal opposition, and admitting it would not win outright. However to challenge Anderson's argument, the Conservatives, within the document, clearly took an ideological/constitutional position by framing itself firmly against a second referendum on independence. The first full section of the document challenges that second point, entitled 'No to a Second Referendum'.

Also, the personalisation of 2016 continues unabated later in the manifesto with five specific candidates highlighted with short biographies (and images). Two men and three women, they all stress their 'new' or 'different' ways of coming to politics and how they are proud to be either part of 'Ruth Davidson's team' or facing down a 'second referendum' (on Scottish independence).

Again, as in 2011, and perhaps most unsurprising given the Scottish focus of the elections themselves, the document is firmly rooted in a sense of Scotland and Scottishness. Terms like Scotland, Scottish, Scots, and references to sub-groups, 'taxpayers in Scotland' or 'young Scots' are abundant throughout the text. The sense of nation is clear and clearly Scottish, although the UK is also present. Where the UK does make an appearance it is usually allied to the term government and focuses on continuing the policy developments of that body – should they be devolved – or working in partnership with the Westminster Government to meet objectives.

The idea of further devolution is also a new ideological aspect of the document that sets it apart from others. Rarely mentioned in the UK documents, and not mentioned in 2011, the idea of further devolution may have been, as discussed above, thrust upon the Scottish Conservatives by events (namely the Independence Referendum result of 2014, and the initially unexpected strength of the 45% Yes vote) but it was firmly adopted. The rhetoric of the Scottish Conservatives clearly adapted on that front, employing the idea of further devolution with gusto in key policy ideas and fronts, while allied to the idea of firmly rejecting both independence and another referendum on the matter.

The imagery of 2016 is different – which is not difficult in that 2011 had no imagery. Edinburgh Castle and the Scott Monument make an appearance – as do individual candidates and Ruth Davidson (in several images). Ruth Davidson, Edinburgh Castle and 'Say No to a Second referendum placard waving supporters make an appearance in one

image, with many wearing jackets with 'Scottish Conservatives' pasted on the back – an image that truly paints many words. Hills, sheep, police cars, skylines, and old person and other 'stock images' do make an appearance. But the number of Ruth Davidson full page images is most striking of all. This is indeed, a personalised manifesto unlike others so far.

Overall, the sense of identity, the sense of belonging, and the 'we' regularly employed by 2016 has changed dramatically from 2011. While Scotland remains and is even firmer, the 'we' has moved beyond the Scottish Conservatives of old – it is a new 'we' a bolder 'we' embracing new policies, new candidates, a new leader – and by implication, a new vision of Scotland and for Scotland. Both may be Scottish focused documents, but it is the 2016 manifesto that is a firm call to Scotland and a much wider sense of a political 'we'.

The Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Manifesto 2017

Entitled 'Forward Together. Our Plan for a Stronger Scotland, a Stronger Britain and a Prosperous Future' this 80 page document dwarves the Scottish parliament documents and matches the size of previous Westminster General Election manifestos. Bearing the title and the full name of the party on the front cover, with no imagery, a signed statement by Theresa May is flanked by a picture of her and Ruth Davidson. Brexit is mentioned in the second sentence of this short statement, and five times in a total of 130 words. This is then followed by a formal foreword by Theresa May and another by Ruth Davidson. The foreword by Ruth Davidson appears to be an addition to wider 'British' Manifesto. Indeed, much of the document seems to be identical to the wider UK version, with Scotland only appearing in only isolated sections of the 80 page document. As an example, there are ten mentions within Ruth Davidson's foreword but is then 15 more pages before Scotland is again mentioned. On page 16 Scotland, as term of reference makes an appearance, with several sentences employing it as a term of reference – these in relation to the taxing properties of the Scottish parliament (which is specifically not mentioned). What is stated is that 'taxpayers in Scotland should not be asked to pay more income tax than their friends, family or colleagues in other parts of the UK.' This pattern is repeated, with large gaps of the document making few if any references to Scotland directly but every 7-8 pages it crops up as a term – often geographic, or policy related.

The nuance of the 2017 UK election must be taken into account – the General Election was called for by Theresa May on the 18th April 2017, with Parliament voting its agreement on the 19th – this left less than two months until Election. While this may have had an impact upon preparations and readiness for the election and a distinct Scottish manifesto it remains the case that the document issues in Scotland is very much a British one, with additions and amendments as needed. In addition to the limited mentions of Scotland, which are often linked to specific Acts of Parliament or devolved policies, there are even fewer uses of the word 'Scottish'. Technically it appears on every page as the title of the Scottish Party – but other than this it makes few if any appearances within the text.

