

Abstract

The role of charismatic leadership in a nationalist movement – A Case Study

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The Scottish National Party, which campaigns for Scottish independence, now forms the minority government in the devolved Scottish Parliament. Its leader, Alex Salmond, is routinely described in the political press as charismatic. By contrast, the personal qualities of Salmond's predecessor as SNP leader, John Swinney, were described in very different terms.

With the SNP campaigning hard for a referendum on independence, and thus the end of the British political state in its current form, this seems an opportune moment to discuss the leadership of this currently buoyant nationalist movement.

This paper begins with a consideration of the role of the elite within political nationalism and politics and then moves to consider the electoral and political fortunes of the SNP over the past few decades, and then a consideration of the two most recent leaders of the SNP. It then moves to an analysis of the press treatment of these two leaders, in order to describe and analyse the way the Scottish political press has characterized the leadership of the SNP in terms of charisma. It does so by a content analysis of articles carried in the country's two indigenous national daily broadsheet titles – *The Scotsman* and *The Herald* and their associated Sunday sister papers. A more detailed textual analysis is then carried out of selected articles. This contrast of media framing in the context of the SNP's electoral performance allows an examination of claims made about the impact of charismatic leadership in general, on the fortunes of this nationalist movement in particular

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Introduction

Contemporary Scotland presents a classic case where contending political parties and elite groups/individuals dispute not only for power and control of the governing units of society (although not the state), but also present differing visions of the future of the nation. The Scottish National Party (SNP) is the mainstream nationalist party that has been present in the British Parliament (Westminster) since the late 1960s, and since 2007 has formed the Scottish Government, with a minority of seats within the Scottish Parliament (Holyrood). The three other major parties that represent seats from Scotland at Westminster, and hold the vast majority of opposition seats in Holyrood, Labour, the Conservatives and the Liberal

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Democrats are all broadly Unionist in their outlook and oppose the *raison d'être* of the SNP, independence for Scotland and the dissolution of the 300 year old Act of Union.

In recent months both the SNP and their unionist opponents have presented distinctly different plans for tomorrow's Scotland. The SNP Scottish Government undertook their *National Conversation* and issued a draft policy paper in 2007 outlining options to hold a referendum on an independent Scotland in 2010 (Scottish Government 2007). The unionist parties within the Scottish Parliament created the Calman Commission; with the aim of considering ways to strengthen the powers of the Scottish Parliament within the Union, and Calman also issued a final report in 2009 (Commission on Scottish Devolution 2009). In these documents it is clear that both nationalists and unionists employ and operate from within a national framework, providing a strong sense of Scotland and identity within the proposed policy documents that outline their respective visions (Leith 2009).

These activities represent the elite, or political class (Bottomore, 1966), providing the intellectual element of politics, and a clear national leadership role within the Scottish polity. In modern democratic politics, the masses look to the individuals and sub groups within the political elite for leadership and direction on the social issues of the day, and in Scotland, this direction is being given through a nationalistic lens. The words and language of the elite are continually reported to the masses, and can reinforce the sense of national identity held by those masses (Billig 1995). Thus, Scotland serves as an example of how contending political elites employ and operate a specific sense of national identity in order to gain popular/mass support for distinct political objectives (Brass 1991).

The centrality of politics to nationalism must not be underestimated. Nationalism is the act of 'seeking or exercising state power and justifying such action with nationalist argument' (Breuilly, 1993, p2) and this is very much the case within Scotland. The SNP seek to create a classic 'Gellnerian' nation-state where the borders of the nation and the borders of the state are congruent. The SNP not only seek power, or control of the Scottish Government, which they currently do as a minority administration; they also seek to refashion Scotland as an independent nation state – and they seek to harness the strong sense of Scottish identity that exists to achieve those aims.

The literature on nationalism illustrates clear divisions around key issues of the nation and the nature of national identity, and this is also evident when one considers the theoretical discussions concerning elite efficacy and importance within nationalism movements. Some would strongly emphasise the ability of elites to mould and form the nation (Ozkirimli 2003), arguing that the constructed nature of national identity (De Cillia et al 1999) makes that role extremely significant (Guibernau 2007). Others have pointed to the restrictions elites face in the formation of a sense of national identity (Smith, 1998, 2002). Whatever the specific position one takes on the nature of national identity, the role of the elite remains important, although it is just as important to remember that 'the power of nationalist elites to spin a story is not limitless' (Harris 2009). It is clear that elites have relevance in the formation of a sense of national identity within Scotland (Kiely et al 2005) and also that the mass

conceptualisation of the nation is influenced by, and influences the elite within Scotland (Bond and Rosie 2006).

