

***Individu & nation***

ISSN : 1961-9731

: Université de Bourgogne

**vol. 5 | 2013**

**Les consultations électorales du 5 mai 2011 au Royaume-Uni**

## The 2011 Scottish Labour campaign: changing tactics?

18 June 2013.

**Fiona Simpkins**

**DOI : 10.58335/individuetnation.277**

🔗 <http://preo.ube.fr/individuetnation/index.php?id=277>

Fiona Simpkins, « The 2011 Scottish Labour campaign: changing tactics? », *Individu & nation* [], vol. 5 | 2013, 18 June 2013 and connection on 13 August 2025. DOI : 10.58335/individuetnation.277. URL : <http://preo.ube.fr/individuetnation/index.php?id=277>

PREO

# The 2011 Scottish Labour campaign: changing tactics?

## *Individu & nation*

18 June 2013.

vol. 5 | 2013

Les consultations électorales du 5 mai 2011 au Royaume-Uni

Fiona Simpkins

DOI : 10.58335/individuetnation.277

🔗 <http://preo.ube.fr/individuetnation/index.php?id=277>

- 
1. A lacklustre campaign? Scottish Labour policymaking and leadership.
  2. The organisation of the Scottish Labour Party: a lack of autonomy?
  3. Scottish Labour and the Scottish Constitutional Debate

References

Press articles

Primary sources

---

- 1 It now appears to have become common usage for the media to qualify Scottish Parliament election results as “historic”. Yet it should perhaps be noted that the Labour debacle on 5th May 2011 probably deserved the adjective more than any other Scottish Parliament elections so far. Indeed, by what were soon qualified as "historic" results by the Scottish media, Scottish Labour suffered its worst defeat since the UK general election of October 1931 whilst its archenemy, the SNP, managed to secure the first electoral majority since the opening of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 in spite of an electoral system explicitly devised to prevent single party government and ensure proportional representation.
- 2 Far from succeeding in attracting disaffected Liberal Democrat voters and widening its electoral base, Scottish Labour lost seven seats and was left with 37 seats in total, of which there were 15 constituency seats only and 22 regional seats. Most surprisingly, many major fig-

ures of the Scottish Labour Party lost their constituency seats, such as Andy Kerr<sup>1</sup>, Sarah Boyack<sup>2</sup> (who lost her constituency seat of Edinburgh Central to the SNP but managed to win a regional seat for Lothian.), Des McNulty<sup>3</sup>, or Frank McAveety<sup>4</sup> to name but a few. This leaves Labour with a majority of relatively unknown Labour MSPs, most of them having been elected on a regional basis. Indeed, Labour failed to copy the SNP system of using regional lists to ensure leading figures get back to Holyrood if they lose constituency ballots. The failure to put their names at the head of a regional list cost senior MSPs like Andy Kerr and Tom McCabe a Holyrood seat. In fact, not only did Scottish Labour fare very poorly on the constituency lists as it lost 20 constituency seats in total (22 were lost to the SNP), but it also failed to fully take advantage of the Scottish Parliament's semi-proportional electoral system and attract more voters on a regional basis. Although Scottish Labour increased its number of regional seats by 13 compared to the 2007 Scottish Parliament elections (that is six regional seats more than the SNP), it falls short of compensating the gap in constituency seats between the SNP and itself. Finally, it appears that Scottish Labour wasted much of its campaign in targeting SNP constituency seats, such as Aberdeen Central, Clackmannanshire & Dunblane, Kilmarnock & Irvine Valley or Dundee City West, rather than the Liberal Democrat constituencies that were up for holds due to a high number of disaffected Liberal Democrat voters and in which the SNP actively and successfully campaigned (winning 8 out of ten). Indeed, Scottish Labour targeted nine SNP held constituencies (yet failing to win any), two out of the three Conservative held constituencies (Edinburgh Pentlands and Dumfriesshire, only succeeding in winning the latter) and only two Liberal Democrat held constituencies (Dunfermline and Edinburgh Central, which were both lost to the SNP), as all of them only required less than a five per cent swing to Labour. This was a major strategic error, for in running a negative campaign on the separatist risks entailed by an SNP vote and the consequences of the current Con-Lib UK coalition government's budget cuts, Scottish Labour failed to secure its own seats or attract a wider electorate.

