

People will always, inevitably, compare Plaid Cymru with the SNP.

The stock response by our politicians is that Wales is not Scotland, and we are at different places on our respective national journeys.

I agree, to a point. However, this ‘reason’ is not in itself enough to explain the difference between the fortunes of both parties. After all, following the inaugural elections for both the National Assembly and Scottish Parliament, Plaid Cymru had a better result than the SNP.

The SNP’s fortunes changed dramatically in 2007, when, through luck or judgement, then managed to forge a minority Government in Holyrood.

In mid-2016 the SNP’s poll rating stood at 29%.

By April 2017 it had increased to 37%

*TABLE 1: Scottish Parliament Voting Intentions (Constituency Vote) 2006-7<sup>1</sup>*

	<b>Con</b>	<b>Lab</b>	<b>Lib Dem</b>	<b>SNP</b>
<b>Aug/Sep 06</b>	13	34	16	29
<b>Oct 06</b>	12	33	15	32
<b>Nov 06</b>	13	31	16	34
<b>Jan 07</b>	13	30	16	34
<b>Feb 07</b>	18	29	16	34
<b>March 07</b>	13	30	14	35
<b>April 07</b>	13	30	15	37

The change in the SNP’s appeal over the life of Holyrood can be seen here: (Party political identification, not which party they intend to vote for)<sup>2</sup>.

	Jan 1999	Jan 2000	Jan 2001	Jan 2002	Jan 2003	Jan 2004	Jan 2005	Jan 2006	Jan 2007	Jan 2009	Jan 2010	Jan 2011	Jan 2012	Jan 2013	Jan 2014
<b>None</b>	7%	11%	11%	13%	12%	13%	20%	14%	13%	21%	15%	14%	15%	15%	12%
<b>Conservative</b>	16%	16%	10%	12%	15%	14%	15%	12%	11%	12%	13%	8%	11%	11%	11%
<b>Labour</b>	41%	36%	46%	41%	33%	35%	35%	34%	34%	26%	34%	31%	34%	31%	32%
<b>Liberal Democrat</b>	12%	8%	10%	7%	10%	10%	13%	8%	7%	6%	11%	5%	5%	5%	4%
<b>SNP</b>	20%	20%	15%	16%	17%	13%	13%	17%	25%	21%	17%	33%	24%	22%	24%
<b>Green Party</b>	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%	2%	0%	2%	1%	2%	1%	0%	2%	2%	3%
<b>Other party</b>	0%	1%	1%	1%	3%	3%	0%	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	3%
<b>Refused</b>	3%	8%	5%	9%	8%	10%	5%	10%	8%	11%	8%	8%	8%	13%	11%

Unfortunately, Wales does not have the same wealth of polling data, nor are the opinion polls that have been conducted presented in any manageable formats or easy to access.

However, we can see the actual voting patterns in Wales and compare them with Scotland.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.electionscentre.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Scottish-Council-Elections-2007.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://whatscotlandthinks.org/questions/party-political-identification-5#table>.

	SNP	Plaid Cymru
1999 Devolved Administration Election (const)	28.74%	28.4%
2001 UK General Election	20.1%	14.3%
2003 Devolved Administration Election (const)	23.7%	21.2%
2005 UK General Election	17.7%	12.6%
2007 Devolved Administration Election (const)	32.9%	22.4%
2010 UK General Election	19.9%	11.3%
2011 Devolved Administration Election (const)	45.4%	19.3%
2015 UK General Election	50%	12.1%
2016 Devolved Administration Election (const)	46.5%	20.5%
2017 UK General Election	36.9%	10.4%

This table<sup>3</sup> shows that both Plaid and the SNP were on a similar trajectory in the first half a decade of this century, more so at the devolved level of Government. But, except for the huge upturn that the SNP received following Scotland's Independence Referendum, which can only be attributed to the referendum, the big difference is in 2007. The SNP saw a 10% swing in its favour nationally, while Plaid only saw a modest 1.2% swing.