Allied to the role that elites contribute to nationalist movements (and any political party that operates within a clearly nationalist framework such as Scotland) are the changing nature of politics in the contemporary UK, the role of leaders within the political system, and the perception of them by the wider public. In recent times three strands of political change have strengthened the role of individual leaders within the political class, and emphasised the importance of the charismatic aspects and public perceptions of those leaders by the British (and Scottish) public.

The first of these strands is the presidentialisation of power (Poguntke and Webb 2005); or the idea that the individual leaders in non-presidential systems have become more powerful over time. In the UK, academics since the 1960s have been discussing the idea that the Prime Minister has become more dominant in the parliamentary system thereby displacing Cabinet Government; although detractors point out that the argument should not be oversimplified to an all-powerful Prime Minister (Smith 2003). The next strand of the phenomena of political change is the conceptual argument that personality politics is now an integral part of the British political system. Personality politics is built around the idea that the personal characteristics, qualities and traits of leaders have become more important as part of everyday politics (Miller et al 1986). Yet it is the third strand which directly concerns us here – a strand directly applied to the UK - and that is the increasing political emphasis on the individual characteristics of the leader, or the ‘politicisation of the persona’ (Langer 2010).

Langer emphasises that personal habits and temperament of major political leaders have become a core aspect of ‘political discourse’ and that the key to political and electoral success is firmly rooted in the ability to project a human face onto the party. This is a feature of politics in de-aligned democratic systems, such as the UK/Scotland, and a regular aspect of everyday political campaigning. Langer highlights several aims in this approach; including the acquisition of ‘soft’ media coverage and increasing the appeal of the leader to those less interested in formal political activity. However, key amongst the objectives must be the aim of allowing the leader to appeal emotionally close to and be like ‘ordinary people, and to legitimize, through personal experiences and example, their political positions’ (2010, p61).

In modern politics, leaders not only lead, they ‘embody’ the party, becoming the personification of the values and ideas that the party trumpets; they also provide a link for the party that creates a clear and simple ‘narrative’ that brings together disparate policy ideas and arguments. Such an argument is even more relevant when one considers the recent history of the SNP. The party does not appeal to a particular segment of society due to their current, or historical ideological background, although they began to trend left in the late 1970s and 1980s (Levy 1990). This, however, should be seen in the light of the SNP’s belief that Scotland is essentially a social democratic country (McAskill 2004) and that by positioning itself as “a moderate left of centre” party the SNP is placing itself in what it believes is the mainstream Scottish political value system. Nationalism as a political movement cuts across traditional political ideologies and thus the SNP have often faced the challenges of internal

divisions brought about by ideological conflict (Leith and Stevens 2010). With the politicisation of personal aspects, a charismatic and personable leader is able to aid the party by making it appear, in the eyes of potential supporters, as unified and whole, rather than divided. It is noticeable in this respect how the current SNP leader² Alex Salmond cleverly uses Scots phrases to transcend the formality of politics and has taken opportunities to present himself as an ordinary Scot – by associating himself, for example, in one memorable photograph as an enthusiastic member of “The Tartan Army” of Scottish football supporters.

We have highlighted the contemporary importance of elites and individual leaders within nationalism in general, and the British political system in particular. The political battle taking place in Scotland/UK over the future powers and role of the Scottish parliament links the nature of Scottish national identity, the elite influence and portrayal of that identity, and the public perception and reception of the personality of political leaders. However, before we turn to a consideration of Alex Salmond as leader of the SNP, we must consider the electoral fortunes of the party itself to see if any patterns can be discerned.

Election in Scotland

The SNP is a fairly young political party (Lynch 2002) formed as the result of a merger of two smaller fringe parties in 1934. Despite a wartime by-election success at Motherwell in 1945, the SNP remained in the political wilderness for much of the first four decades of its existence. It was not until the late 1960s at a by-election in Hamilton that the party gained a Westminster seat in regular electoral competition; a result accompanied by a significant amount of press coverage and raised expectations. These expectations were somewhat dashed by the loss of the Hamilton seat (Labour retaking it) at the next general Election in 1970. However, as Table 1 illustrates, the SNP gained its first national electoral victory by taking the Western Isles seat (again from Labour). Furthermore, this signalled the ‘arrival’ of the party as an electoral force – as it has maintained a continuous electoral presence at Westminster since then, and never dropped into single figures in vote share either.