3 Formerly Scotland's largest political party, Scottish Labour was relegated to the position of Scotland's second party in what now appears for the first time to be a two-party system in Scotland rather than the

multiple party system that had been envisioned by the Scottish Constitutional Convention. Although Scottish Labour's UK general election results remain good (it lost no seats at the May 2010 UK general election and even consolidated its position), its Scottish Parliament election scores have plummeted and therefore question once again to what extent Labour can be considered as a Scottish party rather than a British party. This paper therefore seeks to analyse the structural problems met by Scottish Labour in its attempt to appeal to the wider Scottish electorate in the context of Scottish Parliament elections. To what extent do the Scottish Labour Party's links with the UK Parliamentary Labour Party affect it in terms of image and policy-making?

## **1. A lacklustre campaign? Scottish Labour policymaking and leadership.**

- 4 In fact, the leader of the Scottish Labour Party, Iain Gray, started the campaign buoyed by favourable polls. Indeed, a TNS-BMRB poll for the Herald of 5th March 2011 showed that Labour had a fifteen point lead over the SNP with 44% of voting intentions for Labour on the constituency vote and 29% for the SNP. Recent electoral results were also a source of confidence for Scottish Labour as it had obtained good results in Scotland at the May 2010 UK general election when it kept its 41 seats and increased its share of the vote by 2.5% to 42% of the Scottish electorate, notwithstanding the fact that two previous by-elections held in Glasgow North-East in November 2009 and Glenrothes in November 2008 had also given favourable outcomes for Scottish Labour. Moreover, Scottish Labour felt confident in its efforts to lead a better organised and technology enhanced campaign. Indeed, the Labour campaign was - according to political commentators - better organised than the previous 2007 campaign and labour activists and canvassers were able to use state of the art technology (similar to the Activate application used by the SNP) to target potential Labour voters, with a voter database management software called Labour Contact Creator<sup>5</sup>.

- 5 The Scottish Labour Party's 2011 manifesto was also the product of a wide party and public consultation led by the Scottish Policy Forum over a period of three years and defined by its head as "the most exciting and ambitious policy process that Labour has ever embarked on" (Scottish Labour, 2010). The impetus for the creation of a Scottish Policy Forum open consultation was provided by the poor electoral results of Scottish Labour at the May 2007 election ("Labour has learned the lessons of the last Scottish Parliament election" [Scottish Labour, 2010]) and represented an important change in Labour policymaking. Indeed, the Scottish Policy Forum consulted members, affiliated organisations as well as other varied organisations and interest groups (going from Alzheimer Scotland to the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society) in order to collect ideas that would form the basis of the 2011 electoral manifesto. The Scottish Policy Forum was headed by Margaret McCulloch and included 87 members elected from all sections of the party. These included Constituency Labour Party representatives, Young Labour representatives, socialist societies and trade union representatives, local government representatives, European, UK and Scottish Parliament representatives, Scottish Executive Committee representatives and ex officio national Policy Forum representatives. It was composed of four specialized policy commissions (A Prosperous and Sustainable Scotland Policy Commission, A Scotland of Opportunity Policy Commission, A Safer Scotland Policy Commission, A Caring and Healthier Scotland Policy Commission) whose role was to draw together policy discussion documents for consultation over three stages, the first being completed in 2009 and the last two in 2010. Furthermore, throughout the process, the policy commissions were able to draw on advice from expert sounding boards.
- 6 However, the results of this Scottish Policy Forum, as they were published in the 2011 electoral manifesto, were undermined by the fact that Scottish Labour were accused of stealing the SNP's clothes. Iain Gray's dramatic U-turns on a council tax freeze and free university tuition on the eve of the electoral campaign were notably criticized and the Scottish Labour leader was accused in the press of having no ideas of his own (Guardian, 5th April 2011 & Herald Scotland, 8th May 2011). Indeed, a comparison of both the SNP's and Scottish Labour's manifestos shows many similar headline policies as regarding ap-

prenticeships, tax, crime and justice, higher education or the economy with perhaps a more hardline approach to crime policies with Labour and a strong opposition to nuclear power with the SNP.