This swing in 2007 put the SNP in power, albeit with a minority Government. We cannot say if such a swing would have resulted in Plaid leading a Welsh Government – the d'Hont formula, which allocates seats in the National Assembly, is different. But we can surmise that it is likely that Plaid would have been in the driving seat, having received most of the popular vote.

Since then the SNP have enjoyed a decade in power. They have turned things around in Scotland, and Independence is on the cards.

Wales? Plaid Cymru continues to downplay independence as a long-term aspiration. We are becoming poorer with our GDP and GVA decreasing; our health services creaking and education at the bottom of every league table.

Two things arise from this:

Firstly, what happened in Scotland between 2005 and 2007?

Secondly, what happened in Scotland post 2007?

It's worth noting that looking back at historic events we tend to look at the broader picture, without focussing on some of the details. But without that rich mosaic that makes up the whole, we can miss out on some valuable information.

Such is the case here.

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<sup>3</sup> Wikipedia

While the historic headline is that the SNP 'won' the 2007 elections, the facts are that they only won by a majority of 1 seat (47 seats to Labour's 46) and in many of those seats the results were very close.<sup>4</sup>

The SNP captured Argyll and Bute with a mere 815 majority.<sup>5</sup>

Falkirk West saw an SNP gain with only a 776 majority.<sup>6</sup>

Nicola Sturgeon captured Glasgow Govan with a slim 744 majority.<sup>7</sup>

Livingston gave the SNP victory with a majority of 870.<sup>8</sup>

In Ochil, their majority was 490.<sup>9</sup>

Stirling was captured with a 620 majority.<sup>10</sup>

The Western Isles with a majority of only 687.<sup>11</sup>

And finally, they captured Cunninghame North from Labour with an ultra slim majority of 48.<sup>12</sup>

There were others where the majority was less than 2000.

Could it be that 48 votes in Cunninghame North changed the course and the history of a political party, a nation and the remains of an Empire? Could it have led to the flowering of a national movement and a political awakening?

Is history made by such fine margins?

In this case, probably not. Because like the National Assembly for Wales, the Scottish Parliament also has a Proportional Representation element. However it is worth noting that in the West of Scotland region, where Cunninghame North is located, it was thought on election night that the SNP had failed to win any regional seats, while Labour won two. This would have resulted in Labour winning by one seat. The SNP called for a re-count which resulted in the SNP winning two regional seats, giving them a majority of one instead. It was a tense count night (or day, as was the case).

The upsurge in SNP votes for the first past the post seats saw a slightly greater upsurge in the regional/list votes. The SNP won 21 FPTP seats (+12 on 2013), while Labour won 37 FPTP seats. But crucially the huge vote they received regionally also resulted in the SNP winning 26 list seats. Labour, with a list vote only marginally less than the SNP's, only managed to win 9 extra list seats.<sup>13</sup>

Taking Cunninghame North as an example, what led to 2,000 people there to switch from Labour to the SNP between 2003 and 2007?

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<sup>4</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/vote2007/scottish\\_parliament/html/region\\_99999.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/vote2007/scottish_parliament/html/region_99999.stm)

<sup>5</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/vote2007/scottish\\_parliament/html/16.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/vote2007/scottish_parliament/html/16.stm)

<sup>6</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/vote2007/scottish\\_parliament/html/247.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/vote2007/scottish_parliament/html/247.stm)

<sup>7</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/vote2007/scottish\\_parliament/html/268.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/vote2007/scottish_parliament/html/268.stm)

<sup>8</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/vote2007/scottish\\_parliament/html/380.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/vote2007/scottish_parliament/html/380.stm)

<sup>9</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/vote2007/scottish\\_parliament/html/442.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/vote2007/scottish_parliament/html/442.stm)