Table 1
British General Election results in Scotland 1966-2005: Seats & (%)

Year	Labour	Cons	LibDem	SNP
1966	46 (49.9)	20 (37.7)	5 (6.8)	0 (5.0)
1970	44 (44.5)	23 (38.0)	3 (5.5)	1 (11.4)
1974 (Feb)	41 (36.6)	21 (32.9)	3 (7.9)	7 (21.9)
1974 (Oct)	41 (36.3)	16 (24.7)	3 (8.3)	11 (30.4)
1979	44 (41.5)	22 (31.4)	3 (9.0)	2 (17.3)

² The formal title for the leader of the SNP is ‘National Convener’.

1983	41 (35.1)	21 (28.4)	8 (24.5)	2 (11.8)
1987	50 (42.4)	10 (24.0)	9 (19.4)	3 (11.0)
1992	49 (39.0)	11 (25.6)	9 (13.1)	3 (21.5)
1997	56 (45.6)	9 (17.5)	10 (13.0)	6 (22.1)
2001	55 (43.2)	1 (15.6)	10 (16.4)	5 (20.1)
2005	41 (39.5)	1 (15.8)	11 (22.6)	6 (17.7)

The party had begun to gain in strength during the 1960s, when membership rapidly expanded, and it gained several local councillors. During the early 1970s, the party moved from strength to strength in terms of vote share, although this never translated into seats gained due to the nature of the First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system used for Westminster elections. In the October 1974 General election the SNP moved into second place in terms of vote share, threatening Labour's somewhat hegemonic position and looking as if it would displace the Conservatives as the opposition party of Scotland. Many of the seats taken in the February election had been from the Conservative Party and all four gained in October were at their expense. However, this success was somewhat mitigated by the fact that the party leader at the time Billy Wolfe did not gain election and thus while he remained leader of the party he was not leader of the Parliamentary Party.

Despite such promise, the electoral success of the SNP was short lived. For several reasons the middle to late 1970s was a difficult period for the party (see Lynch 2002) and the party, after suffering a significant loss of votes and seats in 1979, saw a period of infighting and internal wrangling that occupied it during much of the 1980s. It would not be until the 1990s that the SNP would again see a raise in vote share and a success reminiscent of the early 1970s.

Alex Salmond SNP leader 1990-2000

Alex Salmond comfortably defeated his colleague Margaret Ewing in 1990 to become leader of the SNP aged just 35. His rise up the party hierarchy had at times been difficult – he had briefly been expelled from the SNP for his involvement in an internal faction, called the 79 Group. This expulsion took place during the internal feuding alluded to above, after the loss of nine of the eleven SNP MPs, and the collapse of a Westminster proposal for a Scottish Assembly (Lynch 2002, Lynch and Hassan 2001). After his re-admission to the party, Salmond went on to win a seat at Westminster in 1987 (one of only three SNP candidates to do so) and in so doing became one of the party's best-known faces. His profile was considerably enhanced in 1988 when, in protest at the then Tory Chancellor Nigel Lawson's tax-cutting Budget, he was thrown out of the chamber of the House of Commons for shouting out that Lawson's measures were an obscenity (Historic Hansard 1988).

As leader Salmond sought to give the SNP a clear direction as a centre-left party that sought to challenge Labour in Scotland (McEwen 2002). Apart from smoothing the ideological divisions, He was also able to limit the internal disagreements between the fundamentalist independence seekers and the more gradualist pragmatists who would support home rule/devolution. As a result, in 1992 he led the SNP into the Westminster election of that year, under the somewhat optimistic slogan of *Free by 93*. As we have shown, the SNP were unable to increase their representation within Westminster – but they were able to increase their share of the vote, almost doubling it, and to replace the Liberal Democrats as the third party in terms of vote share if not seats. The threat that the SNP presented to the unionist parties was once again a clear and present danger. It would be the 1997 elections that would confirm that one in five support from the electorate was not a flash in the pan for the SNP – and this time they did increase their seats gained. Six MPs would now represent the SNP in Westminster, and a number of other recently elected MPs were looking over their shoulder at who had come second behind them.

Aside from his electoral performance, Salmond's character was also widely commented on. Writing in 1992 the future political editor of the BBC, Andrew Marr, noted that Salmond was “probably the most talented leader the SNP has had” (Marr 1992 p216). Interestingly even at this relatively early stage in his leadership Marr was already commenting on his personal qualities. “Salmond”, he wrote, “can infuriate his political enemies by his bouncy assertiveness” (1992, p216)³.