- 7 Indeed, regarding apprenticeships for instance, while Scottish Labour proposed a “guaranteed modern apprenticeship for every suitably qualified 16 to 18 year-old who wants one from 2013” (Scottish Labour, 2011), the SNP offered to create 100,000 training opportunities each year, including a package of £11.5 million to fund 25,000 modern apprenticeships. Tax matters were also strikingly similar in both manifestos as Scottish Labour and the SNP both proposed to freeze the council tax (for two years with no above-inflation rises thereafter under a Labour government and for a duration of five years under an SNP Government), guaranteed that there would be no increase in income tax rates or the creation of a “tartan tax” (i.e. use of the Scottish variable rate mechanism which enables the Scottish Government to vary the basic rate of UK income tax by 3 pence in the pound), and promised to maintain parity with the English non-domestic business poundage rate. Finally, regarding the economy, both parties put a particular emphasis on supporting small businesses: while Labour wished to create a new « Plus One Scheme » to help small businesses take on their first employee with support on personnel, payroll and legal issues as well as continue the Small Business Bonus Scheme, the SNP promised “specific support for small businesses looking to take on their first member of staff, including help setting up payroll systems” and “work to win new job-creating powers for the Scottish Parliament” (Scottish National Party, 2011) as well as continue the Small Business Bonus Scheme with 80,000 firms paying no or lower rates. Both parties also expressed their wish to curb youth unemployment. Scottish Labour claimed in its manifesto that it would “abolish youth unemployment and create 250,000 jobs by the end of the decade” (Scottish Labour, 2011) as well as create 10,000 work placements for unemployed young people through a new Scottish Future Jobs Fund and restart a national volunteering scheme. The SNP matched these electoral promises with its own plan for a new £250 million Scottish Futures Fund focusing on young people and early years. It also promised to provide 2,000 work opportunities for young people in the voluntary sector. Moreover, while Scottish Labour wished to appoint a “digital champion” to bring forward a strategy to improve broadband,

the SNP boasted that it would make “next-generation broadband available to all by 2020” (Scottish National Party, 2011).

- 8 The aforementioned examples suggest that there were few differences between both parties’ policy programmes and it is worth noting that many more themes developed in the manifestos such as education, health, environment, energy and transport also represented many striking similarities which we do not have the space to analyse in detail here. Consequently, in the absence of clear policy differences or of a true ideological debate between Scotland's two main rival parties - independence excepted -, voters' choices had to depend on other variables. If voters did not make their choice according to policy differences, did they base their decisions on party image or leader popularity?
- 9 In fact, soon after the launch of the campaign, opinion polls started showing a clear downward trend for the Scottish Labour Party's electoral fortunes. As soon as the second week into the campaign, a TNS/STV poll showed that Labour and the SNP were running neck to neck with 35% of the vote each. Furthermore, a TNS-BRMB poll for STV published immediately before the first Scottish Leaders' debate - which took place on 29th March - showed that SNP leader Alex Salmond had a clear lead over his Labour counterpart: 30% of people polled declared that Alex Salmond would make the best First Minister for Scotland, with Conservative leader Annabel Goldie coming in second at 9% and Labour leader Iain Gray in third position at only 7%. Iain Gray's poor performance during the debate would not turn the tide. Indeed, a Scotsman article dated 31<sup>st</sup> March even reported that several Labour MPs in Westminster had expressed their concern about the Scottish Labour party's campaign and Iain Gray's "lacklustre" performance. First, Iain Gray somewhat stalled on questions related to employment and the economy, his arguments failing to carry the same punch as his main opponent's. He then launched a counterproductive attack on Alex Salmond's achievements as First Minister which made him appear aggressive and hectoring while Alex Salmond appeared more calm. This would also be the case during the last televised leaders' debate on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2011 as Gray launched several personal attacks on Salmond who he had qualified a few days earlier as "downright dangerous" (Guardian, 25th April 2011).

- 10     Iain Gray's image was further damaged a week after the first debate after a much mediatized incident - dubbed a "PR nightmare" (STV News, 2011) - in Glasgow's Central Station where the Scottish Labour leader went with his aides to promote the party's transport policies and highlight its commitment to constructing the Glasgow Airport Rail Link. He was confronted by protestors from Citizens United Against Public Cuts as soon as he arrived. His seemingly unprepared party organisers decided the best form of defence was retreat as they ushered their leader in a nearby Subway sandwich shop. He was followed and cornered by the protesters before finally being rushed off in a taxi. This reaction compared unfavourably to Annabel Goldie's when she was heckled by the same group of protestors a few days earlier but stood her ground and argued with them, albeit rather uncomfortably. Another similar incident occurred during the sixth week of the campaign when Iain Gray's and Alex Salmond's teams unexpectedly met in an Asda supermarket in Ardrossan. Both parties accused each other of hiding after this unplanned encounter, yet the First Minister managed to get the upper hand in the argument as he continued talking to shoppers and staff while the Labour team left the premises hurriedly, further damaging their leader's image.
- 11     Although the outcome of the May 2011 Scottish Parliament election cannot be reduced to image alone, Labour's defeat was certainly favoured by the lack of charisma of its leader, Iain Gray, and a seemingly poor PR team. The campaign often appeared as a contest between a popular and charismatic SNP First Minister, Alex Salmond, and a dull, little-known Labour leader. A Scotsman poll of February 2011 found that less than 20% of people polled recognized Iain Gray when a picture of him was shown to them whilst a majority recognized Alex Salmond (Scotsman, 18th February 2011). This in turn questions the organisation of Labour in Scotland and stresses the lack of commitment of major Scottish Labour figures to the Scottish Parliament, an institution they created in the late nineties but overlooked as a possible base for their careers. Only a handful of senior Labour figures switched their political careers to Edinburgh, including the late Donald Dewar, whilst all of the SNP's senior figures strove to obtain parliamentary seats in the new Scottish institution. This sends the wrong message to the Scottish electorate as it understands that the Scottish elite of the Labour Party, with such senior Labour figures