<sup>10</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/vote2007/scottish\\_parliament/html/538.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/vote2007/scottish_parliament/html/538.stm)

<sup>11</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/vote2007/scottish\\_parliament/html/627.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/vote2007/scottish_parliament/html/627.stm)

<sup>12</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/vote2007/scottish\\_parliament/html/173.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/vote2007/scottish_parliament/html/173.stm)

<sup>13</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/vote2007/scottish\\_parliament/html/scoreboard\\_99999.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/vote2007/scottish_parliament/html/scoreboard_99999.stm)

## Binary choice

As we have seen the polls were tight leading up to the 2007 Scottish elections. Both the SNP and Labour were pitching themselves as the next prospective Government.

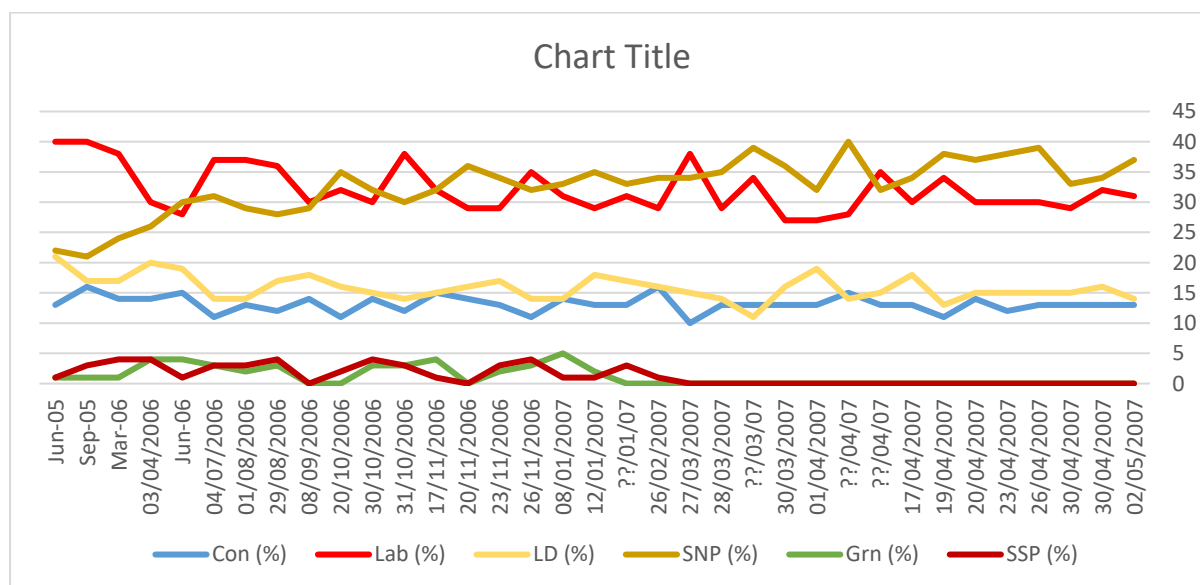
As the graph above shows (Table 1), the Conservatives were regularly polling at around 13%, and the Liberal Democrats a little more at or around 15%. While Labour were in the early 30s, the SNP were gaining on them, initially polling in the high twenties, then reaching a high of 37% in April 2007. If voters wanted Labour out then they had only one real alternative, and that was the SNP.

But the rot had set with Labour some time earlier, and the SNP had momentum from early 2006.

Graph 1 shows us the Holyrood Voting Intentions, for the constituencies, dating from June 2005 until just before the election itself, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2007.

In mid-2005 Labour had a clear 18-point lead over the SNP, who were only polling one point more than the Liberal Democrats at that point. However, 1 year later, and the June 2006 poll shows that the SNP had for the first time edged ahead of Labour in the opinion polls. Labour's support had been gradually declining, and in June the Tories, Liberal Democrats and Labour polled lower than the previous poll. The SNP, on the other hand, had seen steady, regular growth.