During that decade Salmond firmly established himself as one of the major figures in contemporary Scottish politics, at a time when there was real public excitement and interest in Scotland's future. In 1992 2,500 people packed out Edinburgh's Usher Hall (with thousands of others left ticketless) for a debate among the country's political leaders, which Salmond “dominated” (Marr, 1992, p220). His debating skills and confident performance as a leader were again to the fore in a later debate with Labour's then Shadow Scottish Secretary, George Robertson, when Robertson appeared flummoxed by a question from the audience over his attitude to Scottish independence (alba.org). These major set-piece public occasions, to which the press paid so much attention, clearly helped to create the perception – as we shall see - of Salmond as a charismatic, supremely confident political leader.

Nine years into his leadership, Salmond underwent his greatest personal test when he led the party into the 1999 elections to the brand new Scottish Parliament, set up after the 1979 referendum which the SNP strongly supported, alongside Labour and the Liberal Democrats (Taylor 1999, Pittock 2008, Macdonell 2009). For Scotland's political leaders (those at least who had decided not to pursue a career at Westminster) the election offered the opportunity, for the first time in mass democratic politics, to head up a national government in Scotland. Furthermore, Salmond, and the SNP, were buoyed by the fact that in the year before the

³ There is no room here for a detailed political analysis of Salmond's leadership of the SNP - curiously no full-length biography has been published although Lynch and Taylor among others discuss his career in the context of wider political studies.

election the SNP had opened up a big lead over Labour in the opinion polls. But by the time of the election itself Labour had closed the gap and ultimately emerged as the largest party, winning 56 seats to the SNP's 35 (see Table 2).

During the campaign (Ritchie 2000) Salmond's leadership became a major talking point for several reasons. Foremost among those was his decision to use a national television broadcast to strongly criticize the NATO operation in Serbia, an action he called an "unpardonable folly," and his comments prompted fierce criticism from Labour in particular. At various stages during the election the SNP also believed they were the subject of unfair and relentlessly negative media coverage from most newspapers, especially over economic matters, prompting the party to set up its own newspaper.

At one point during the campaign a poll suggested the SNP was as much as 20 per cent behind Labour. This prompted Salmond to abandon daily press conferences in favour of street campaigning. Launching the new strategy he said it was time to "get the jackets off and get stuck in" (Taylor 1999 p173.) This street strategy, for which Salmond attracted considerable praise, appeared to pay off to some extent as the SNP recovered to emerge with almost 30 per cent of the vote. Furthermore, while Labour and the Liberal Democrats formed a coalition and took office as the Scottish Executive⁴, the SNP formed the official opposition. No longer in the political wilderness as the third or fourth party in Scotland, they now seemed to stand in the wings; awaiting 'their' turn.

As a result it was to the surprise of most political observers in Scotland, that Salmond announced in 2000 his resignation as SNP leader after 10 years in the job. After leading the party to increasing (if somewhat limited) success in Westminster, supporting and aiding the referendum of 1979 that resulted in the first Scottish parliament in almost 300 years, and taking the SNP into that parliament as the second largest party, he returned to the back benches before resigning his Holyrood seat in 2001. Although vacating the Holyrood political scene he remained on the Scottish/British political stage by retaining his seat in Westminster as MP for Banff and Buchan.

John Swinney (2000-2004) (footnote)⁵

Salmond's successor as SNP leader was John Swinney, the then MP and MSP for North Tayside. A former business consultant and strategic insurance planner, he was associated with Salmond's gradualist strand of Scottish nationalism. In the contest to succeed Salmond he easily defeated his rival from the so-called fundamentalist wing of the party – Alex Neil. This further cemented the gradualist control of the party that had been the trend since the late 1980s. Swinney had held senior positions in the SNP since a young age – becoming national secretary at the age of 21. Although at the time of the leadership election he was the SNP's

⁴ The Scottish Executive is now known as the Scottish Government – a change made by the SNP when they took office in 2007.

⁵ One of the authors of this paper was Private Secretary to John Swinney for much of this period.

treasury spokesman and a leading spokesman for the SNP, from the very start of his leadership, journalists were keen to draw contrasts with Salmond's confident leadership style. One of the first profiles written when he became leader explicitly asked if he had the charisma "essential" to lead the SNP. As this article will illustrate it was not long before the political press in Scotland offered a clear answer to that question.

Swinney took the SNP into the 2001 Westminster election from which the party emerged with one fewer seat (five) and just over 20 per cent of the vote (Table 1). The result, which in hindsight and in the light of the subsequent SNP Westminster performance was creditable, was nevertheless seen as a disappointment – internally and externally. Although respectable it was indeed a reversal for the SNP – their first since the 1980s and it prompted the first real signs of unrest over his position – something that was to gather pace during the remaining years of Swinney's time in the leader's office.