as Gordon Brown, Alistair Darling, Douglas Alexander or Willie Bain, give priority to wider UK concerns. As we shall see, the link between the UK Parliamentary Labour Party and Scottish Labour is therefore unfavourable to the latter in the context of devolution.

## **2. The organisation of the Scottish Labour Party: a lack of autonomy?**

- 12 Studies such as David McCrone's (McCrone, 2001) have found that Scottish voters in general are somewhat more likely to be collectivist in outlook than the English and that Labour voters in Scotland are significantly more left-wing than their English counterparts. John David Stewart's 2004 study of welfare policy in post-devolution Scotland also concludes that there is "a public-sector, collectivist ethos and culture in Scotland that markedly distinguishes it from New Labour aspirations and policies" (Stewart, 2004). Yet the rightwards shift of the UK Parliamentary Party under Tony Blair's leadership has created an uncomfortable position for its Scottish branch. Scottish Labour, having operated in a different cultural and political environment, evolved differently to the British party. As noted above, Labour's politics in Scotland have not only evolved in an environment strongly defined by social democratic values, but also multi-party politics and, crucially, the Scottish constitutional question. Furthermore, Scottish Labour's electoral experience in the period 1979-1997 is particularly contrasted to that of British Labour as it consistently upheld its majority of seats and votes in Scotland whilst British Labour as a whole lost four consecutive elections to the Conservative Party. Crucially, Labour's success in Scotland has strengthened its perceived image, policies and values as well as its sense of its own power and appeal. This has meant that Scottish Labour did not have to challenge its own values and traditions the way that its British counterpart had to after four consecutive defeats in England (Hassan & Shaw, 2010). On the contrary, under Blair's leadership, British Labour undertook a "modernisation" process which in fact reappraised and transformed many of its fundamental values and policies in order to counter what Giles Radice called the "Southern Discomfort"

(Radice, 1992) problem and appeal to Middle England voters as a reinvented New Labour party. This appeal, though, is much more limited in Scotland and undermines Labour's position north of the border as it becomes associated with a number of unpopular policies.

- 13 This was the case during the 2007 Scottish Parliament elections for instance, when Scottish Labour suffered from its links with the UK Parliamentary Labour Party regarding three reserved issues: in their 2009 study, Curtice et al have noted that opposition to the Iraq War (64%), building more nuclear stations (51%) and the replacement of Trident (42%) had depressed the Labour vote in Scotland. Although Scottish Labour has admittedly clashed with its UK counterpart on several occasions during the post-devolution period (notably with Henry McLeish's policy of free care to the elderly), these rows have remained very limited and Scottish Labour have - rightly - been perceived by the Scottish electorate as close to British Labour. According to Hassan & Shaw, "while it would be expected that the creation of a new institution and political environment would strengthen divergence, this has to be seen in the context of Scottish Labour's balancing act as a mediator of both Scottish and British interests - advocating for Scottish interests in Westminster, and making the case for the union in Scotland" (Hassan & Shaw, 2010), a *modus operandi* increasingly snubbed by the Scottish electorate.
- 14 The rejection of wider British interests in the way Scotland is run in Holyrood creates a favourable context for the nationalists. It is therefore ironic - or suicidal? - that out of the four candidates contesting the Labour leadership in 2008, the winner Iain Gray, was the candidate with the closest ties to the Labour leadership in London. Between 2003 and 2007, Iain Gray worked as an advisor in Westminster to Alistair Darling, Brown's closest ally in Cabinet. Furthermore, Iain Gray has shown no interest in developing more autonomy for the Scottish party as he did not wish to pursue the pro-autonomy, more distinct agenda introduced by his predecessor, Wendy Alexander. She had called for changing the role of leader and making the Holyrood Labour group leader the leader of the whole party, as well as developing an agenda of more devolution powers through the Calman Commission and agreeing to the organisation of an independence referendum - the famous 'Bring it on' strategy that was first unveiled during a speech given by the then Scottish Labour leader at Edinburgh