Graph 1



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It's worth reminding ourselves that the Liberal Democrats were also in Government with Labour at this time. If the Government were deemed to be performing badly, then it's reasonable to assume that both parties of Government would suffer. It might be that the Liberal Democrats suffered because of Labour's poor record in Government.

What's clear is that the Scottish electorate didn't feel that the other two major parties, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats, were a credible alternative to form a Government.

<sup>14</sup> <http://ukpollingreport.co.uk/scottish-voting-intention>

By early summer 2006 it was clear that the Scottish electorate had a binary choice – Labour or the SNP. From that time until Easter 2007 both Labour and the SNP were vying for top position in the Scottish opinion polls.

In the last month of campaigning, the SNP were in poll position.

## Unpopular Labour

Certainly, by the 2005-07 period Labour in both Scotland and the UK had become uninspiring and tired. The Iraq war and its subsequent occupation was taking its toll as body bags were mounting and public opinion became stronger against the war (2007 saw the greatest number of UK military deaths in Iraq since 2003).<sup>15</sup>

Labour on an UK level were in the middle of a nasty civil war, between Blair and Brown (based on personalities not policies).

They were also in the middle of a damaging donations scandal.<sup>16</sup>

The Labour vote had fallen considerably in the English Local Elections, with the Tories, under their photogenic, fresh, new leader, David Cameron, gaining over 900 extra Council seats<sup>17</sup>.

Clearly Labour were not in a good place.

But these factors were also at play in Wales.

It's worth noting that one factor might have been that the 2007 elections were held on the eve of an unpopular Labour Scot, Gordon Brown, becoming Prime Minister. However, in truth it's unlikely that this had much of an impact on decision making.

There was also a uniquely local factor at play in the immediate run up to the Scottish Elections. Two elections were held on the same day – both Scottish Council and Scottish Parliament elections - and the different ballot papers caused some serious confusions, resulting in over 100,000 ballots being rejected. The Scottish Office and Scottish Executive, both Labour, overruled independent advice not to hold both elections on the same day. This could well have played a roll.<sup>18</sup>

“Mr Salmond promised that if he became first minister he would demand an independent judicial inquiry into how the democratic debacle had been allowed to happen, saying the events "will have offended every democrat in the country"

It could be that the SNP entered Government as a result of pure luck. As David Denver points out,

“...the confusion may have been politically important as there were 16 constituency contests in which the number of rejected ballots was greater than the winning candidate's majority. Of these, the SNP won 9, Labour 5 and the Liberal Democrats 2”<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-10637526>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2007/11/at-the-heart-of-the-labour-funding-scandal-is-the-moral-collapse-of-a-oncegreat-party/#>

<sup>17</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/vote2007/local\\_councils/html/region\\_99999.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/vote2007/local_councils/html/region_99999.stm)

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2007/may/04/scotland.devolution>

<sup>19</sup>

[https://www.researchgate.net/profile/David\\_Denver/publication/242718171\\_'A\\_Historic\\_Moment'\\_The\\_Res ults\\_Of\\_The\\_Scottish\\_Parliament\\_Elections\\_2007/links/55268b260cf21e126f9e4011.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/David_Denver/publication/242718171_'A_Historic_Moment'_The_Res ults_Of_The_Scottish_Parliament_Elections_2007/links/55268b260cf21e126f9e4011.pdf)

Some will conclude that it was ultimately luck that secured the 2007 SNP victory, and it might well be the case. But, as we will see, there were many other factors at play.

## Smaller Parties

The previous Government was comprised of the majority Labour party and a minority Liberal Democrats party. It is widely believed that minority parties in coalition Government's get punished at the ballot box, yet this wasn't the case in Scotland, where the Liberal Democrats only lost 1 seat, and their constituency vote increased marginally (+0.9%), while their regional vote only fell by 0.5%<sup>20</sup>.