In terms of a political platform, Swinney continued, and re-inforced, Salmond's emphasis on the economic (rather than the cultural aspects) of Scottish independence. The SNP adopted a low corporate tax policy, aimed at securing a competitive advantage for Scottish business, and a major initiative was launched to win over a sceptical business community. On the constitutional front, by this time the SNP's favoured vehicle for winning independence was through a referendum that an SNP government would hold as the government of the devolved Parliament. Previously the party had argued that a majority of seats at a Westminster election would trigger independence negotiations with the British Government. Swinney argued forcefully that it was important for the SNP to prove itself in government before asking Scots to move towards full independence. With the 2003 Scottish Parliament elections in sight the party therefore said, if elected, it would not hold a referendum until the second half of its term of office, sometime around 2005-2007.

The 2003 Scottish Parliament election was held against the backdrop of the Iraq war – something to which the SNP was strongly opposed. The result was a disappointment for the party, in part due to the rise of the far-left SSP and the Scottish Greens (who both supported an independent Scotland). The SNP lost 8 seats overall, and its formal role as opposition was somewhat limited by the presence of those other parties. Most importantly to this paper, the result caused an intensification of the speculation about Swinney's leadership and a challenge at the 2003 party conference – which Swinney saw off comfortably.

By this time Swinney had decided the party's constitution was in need of a major overhaul and in particular he championed the idea of one member one vote for the election of party leader and in Parliamentary candidate selection. He successfully piloted through the proposed changes to party constitution and structure through. But disappointing results for the 2004 European elections only increased the pressure on him and he resigned shortly afterwards. His success in modernizing the internal machinery of the party coupled with disappointment at electoral events prompted some in the Scottish press to compare him with the former Labour leader Neil Kinnock.

We have shown that after initial success in the 1970s, the SNP slipped back into minor party status in the 1980s, only to be revived with the arrival of a new leader in the 1990s. Likewise, the initial success of 1999 appeared to be again slipping away with the disappointment of 2003. However, in 2007, as in 1992, the party saw a substantial increase in its vote (and the nature of the electoral system in Scotland was much kinder in terms of seats won than that for Westminster) and it was the same individual who led the party on both occasions: Alex Salmond.

Table 2
Scottish Parliament Election results 1999-2007⁶: Seats & (%)

Year	Labour	Cons	LibDem	SNP
1999	53 (38.8)	0 (15.6)	12 (14.2)	7 (28.7)
	3 (33.6)	18 (15.4)	5 (12.4)	28 (27.3)
2003	46 (34.6)	3 (16.6)	13 (15.4)	9 (23.8)
	4 (29.6)	15 (15.5)	4 (11.6)	18 (21.6)
2007	37 (32.2)	4 (16.6)	11 (16.2)	21 (32.9)
	9 (29.2)	13 (13.9)	5 (13.9)	26 (31.0)

Alex Salmond SNP leader 2004-

In 2004 Salmond was asked if he wanted to take on the role of party leader once again. His reply, paraphrasing Lyndon Johnson, was unambiguous. "If nominated I'll decline. If drafted I'll defer. And if elected I'll resign" (BBC news 2004). One month later he announced his candidacy. A U-turn on this scale may have caused problems for some politicians, but such were Salmond's political skills that he easily brushed off any hostile questioning. Indeed, in the ensuing contest he won 75 per cent of the vote and became for the second time the SNP's leader (Daily Telegraph 2004). Since regaining the leadership, Salmond has led the SNP into three national elections; the 2005 Westminster election; the 2007 Scottish Parliament elections and the 2009 European Parliament elections.

While the 2005 British General Election result saw a further fall in the SNP vote, the party did gain one more MP. There seemed little in this ambiguous result to suggest a major breakthrough but a just a year later the SNP had started to open up a substantial lead when

⁶ Only the four major parties are listed. In the Scottish Parliament elections, voters get two ballots. One is for their constituency member. Of the 129 MSPs, 73 are directly elected under a first past the post, single member constituency system. The other ballot also cast by voters sees the election of 56 regional members (each constituency is a sub-division of a region) among eight regions. This second ballot is counted under a proportional representation system known as the D'Hondt method. Voters are not casting for individuals in this ballot, but for parties.

pollsters tested opinion on voting intentions for the Scottish Parliament. By this time it was clear that Salmond was a major electoral asset for the SNP and the party's internal polling showed him to be far more popular than the incumbent First Minister, Jack McConnell. This prompted the SNP to emphasise the contrast between the party leaders, a strategy that culminated in the party using "Alex Salmond for First Minister" instead of "SNP" as the main party identifier on the regional ballot paper for the 2007 election (see the footnote on Table 2). Obviously the party sought to accentuate the person over party, attempting to make the party more favourable through the lens of one man.