University on Saint Andrew's Day 2007. Interestingly, at the time, Labour's defeat in the Glasgow-East by-election had prompted fuller debate within the Scottish Labour Party about its relationship with the UK party. Former Health Minister Andy Kerr, in particular, had called for the next leader to have real control in Scotland, including authority over Westminster's 38 MPs. One of his backers, former Holyrood Finance Minister Tom McCabe had accused those same MPs of being "arrogant" and "in denial" (Telegraph, 3rd August 2008) of the scale of their difficulties. Appel de note après la punctuation basse en anglais? Kerr's argument, which had been used by Wendy Alexander before him, was that former Labour Prime Minister Gordon Brown had to devolve authority to the Scottish Labour Party if it was to resist the SNP and stop being out-manoeuvred by the skilful Alex Salmond by pursuing its own policies, independent of London.

- 15 Unsurprisingly, these issues have resurfaced in the debates leading to the review of the Scottish Labour Party ordered by Ed Miliband after the defeat in May 2011 and which was led by MP Jim Murphy and MSP Sarah Boyack. MP Tom Harris had already vocally backed a call made by former First Ministers Jack McConnell and Henry McLeish for a "one member, one vote" election of leader, and for the leader to be in charge of the whole party (Herald Scotland, 16th May 2011). This meant that the new leader would be elected by ordinary members, not just MPs and MSPs, and stand alone from the UK party. Indeed, the proposals of the Review of the Labour Party adopted by the Scottish Labour Party Conference on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2011 meant a certain degree of decentralisation to the Scottish branch for the first time with the creation of an elected Leader of the Scottish Labour Party; opening the position to all Labour parliamentarians elected in Scotland, provided they commit to seek election as an MSP and First Minister; "fully devolving the Scottish Labour Party in all Scottish matters"<sup>6</sup>; beginning the process of restructuring local parties in Scotland on the basis of Scottish Parliament seats, not Westminster seats; establishing a political strategy board, meeting weekly, to develop and co-ordinate political strategy with the Leader, Shadow Secretary of State, the leader of the COSLA Labour Group, a representative of the MEPs, the party chair, and the Scottish General Secretary; and, finally, establishing a new political base in Edinburgh. Yet, the Scottish leader is still chosen from three "electoral colleges": one of ordinary

members, a second of trade unions and a third of MPs and MSPs. Labour now has more MPs in Scotland than MSPs (40 and 37) which, under the party's electoral college system, gives them more say on who becomes the new leader at the Scottish Parliament. This was still the case when Johann Lamont was elected new leader of the Scottish Labour Party in December 2011.

- 16 This begs a fundamental question: what is the point of devolution if political leaders are still chosen in London? Before the creation of a Scottish Parliament in 1999, the leader of the Scottish Labour Party was effectively the Secretary or Shadow Secretary of State for Scotland chosen by the UK Labour leader at Westminster. Devolution introduced the election of Scottish party leaders by the party in Scotland rather than at Westminster. But in fact, only Donald Dewar was empowered as Scottish Labour Leader. His successors were elected as Leader of Labour in the Scottish Parliament, which implied only a limited role and blurred the lines between Scottish Labour and the UK Parliamentary Labour Party. The overarching role of British Labour meant that in fact the leader of the British Party was – until December 2011 when Johann Lamont was elected as Leader of the Scottish Labour Party – the leader of the Scottish Party. Besides, the lack of autonomy of the Scottish Party suggested that Labour was reluctant to embrace devolution. In fact, although there has really been little or no interference from Westminster or No. 10 Downing Street, the small numbers of party elites involved in Scottish leadership contests have raised questions about party democracy in Scotland. Contrary to British Labour, which adopted direct democracy in its leadership contests under Smith and Blair, Scottish leadership contests are still elite-dominated. Because directly electing a party leader can be viewed as an incentive to be a Labour member, this disparages potential membership.
- 17 Yet, membership is clearly a weak point for the Scottish Labour Party as it has fallen dramatically since 1997. In September 2010 according to the number of ballot papers issued to party members during the Labour Party (UK) leadership election ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labour\\_Party\\_%28UK%29\\_leadership\\_election,\\_2010](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labour_Party_%28UK%29_leadership_election,_2010)) it emerged that the party had 13,135 members in Scotland, down from a peak of 30,770 at the end of 1998 and 18,800 in March 2006. This is significant for the future of the party as it indicates the end of Labour's institutional hegemony in