At the same time, the Labour vote didn't 'collapse' or 'haemorrhage'. In fact, it remained fairly steady, losing only 2.4% of its share in the FPTP vote, and a tiny -0.1% loss in the regional vote.

As Eve Hepburn points out,

"The figures ... show that the SNP's electoral success came largely at the expense of regional list support for the Greens, the Socialists and the independents. The six SSP/Solidarity MSPs all lost their seats in Parliament. The SSP's share of the regional vote fell to 0.6% and, because it did not put forward any individual candidates, like the Greens and Solidarity, it received no share of the constituency vote. Solidarity received 1.5% of the regional vote but this was insufficient to elect a list candidate. The Scottish Greens fared relatively better. Their share of the vote had dropped from 7% in 2003 to 4%—which was just under the 5–6% normally needed to elect a candidate via proportional representation."<sup>21</sup>

This is one key difference with Wales. Except for the extreme right wing Ukip, and the Green Party on the left, Wales does not have the same plurality of parties which the larger parties can pinch votes away from.

Like Plaid Cymru in Wales, the SNP were fighting the Labour Party on the left. Most of the Scottish Political Parties are left of centre, consequently many of their policies converged. Therefore, there were no discernible differences in their manifestos on devolved matters. This was also true in Wales.

One constant criticism here in Wales is that the electorate don't feel a need for a 'Diet' Labour alternative (Plaid Cymru) when they can vote for the real thing. This might be over simplifying things, but there is certainly, in my view, an element of truth to it.

Of course, the issue of how tired Labour were, as has already been noted above, will have been a factor. But not the deciding factor, as we saw in Wales.

Turnout might have been a factor.

Turnout in 2007 was 4.1% up on the previous election in 2003. This represents approximately 100,000 new voters.

As David Denver points out,

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<sup>20</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish\\_Parliament\\_election,\\_2007#Major\\_parties](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Parliament_election,_2007#Major_parties)

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13597560701855251?scroll=top&needAccess=true>

“The increase, no doubt, was mainly due to the widespread expectation that the election would be a close-run thing with a strong possibility that the SNP could oust Labour as the largest party in the Parliament... turnout was up all across the country”<sup>22</sup>

This points at the first significant difference between Scotland and Wales. As has been noted above the opinion polls and actual election results up until 2005/06 had shown that both Plaid Cymru and the SNP had a relatively similar level of support (with Plaid being somewhat lower overall).

Now, while pollsters will argue that they only reflect the public mood at the time of polling, they are also newsworthy, and have the ability of setting the news agenda. Not only do they reflect which party might have the big M, momentum, but they also reinforce that momentum.

They can only do this with a compliant media.

Scotland, as we all know, has a plurality of media outlets reporting on Scottish issues and stories. They give a uniquely Scottish view on things, and while our friends in the SNP might complain that they are largely partisan, they at least report Scottish news, or report on news through a largely Scottish lens.

The same cannot be said of Wales. Even it's notional 'National' media of the BBC and ITV is by and large broadcasted from an Anglo or London centred perspective.

Therefore in the event of a similar scenario in Wales it is unlikely that tightening polls between Plaid Cymru and the Labour Party would penetrate much of the Welsh electorate.

However, with the ongoing march of new media, and the growth of popular tribal partisan opinion websites (order-order, the Canary, Bella Caledonia, Another Angry Voice, Squawk Box, Breitbart etc) there is an opportunity there for someone to start and develop a Wales focussed presence. Nation.Cymru and Bella Gwalia are examples.

Eve Hepburn notes,

There was popular disenchantment with Scottish Labour and its perceived inability to represent the interests of the Scottish people on key reserved matters, such as the treatment of asylum seekers on Scottish soil, and plans to extend nuclear facilities in Scotland<sup>23</sup>

As has already been noted, the SNP saw a huge upsurge in their list/regional votes (+10.1%), more than the increase they received in their constituency vote (+9%). This increase resulted in the SMP capturing 8 more list seats than the amount they previously held.