The election result marked the party's greatest political triumph to date when for the first time the SNP beat the Labour Party in the popular vote in a national election – a feat it would repeat in the European Parliament election in 2009. Although well short of an overall majority the SNP became the minority administration Scottish Government, (with Swinney appointed as Finance Secretary) taking office in national government for the first time in the party history. Just as important, and perhaps a more momentous milestone, was that the party bypassed Labour in the votes received, by gaining 32.9% - its largest ever share of the Scottish national vote. In forty years, from 1967 to 2007, the SNP had moved from their first (peacetime) by-election win to forming their first government and from being a fringe party, to the largest in terms of vote share.

We have seen therefore that under the leadership of Salmond's predecessor, John Swinney, the SNP had been badly beaten by Labour both in the 2003 Scottish Parliament election (and the 2004 European election) results that led to Swinney's resignation as leader. In retrospect, this period seems more of an interregnum than a new chapter for the SNP and, superficially at least, there appears then to be some relationship between the SNP's electoral performance and the change of leader. For the purposes of this article, the particularly interesting aspect is that Salmond is often hailed as charismatic, while Swinney, during his time as leader, was usually referred to in less flattering terms.

It is outwith the scope of this work, however, to prove or disprove any firm connection between the personality of the SNP leader and election results - obviously a variety of variables impacts upon a party's performance and electoral return. In any case, some of the other data is less compelling in this regard – as discussed the SNP, for example, under Swinney polled a higher share of the vote at the Westminster election of 2001 than it did in 2005 – although the seat outcome was a return to form for Salmond. However, our discussion on the theoretical literature shows the performance of individual leaders of political parties, especially in dealigned democratic polities such as Scotland, may have a significant impact – and the increasing politicization of the personal qualities of political leader brings the issue of charisma, and how the individual/leader is portrayed in a political contest firmly to the fore.

Therefore, in order to specifically examine the charismatic importance of the recent SNP leaders, we now turn to the media perception of the qualities of the two leaders and the way those leaders were therefore presented to voters by the media. We also consider if the media places a greater importance on the need for charisma for the leader an overtly nationalist

party, compared with the qualities it expects from the leader of other political parties. Our work can therefore act as a contribution to the debate over the role of elites within nationalist activities, the increasing focus on the person and personalities of party leadership, and the impact of perceived charismatic leadership, rather than the basis for firm conclusions.

The contemporary SNP describes itself as a civic nationalist party, committed to inclusiveness (Leith 2008). The academic debate over the usefulness and validity of the civic/ethnic divide for nationalist movements (see, for example, Ozkirimli 2000 or Harris 2009) is less important in the context of this study than the way the SNP characterizes itself. The party's self-proclaimed civic identity means it avoids "blood and soil" rhetoric that might popularly be associated with a charismatic nationalist leadership. Salmond has consciously, for example, distanced himself from what he calls "wha's like us" Scottish nationalism – a phrase used to describe boastful Scottish national rhetoric. Nor was this a significant change between the leadership of Swinney and Salmond. Moreover, despite following the same broad political programme, the conclusions drawn by the Scottish press about Salmond and Swinney's charisma factor are very different. It is to this analysis that we now turn.

Analysis

Scotland has an intensely competitive newspaper market (Reid 2006) with a variety of tabloid, mid-market and "quality" titles. This article concentrates on the country's two self-styled quality national newspapers and their sister Sunday titles – *The Herald/Sunday Herald* and *The Scotsman/Scotsman on Sunday*.

In a country where the press is partisan, *The Herald* stands out for its neutral stance. At election time for the Scottish Parliament it refuses to endorse any party. The Scotsman moved from a position in 1999 of backing Labour, to one in which in 2003 it refused, like *The Herald*, to endorse any party, before promoting in 2007, the idea of an SNP-led coalition government. Neither paper has therefore had a consistently hostile editorial line towards the SNP; yet neither has consistently supported it.

We have three distinct foci in our analysis. First, we considered a simple count over a ten year period (1998-2008) of all articles in the selected newspapers containing the terms: Alex Salmond and charisma/charismatic; and of all articles containing the terms: John Swinney and charisma/charismatic⁷. The advantage of such a lengthy temporal analysis is the ability to chart any significant changes in media perception. This period also covers the time period when both were leaders of the party and the Scottish Parliament elections were expected or occurred. In addition, we undertook an analysis of whether the relationship between the two leaders was positive or in relation to charisma – in the sense of whether the articles described either man as being charismatic or having charisma and third was the textual analysis of

⁷ Articles in which there where a co-incidental relationship were been removed from the analysis – for example, when another individual is being cited in relation to charisma and Salmond/Swinney also happen to be mentioned but in another context.

selected articles to draw out in more detail the ways in which Salmond and Swinney were framed by these newspapers in relation to charisma.