Scotland. "In membership terms, [Labour in Scotland] is now a smaller and declining part of society in Scotland" (Hassan, 2004). Moreover, British membership figures were 166,000 in 2008, which suggests that Scotland only accounts for less than 10% of Labour members and therefore "benefits from a smaller voice within British Labour than its electoral strength suggests" (Hassan, 2004). Finally, a smaller party also entails a reduction in the number of activists. The role of activism can be determining in target seats and the decline in the number of activists is therefore a liability for the Scottish Labour party. Crucially, a smaller number of members begs the question of participation and decision making within the Labour party and risks driving it further towards an elite-oriented organisation with strong links to the British Party.

### **3. Scottish Labour and the Scottish Constitutional Debate**

18 The negative impact of Scottish Labour's UK associations is also related to Scotland's singular constitutional debate. This was made very clear after the May 2007 Scottish Parliament election when, in spite of Labour's repeated attacks on the SNP's separatist ethos, the nationalists first managed to appeal to the Scottish electorate with a comprehensive programme of left-of-centre social policies including cutting prescription charges, abolishing the Graduate Endowment Scheme for students, replacing the council tax with a new system of local taxes, reducing business taxes, and many more. Not only has Scottish Labour's links to New Labour steered it towards a common centre-left ground with the SNP, but it was clear then as it is today that Scottish Labour's main opponent is at an advantage in having no UK-wide counterpart like the other main political parties in Scotland and being able to present itself as a uniquely Scottish party devoted to defending Scottish interests only. Labour therefore also has to stress its Scottish character and prove that it is in a better position to defend Scotland's interests if it wants to have a greater impact with the Scottish electorate.

19 This is all the more true as Scottish Social Attitudes Surveys have consistently shown over the years that Scottish voters trust the Scottish government more than its British counterpart to work in Scot-

land's long-term interest and that a majority wish Holyrood to have more influence on the way Scotland is run than Westminster. Indeed, 61% trusted the Scottish Government to work in Scotland's interests according to the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey of 2009 (published in December 2010) against 25% only for the UK government in Westminster. Furthermore, if 33% of the population considered that the Scottish Parliament had most influence over the way Scotland is run in 2009 against 39% who still believed that Westminster retained the most influence, 72% believed the Scottish Parliament or Government ought to have most influence over the way Scotland is run rather than the British Government in Westminster (13%).

- 20 In Scotland, New Labour's shift to the centre is important partly because it reduces the gap between the party and the Conservatives, but mainly because it has virtually eliminated any left-right ideological difference with the party's main rival, the SNP. The parties are left clearly distinct only in terms of nationalist ideology and constitutional preferences. The key here is party image. Indeed, many studies emphasise the importance of being seen to support Scotland's interests. The Conservatives' unpopularity in Scotland for instance owes considerably to their opposition to devolution, not just because the majority of voters disagreed, but because it made them appear anti-Scottish. In contrast, 'standing up for Scotland's interests' is more or less the SNP's *raison d'être* and so even those opposed to independence are nonetheless inclined to believe that the party could deliver benefits to Scottish voters. If Labour is not thought sufficiently capable of standing up for Scotland's interests in the Union, the SNP is therefore at a clear advantage.
- 21 Indeed, Jack McConnell's decision to campaign against a demand for greater powers to the Scottish Parliament during the 2007 Scottish Parliament election campaign and refusing to debate this issue while the SNP was defending the idea of a comprehensive enquiry into the powers of the Scottish Parliament and a multi-option referendum proved to be a tactical mistake. Opinion polls at the time revealed that a large majority of Scots were in favour of increasing the Scottish Parliament's powers and even giving it important fiscal powers: the 2007 YouGov/Scottish Election Study<sup>7</sup> found that 45% of Scots were in favour of getting more powers for their Parliament against 32% of Scots preferring the status quo. Here Labour had clearly failed to

present themselves as the best party to defend Scottish interests and therefore lost the election.