David Denver notes that for each of the other large Scottish Political parties, their support is related to the social characteristics of their constituencies,

The Conservatives do better where there are more people with professional and managerial jobs, more owner occupiers, more older people, more people employed in agriculture and more people who claim an affiliation to the Church of Scotland. They do worse where there are more people who rent their homes from the council or a housing association and more young people, in more urban areas (persons per hectare), where there are more households

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.eupublishing.com/doi/pdfplus/10.3366/scot.2007.0036>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13597560701855251?scroll=top&needAccess=true&>

without a car and more Roman Catholics. In general, the pattern of Labour support is a mirror image of that for the Conservatives<sup>24</sup>

However, this is not the case with the SNP. David Denver notes that there were no real correlations between support for the SNP (or at least leading up to the 2007 Scottish Elections) and particular social or economic characteristics. The party, he notes, “attracts a similar level of support in all types of constituencies”. The SNP, he says, is a good example of a ‘catch all’ party. The Broad Church that we so often hear about. This, he argues, might be a source of weakness when fighting for First Past The Post seats, and the results suggests that. The SNP gained a greater percentage of the vote than Labour but won less seats. However,

In a proportional system ... the geographical dispersion of votes does not have a significant impact on the distribution of seats.<sup>25</sup>

I have not seen any body of work showing the correlates of party support in constituencies in Wales. Such an exercise would be interesting to see if Plaid Cymru are in a similar position to that of the SNP.

## Independence

As has been previously noted, Plaid Cymru have historically played down any ambitions for an Independent Welsh State. In fact, Independence only became party policy at their 2006 (?) Annual Conference.

The SNP, on the other hand, have had no qualms about their constitutional ambitions for Scotland.

Many within and without Plaid Cymru have expressed a fear of propagating Independence, fearing that the term was a ‘vote loser’, and that it would result in the party losing the gradual few hard gains that it had made over the decades.

Again, the SNP blithely ignored such concerns and have put Independence as the central plank of their existence as a political party.

Here we have two divergent views on Independence – one believing that it is a vote loser while the other believes that, if it is not necessarily a vote winner, it is not a vote loser.

The stark difference in how both parties viewed and promoted independence became even more pronounced in the 2007 elections.

Here the SNP put Independence right at the heart of their campaign. Plaid Cymru fought the election on 7 signature policies, the most memorable of which was to provide free laptops to every pupil, and under the ‘Make a difference’ banner.

The intention is not to belittle the Plaid Cymru team of 2007. Both the Plaid Cymru and SNP Manifestos said vaguely similar things. Yet, while Plaid Cymru’s eye-catching policy was free laptops for children, the SNP said,

We are working hard to earn the trust and support of the people of Scotland and we will trust Scots to take the decision on Scotland’s future in an independence referendum.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> P.73 <http://www.eupublishing.com/doi/pdfplus/10.3366/scot.2007.0036>

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/ass07/man/scot/snp.pdf>



This became the defining narrative of the 2007 Scottish Elections. And indeed, not just in Scotland.

The English media were taking an interest.

The SNP were leading in the polls, Labour were unpopular, and the SNP said boldly that if they were to form a Government that they would hold an independence referendum.

If the opinion that independence was a vote loser was to be proven one way or the other, then the 2007 result would be the decisive arbiter.

The Independence Referendum pledge set the narrative for the whole election. In early April 2007, David Cameron wrote about the prospect of Scottish Independence in the Daily Telegraph.<sup>27</sup> Letters were published in London based tabloids and broadsheets<sup>28</sup>.