Table Three
Salmond Analysis 1998-2008

	Articles containing charisma/charismatic	Positive association
The Herald/Sunday Herald	18	18
The Scotsman/Scotland on Sunday	39	38*

*In one instance Salmond was compared unfavourably with President Kennedy!

Table Four
Swinney Analysis 1998-2008

	Articles containing charisma/charismatic	Positive association
The Herald/Sunday Herald	20	0
The Scotsman/Scotland on Sunday	29	0

The first observation is that there are relatively few articles that explicitly make a connection between either man and charisma. This can partly be explained by the fact that the vast majority of articles written about Swinney and Salmond were news reports, during which the reporters will not offer any opinions or commentary on either man's character. When such a commentary is offered, it will usually appear in opinion or analysis pieces or in news stories when a reporter is quoting a source, rather than making the connection him or herself.

However, in analyzing the articles that do draw this connection, a clear pattern emerges. Alex Salmond is almost always described as having charisma or being charismatic. One article even describes him as "oozing charisma". By contrast Swinney is never described in those terms. There is never any ambiguity about either man. This may explain why charisma is so rarely explicitly mentioned: for both men, the relative descriptions are taken as a given; as uncontroversial and not worth commenting on to any great extent. Indeed *Scotland on*

Sunday, in a leader column towards the end of Swinney's leadership, felt confident enough to proclaim: "No-one would describe him as charismatic". This point can be re-inforced by the fact that in no single instance is Salmond described as having given a charismatic performance during a speech or campaign. Charisma is presented as just part of his personality without explanation. Similarly, in no article is Swinney depicted as having given an uncharismatic speech – he is simply presented as uncharismatic as if that is also part of his character.

An interesting feature of the use of charisma in relation to both men is the number of times a direct comparison is made. As noted above for much of Swinney's leadership he was under pressure. Speculation about his leadership prompted several articles on his leadership style and prospects and many of these compared him directly to Salmond, usually in terms of charisma. In *The Herald/Sunday Herald* 12 of the 20 articles that included references to Swinney's charisma made a comparison with Salmond. *The Scotsman/Scotland on Sunday* made a similar comparison in 14 of the 29 stories they carried.

It is important to highlight at this point, as discussed earlier, the simple fact that Swinney's political agenda was very similar to Salmond's; neither sought to take the party in either a different ideological or constitutional direction than that of the other. The differences between them, as presented to the electorate by the newspapers studied, therefore focused on personality differences, often framed in terms of charisma.

Swinney's difficulties

This comparison becomes more acute when Swinney began to face real political difficulties in 2003 and 2004. In particular in an interview given by SNP supporter Sir Sean Connery in March 2003, the actor was invited to compare the two men and in his reply said: "He's (Swinney) not as charismatic as Alex." Although Connery goes on to praise Swinney's leadership this quote was used several times in other news stories to highlight Swinney's difficulties, and compare him unfavorably to Salmond.

In the days following the SNP's poor European election result the following June, *Scotland on Sunday* in particular started to focus intently on the charisma issue. In one interview, the paper's political editor wrote: "When Swinney lightens up like this, the charges of a lack of charisma against him appear harsh. And yet this has become one of the main critiques of his leadership. *Speak to any of Swinney's nationalist enemies and they complain first and foremost about this*" (emphasis added). An accompanying news story in the same edition stated: "Up and down the country the message is the same. *It is his lack of charisma and leadership, which has allowed the party to drift*" (emphasis added).

However, and despite these comments, the leader article in *The Scotsman* a few days later, which commented on Swinney's resignation, was firm in rejecting the leader's apparent lack of charisma for his party's difficulties:

“ explanations on the basis of "charisma bypass" are weak on two counts. First, the absence of stand-out charisma is shared by all of Scotland's mainstream

political leaders. It cannot be said that the First Minister glows with charismatic sparkle..... an absence of dynamic leadership is a malaise by no means unique to the SNP... The "charisma excuse" is also wobbly on another, and arguably more serious count. By ascribing the SNP's declining fortunes to a failure of leadership, it is all a touch too convenient”

This point about charisma more generally – the fact that *The Scotsman* says it is not just an issue for the departing nationalist leader but to other leading Scottish politicians of the time is interesting and will be explored further below. Prior to doing so, it is worth considering the return of Alex Salmond as leader of the SNP.