What becomes clear in considering the text of the 2017 manifesto, is the clear divergences between the UK facing and the Scottish facing documents. They are technically being written for the same population – the Scottish based electorate (EU/Commonwealth national voting right differences aside). However, they maintain distinct differences that would almost seem to indicate they are aimed at different audiences. Once again, as in

2010 and 2015, the 2017 document uses signifiers and terms that are centred around the idea of Britain and/or the UK. In the initial 15 pages of the document that do not mention 'Scotland' the term 'nation' is used often – but clearly in relation to the nation that is Britain. Such phrases as 'If we are going to make sure Britain emerges from Brexit as a strong and united nation' are used to illustrate that clearly. But the clearest example is the one that simply states 'Britain is a great nation' and that 'we will, as a nation, go forward, together' (p12).

However, this is also a perfect example of where there is a clear change in the sense of 'we' that is often employed in aspects of the manifesto. In many areas that relate to specific policy, or acts of the Government, the 'we' is clearly a Conservative party one – a UK Conservative party one. However, at other times, and especially when discussing Brexit, the 'we; becomes much more encompassing – but again, from a strongly British perspective. The 'we; is the 'we the people', the people of the United Kingdom, the people of Britain. The nation herein is not Scotland – which mentioned and discussed and focused upon in places, but in other places it is clearly a bigger geographical *nation*, the State.

Again, the challenge is there for anyone who holds their national identity as firmly Scottish – but not to those who holding a multi-layered sense of differing, but not competing identities. Again, we have that shifting frame of reference, or shifting sense of a centric viewpoint – and it could be a subtle and distinct employment, or a by-product of attempting to avoid challenging and clashing concepts. At times, and as in 2010 and 2015, the Scottish Conservative Party manifesto employs a clearly Scottish centric view, and at others, and often in the same section of the document, switches to a clearly British viewpoint.

One aspect of the document that specifically requires consideration is the section entitled 'Leaving the European Union'. Covering just over two pages, this section covers an issue that clearly divided the Scottish and English based electorates within the UK. However, while the text mentions Northern Ireland and Gibraltar, and London, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast, and, of course, the EU. It only mentions Scotland once, when it states 'We will work closely with the devolved administrations to deliver an approach that works for the whole of the United Kingdom and reflects the needs and individual circumstances of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland' (p37). Again, the 'we' is a British one, if not a firmly Conservative one.

In 2017, the sense of identity, of belonging, and the 'we' employed by the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party remains both firmly party political and British. It is 'we have the biggest defence budget in Europe' when referring to Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and England all together, and it is 'we' when 'we will build on the proud Conservative record'. When it makes a reference to a territorial or national sense of belonging, such references are UK or British in focus – only occasionally does Scotland make an appearance and when it does it is very much a part of the wider UK.

Conclusion

Our short historical consideration at the beginning of the chapter considered how the shift in ideology – which led to a shift in emphasis of identity and belonging – within Conservatism in the UK, and Scotland, may have contributed to the decline in fortunes

suffered by Scottish Conservatives. By focusing firmly on the manifestos produced by the Scottish Conservatives for elections over the past decade, we can see that there have been significant shifts in the language used within Scotland, or rather for elections within Scotland, but that the same clear shift and changes has not taken full root for the elections involving Scotland.

Our analysis of manifesto foci and rhetoric in 2010, 2015 and 2017, did not indicate significant shifts in terms of how Scottish Conservatives presented themselves for British elections. It has been argued that the autonomy of the Scottish Conservatives is something they have not always sought to emphasise or employ – it seems that this may well be the case when it comes to the manifestos produced for British elections for a Scottish audience. The presence of a distinct Scottish voice in such documents remains muted at best, and absent in large elements. However, this may be a deliberate choice, or simply an attempt to speak to what they conceive of as their core support. In either case and in recent elections, it would seem to be a positive happenstance. There can be little doubt that after the Brexit referendum result of 2016, the Conservatives presented a distinctly British voice for Scottish voters. Curtice has argued that this may have spoken ‘to the hearts of those who were most opposed to independence’ (2017 p42).

While the position at the British level is not so clear – and the intentions and control of rhetoric as unclear. This is not the case for Scottish elections. Here we can see a clear shift in rhetorical emphasis, presentation, imagery and linguistic application between 2011 and 2016. The significant change in not only tone, but sense of identity, belonging and nation, so evident in 2016 is a clear factor that must be considered as having an impact upon the electoral fortunes of the party itself. They had a new leader, but they also had a new message, a new document, a new imagery and a new vision – albeit one allied to a clear ideology. What was different in 2016 was that Scottish Conservatism stood out with a rhetorical flourish absent from its preceding manifesto. The sense of belonging, and the sense of national identity was allied to a clear ideological and constitutional message.

Without further consideration, research and analysis it would be difficult to draw conclusions as to why there seems to be two distinct approaches, to these two (some might say) distinct electoral events. Yet, what is clear is that they have seemed to pay dividends to a party that was more than happy for them to arrive and revive their fortunes. What is clear is that a distinct Scottish Conservative rhetorical change has taken place during the last decade – why they have chosen to apply it.

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