In fact, it was such an overwhelming narrative that it's sometimes easy to forget that local elections were being held in areas across the UK. As the Plymouth Herald put it,

*Indeed much of the coverage, nationally at least, of this election campaign has focused on Scotland and the possibility of nationalist success opening the door to Scottish independence or else highlighting the potential embarrassment for Tony Blair of a Labour rout as he prepares to leave office.<sup>29</sup>*

On polling day itself, Angus Macleod, writing in that most haughty of London papers, The Times, said,

*Scottish voters, who go to the polls today, could take a historic and decisive step away from the Union which has linked the nation with England for the past 300 years. The result will be critical for the country's future because, if they emerge as the largest party at Holyrood, as opinion polls have long predicted, the SNP has pledged to hold a referendum on separation.<sup>30</sup>*

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<sup>27</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/personal-view/3639114/Scots-and-English-flourish-in-the-Union.html>

<sup>28</sup> Daily Mail – AS A Scot born and bred, with a Scottish family history as far back as I can trace, I am proud to call myself British as well as Scottish.

For centuries, the different cultures in the UK have celebrated their differences, but also co-operated in the greater united entity. Until recently, the banter between the separate parts of the country were generally good humoured, but within the past ten to 15 years a nasty tone of vitriol has crept into the atmosphere.

I cannot understand how anyone can believe that Scotland could be a totally independent entity; there are just too many ties at all levels with the other parts of the Union.

To think that Scotland could be better governed is to ignore the self-serving, money-grabbing, politically correct insanity that is the Scottish Parliament.

At least it is limited in the damage it can do.

DAVID PATERSON, Glasgow.

<sup>29</sup> Make sure you cast your vote  
The Western Morning News; Plymouth (UK) [Plymouth (UK)]03 May 2007: 10.

<sup>30</sup> Future of Scotland is hanging in the balance: [Final 1 Edition]  
Macleod, Angus. **The Times; London (UK)** [London (UK)]03 May 2007: 1.

Labour believed, or hoped, that Independence was off-putting, and used the SNP's Independence Referendum pledge as often as possible in attempt to woo. As Macleod said later in his Times article,

*(Labour) Party strategists believe that it has helped convince those undecided voters that the risks of independence are a more important factor on which to base their vote than punishing Labour and Mr Blair.<sup>31</sup>*

The SNP's Independence Referendum was so potent that even The Sun made an unusually strong appeal to its readers to vote for Labour and oppose the SNP,

*Today Scotland is standing at a crossroads.*

*Not since the 1940s has there been a day like this, when millions of ordinary people have had such power over their own futures - a day when the very existence of Britain is at stake.*

*This is the day to go and vote. Vote for Britain with Scotland at the heart of it.*

*Vote Labour.<sup>32</sup>*

Before attacking the SNP's independence Referendum pledge in a 1000-word attack editorial, claiming how the financial services industry, shipbuilding on the Clyde and Forth, education etc. would suffer as a consequence. It was an attack concentrating exclusively on the SNP's Independence Referendum manifesto pledge. Not their Health, Education, Infrastructure, Economic pledges.

This attack by *The Sun* was a result of Labour issuing their final plea to voters, '10 reasons to fear an SNP victory', with the then First Minister Jack McConnell and then Chancellor Gordon Brown spearheading the attack.

The Scotsman summed it up on the final day of campaigning when they said,

*The focus of this election has been on independence. Labour has tried its best to make this a virtual referendum on independence while the SNP has done the opposite, insisting that this is anything but a referendum on independence - that will only come later if the SNP wins the election.<sup>33</sup>*

Independence had been a central campaigning policy for the SNP for decades.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> Only Labour can save us from a living nightmare: The Sun; 03 May 2007

<sup>33</sup> Election 2007: Election Agenda: All you need to know to make your final decision The Scotsman, 03 May 2007



*SNP Manifesto 1992*

The SNP had been consistent in their promise of holding an Independence Referendum if they formed a Government in Holyrood,

*THIS is a historic opportunity for every Scot as we vote for our first Parliament in 300 years.*

*I have campaigned on my principles but I have not been alone.*

*All over the country, people who share the vision of a Scotland with meaningful jobs, good health, high education and strong services have been working hard.*

*We want to prove that Scots can govern themselves well and, from good government, move on to self-government.*

*That's why we promise a referendum on independence - so that we can aspire to be a nation like any other.<sup>34</sup>*

But in 2007 things changed.