- 22 It was therefore surprising during the May 2011 campaign that the same failing tactics should be pursued by Scottish Labour. Indeed, week six of the campaign saw Labour shifting from attacking the Conservatives in Westminster to attacking the SNP, and particularly its policy of independence. This came as both an Ipsos-MORI poll for the Sun and a YouGov poll for Scotland on Sunday found 32% and 34% for Labour and 45% for the SNP. In a desperate U-turn to save his campaign, Iain Gray thus resorted to scare tactics vaguely reminiscent of John Major's also doomed 1997 "72 hours to save the Union" campaign as he attacked the SNP's plans for an independence referendum in a speech given at the Lighthouse in Glasgow on 25th April:

We stand now, closer than ever before to the end of the Union. That would be a disaster for Scotland. [...] So today the polls put the SNP in front, they have a real chance of forming a government and what is Alex Salmond's first reaction? Not a plan for jobs, not the promise of youth employment, not a programme to get the economy growing. His only plan is a plan for separation. He says that a second term gives him the moral authority to pursue independence. He doesn't care. Five more years of his constant obsession with independence. is that what you want? Is that what the country wants? is that something that Scotland can afford?<sup>8</sup>

- 23 This strategy is in fact doomed because it depends on perceptions of the likelihood of independence in the event of an SNP victory. A strong commitment to independence may win the SNP credit for their devotion to Scottish interests even from opponents of independence, but it will not win those voters' support if they think the party can and will deliver independence. So the less credible the SNP's commitment to independence, the better it will serve them in terms of votes. The fact that the SNP abandoned their idea of a referendum on independence during their first term made the idea of independence even less likely and served them in terms of vote share. On the other hand, the SNP's demands for more powers to the Scottish Parliament and a three-question referendum make them appear like the party most capable of delivering extra powers for Holyrood.

- 24 Finally, Scottish Labour will have to rethink its organisation and its links with the UK Parliamentary Labour Party if it is to create a distinct Scottish identity and agenda that appeals to the Scottish electorate and convinces them that Scottish Labour is the party best suited to defend Scotland's interests. Negative campaigning and scare tactics have been proven to fail. Scottish Labour therefore needs a positive agenda of Scottish policies and needs to take into account the desire for further powers to the Scottish Parliament if it is effectively to defend the Union. It remains to be seen whether the reforms adopted by the Scottish Labour Conference of October 2011 will deliver benefits in terms of vote share.

## References

- 25 Hassan, Gerry / Shaw, Eric (1<sup>st</sup> April 2010). Doctrine and Ethos in the Scottish Labour Party, Paper to the Political Studies Association Annual Conference, 'Regionalist Parties and Territorial Politics'.
- 26 Lynch, Peter / Birrell, Steven (2004) in : Gerry Hassan, Ed. The Scottish Labour Party, History, Institutions and Ideas, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- 27 McCrone, David (2001). Understanding Scotland, London: Routledge.
- 28 Radice, Giles (1992). Southern Discomfort, London : Fabian Society.
- 29 Stewart, John David (2004). Taking Stock: Scottish Social Welfare After Devolution, Edinburgh : Policy Press.

## Press articles

- 30 Carrell, Severin (2011). "SNP's Alex Salmond's 'downright dangerous' says Scottish labour leader", The Guardian, 25<sup>th</sup> April 2011.
- 31 Cramb, Auslan (2011). "Scottish Labour Leader 'should get complete control of party'", The Daily Telegraph, 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2011.
- 32 Currie, Brian (2011). "Glasgow MP first to give up Labour leadership vote", The Herald Scotland, 16<sup>th</sup> May 2011.
- 33 Hutcheon, Paul (2011). "How Labour Lost It", The Herald Scotland, 8<sup>th</sup> May 2011.



- 34 Livingstone, Jamie. "Running up a dead end?", STV News, <http://news.stv.tv/election-2011/242252-running-up-a-dead-end/>
- 35 McWhirter, Iain (2011). "Scotland's 'me too' election", The Guardian, 5<sup>th</sup> April 2011.
- 36 Peterkin, Tom / Maddox, David (2011). "Labour's concern grow for flagging election campaign", The Scotsman , 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011.
- 37 Whitaker, Andrew (2011). "Iain Gray: does anyone know who this man is?", The Scotsman, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2011.