When Salmond returned, he immediately sought to characterize himself as a potential First Minister and in the months following his achievement of that office he stood tall among political leaders in Scotland. In his “honeymoon” period after the 2007 election writers on both *The Herald* and *The Scotsman* started to describe him in glowing terms. In 2008 a *Scotsman* leader for example called him: “By far Scotland’s most effective and charismatic politician.” The paper’s sister Sunday title in the same year said simply he was “a charismatic leader.” Meanwhile in an earlier leader column in *The Herald* in 2007, Salmond was being described as a “politician of substance and charisma.” Obviously the charismatic nature of Salmond, and not Swinney had been noted – but was it key for the SNP as a nationalist movement?

Until this stage we have drawn attention to the way in which the featured print media compared the relative merits of the two nationalist leaders. However, it is noteworthy and striking that the Scottish press does not see charisma as being of especial importance for a self-proclaimed nationalist movement. There is no suggestion that nationalist movements – or at least the Scottish nationalists – have any greater or less need for a charismatic leader than any other mainstream party. Charisma is seen through the prism of *political* rather than *nationalist* leadership.

This can be seen clearly when comparisons are made between Salmond and his Labour opponents – like Swinney before them they are compared unflatteringly. Thus, in an article comparing Salmond and his Labour counterpart, Iain Gray in *The Scotsman* in 2008, a columnist says: “nor can Gray match Salmond for big-beast charisma.” In *Scotland on Sunday* in the same year, during the Labour leadership contest, which Gray won, all the candidates were said to occupy a “charisma-free zone” in comparison with Salmond’s magnetism. Similarly in surveying the Labour field during the leadership contest, a *Scotsman* journalist said: “all the candidates will suffer in comparison next to the charismatic Alex Salmond.” Gray’s predecessor, Jack McConnell, was also described unfavourably with Salmond by a columnist in *The Herald*: “The SNP have more money than Labour and a more charismatic leader”.

This idea of charisma being a general issue of political leadership, rather than nationalist leadership is presented routinely and is re-inforced by comparison with the stridently anti-Scottish nationalist former UK Prime Minister, Tony Blair. Both men, said *Scotland on*

Sunday, were charismatic leaders. There is no sense that it is any more useful for the SNP to have such a leader than the UK Labour Party.

Conclusions

Charisma is clearly a contemporary national and political phenomenon. The personality and character of political leaders is now clearly an important part of how politics is covered in Scotland and the UK as a whole. The parties clearly try to present or “package” their leaders in a particular way (Franklin 2004) and the media will also seek to provide characterizations of those leaders. The parties involved, and the leaders themselves, will seek to personalize the presentation of the leader in order to gain positive media coverage and connect with voters (Langer 2010) and potential voters alike.

For the SNP’s two most recent leaders, the Scottish press has offered to voters starkly contrasting personalities. Alex Salmond may sometimes be referred to pejoratively (the fact that he is said to “smirk” rather than smile for example) but with regards to charisma, he is presented in unambiguous and overly positive terms. On the other hand, while John Swinney as leader was not universally derided, he was not hyped. He was praised at times for his courtesy and thoughtfulness, but just as Salmond is seen clearly as charismatic, on this measure, Swinney was always described as uncharismatic or, at best, at the start of his leadership, as having questions to answer in this regard.

Charisma is clearly seen by the two newspapers studied here as an important part of a leader’s make-up, so much so that competing leaders are measured (on one occasion explicitly in terms of marks out of ten) on the charisma scale. Interestingly though, this phenomenon is not confined to nationalist leaders. Salmond is presented as dominating the Scottish political scene, and all political leaders are compared unfavourably in this respect. However, as we have noted above, Scotland operates within a sub-state but very much national political stage. It may well be that all political parties are ‘nationalist’ in their manner and presentation.

Nonetheless, it is clear that as far as the press is concerned charisma is clearly a factor in the SNP’s recent electoral performance. In addition, the party itself was happy to use Salmond’s personal standing in an explicit way (as was explicitly seen on the Scottish Parliament regional ballot paper) to win votes in the 2007 election – a contest that resulted in the first SNP government and the party’s largest ever vote share in a national election.

Given this apparent confluence in opinion and with the prospect of a referendum on Scottish independence now firmly on the agenda (albeit not an imminent prospect), it seems likely that charismatic leadership, or at least the perception of such leadership, will play a significant role in future campaigning to establish an independent Scottish state. Salmond has that charisma, or at least he does according to the mainstream print media in Scotland, and the continual re-enforcement of that state of affairs will deprive any other major political leader of it.

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