## Primary sources

- 38 Scottish National Party Manifesto 2011, Re-elect A Scottish Government Working For Scotland, Scottish National Party, 2011.
- 39 The Scottish Labour Party, Report of the Scottish Policy Forum, Scottish Labour, 2010.
- 40 The Scottish Labour Party Manifesto, Fighting For What Really Matters, Scottish Labour, 2011.

---

1 Former MP for East Kilbride who served as Minister for Finance and Public Services in 2001-2004 and Minister for Health and Community Care in 2004-2007.

2 She served as Minister for the Environment, Planning and Transport in 1999-2000, Minister for Transport and Planning in 2000-2001 and Deputy Minister for the Environment and Rural Development in 2007.

3 Former MP for Clydebank and Milngavie who served as Deputy Minister for Social Justice in 2002-2003, Deputy Communities Minister in 2006-2007 and Shadow Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change since 2008.

4 Former MP for Glasgow Shettleston who served as Deputy Minister for Local Government until 2000, Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care until 2002 and Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport until 2004.

5 The Labour Contact Creator system is an online tool for Labour Party members and activists provided with a username and password. It gives ac-

cess voter contact details, preferences, interests, past voting behaviour, and demographic/socio-economic information as well as information on when and how these voters prefer to be contacted, and the responses given upon previous contact. Potential voters are selected on the basis of a MOSAIC grouping, which attempts to determine the sort of interests and activities a voter or a household might display.

6 [www.scottishlabour.org.uk/new-position-of-scottish-labour-leader](http://www.scottishlabour.org.uk/new-position-of-scottish-labour-leader).

7 YouGov/Scottish Election Study Results. <http://yougov.com>.

8 <http://www.holyrood.com/daily/2011/04/25/384-election-round-up-a-pril-25>

---

## English

After the setbacks Labour suffered at the Scottish Parliament elections of May 2007, it appeared clearly that the Labour party in Scotland urgently needed to readjust its political strategy and message to the new post-devolution constitutional system. Soon after the May 2007 elections, voices were consequently raised within Labour to stress the need to formulate distinct Scottish policies. Yet, in May 2011, Scottish Labour suffered its worst electoral defeat in Scotland since the UK general election of October 1931 whilst the SNP managed to secure the first electoral majority since the opening of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 in spite of an electoral system explicitly devised to prevent single party government and ensure proportional representation. This paper therefore seeks to study the outcome of the May 2011 election in light of Labour's political strategies and programme, and analyse the structural problems met by Scottish Labour in its attempt to appeal to the wider Scottish electorate in the context of Scottish Parliament elections. How do the Scottish Labour Party's links with the UK Parliamentary Labour Party affect it in terms of image and policymaking? To what extent is a complete restructuration of the party necessary North of the border and how will this affect politics in Scotland?

## Français

Après l'échec que subit le parti travailliste écossais aux élections législatives écossaises de mai 2007, il apparut clairement que ce dernier devait repenser sa stratégie électorale et réajuster son message politique au système constitutionnel post-dévolution. Des voix s'élevèrent en effet au sein du parti travailliste écossais peu après les élections de mai 2007 pour appeler à l'élaboration de nouvelles politiques écossaises distinctes. Mais en mai 2011, le parti subit sa plus grande défaite électorale en Ecosse depuis les élections législatives d'octobre 1931 tandis que le SNP parvenait à obtenir la première majorité électorale depuis la création du Parlement écossais en 1999, malgré un système électoral semi-proportionnel adopté dans le but d'éviter les

gouvernements majoritaires et d'assurer une représentation politique proportionnelle. Il s'agira dès lors d'étudier les résultats des élections de mai 2011 à la lumière de la stratégie électorale et du programme adoptés par le parti travailliste écossais, et d'analyser les problèmes structurels rencontrés par ce dernier alors qu'il faisait campagne pour les élections législatives écossaises. Dans quelle mesure le parti travailliste écossais est-il affecté par ses liens avec le parti travailliste parlementaire en termes d'image et de programme politique? Une restructuration complète du parti est-elle nécessaire en Ecosse et en quoi bouleverserait-elle le paysage politique écossais?

---

### **Mots-clés**

Politique britannique, Ecosse, Parlement écossais, élections législatives écossaises, parti travailliste écossais

---

### **Fiona Simpkins**

Maître de Conférences, Triangle UMR 5206, Université Lumière Lyon 2, 86 rue Pasteur, 69007 Lyon – Fiona.Simpkins [at] univ-lyon2.fr

IDREF : <https://www.idref.fr/253130379>

HAL : <https://cv.archives-ouvertes.fr/fiona-simpkins>