As we've seen, Labour were unpopular; the SNP were close to Labour in the polls, and eventually leaped ahead of Labour in the polls; an independence referendum became a very real prospect, and, as has been noted, the media responded.

They didn't shy away from their independence pledge,

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<sup>34</sup> Alex Salmond, Sunday Mail, 02 May 1999



Independence, instead of being a pledge placed in the middle of a paragraph on an obscure page of a manifesto that nobody reads, was central to the SNP's election campaign. But more importantly, that independence pledge was qualified with the commitment to hold a referendum. This is key. Electors could vote confident that they would be in control. They might be sceptical of independence, but they could also like the SNP's proposed programme of Government, and could still vote for the party knowing that the constitutional question would be firmly under their control.

## Leadership and national identity

Many of the factors which made the Labour party unpopular in Scotland were also at play in Wales. The electorates of both countries were looking for a competent alternative.

In Scotland there was the SNP, who had a leader of great charisma and recognition factor.

Francois Vergnolle De Chantal, in his book *Leadership and Uncertainty Management in Politics*, says this,

“Before becoming First Minister Alex Salmond had managed to build up a strong leadership within his own party as well as a high profile in London where he relentlessly promoted the nationalist case at Westminster and in numerous broadcast political programmes (Lynch, 2002). By the time of the 2007 Holyrood elections he had clearly become a major electoral asset for the SNP, with the polls showing him to be far more popular than the incumbent First Minister, Jack McConnell. This prompted the SNP to emphasize 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 (Murray and Crawford, 2010).<sup>35</sup>

This final point is significant.

Contrast Scottish Labour's Jack McConnell with Welsh Labour's leader at the time Rhodri Morgan. Rhodri Morgan was a hugely liked character in Wales. He had a ready wit, and gave the impression of being of the people.

He had also managed to rebrand the Labour Party as Welsh Labour, with ‘clear red water’ between his Labour in Wales and the unpopular New Labour under Tony Blair.

Rhodri Morgan's ‘Welshification’ of the Labour Party was one of the most important reasons why Plaid Cymru failed to see the same level of breakthrough in Wales as the SNP saw in Scotland.

The then First Minister delivered a speech in Swansea in December 2002 which should be seen of historical importance to Plaid Cymru as well as the Labour Party in Wales.

In his 2002 Swansea speech, Rhodri Morgan set out the Labour Party in Wales' vision and articulated how differently that vision was from the type of ideas and policies being implemented by the then New Labour in London.

It was this speech that brought to public attention the idea of “clear red water” between Labour in Wales and London (though Rhodri Morgan didn't refer to ‘clear red water’ himself, only referencing to it as a quote from the Guardian).

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<sup>35</sup> *Leadership and Uncertainty Management in Politics: Leaders, Followers and Constraints in Western Democracies*, Francois Vergnolle De Chantal, Chapter 5

Journalists of the day argued that the point of the speech was to create a clear distinction between London and Wales.

It certainly succeeded in achieving that aim, if that was its aim.

However, if Rhodri Morgan's intention was to have an impact on Labour, his unintended consequence was to have a significant impact on Plaid Cymru. Plaid Cymru's failure was to identify this and respond accordingly.

## **The Welshification of Labour**

Plaid Cymru had achieved an astonishing election result in the inaugural National Assembly elections. The National Assembly was seen as a Welsh institution, and Plaid Cymru was 'the Welsh Party'.

The Swansea Speech was delivered 4 months before the National Assembly's second elections. Though the speech was ostensibly a speech on social policy in Wales, it was in actual fact a campaigning speech designed to distance the Labour Party in Wales from Tony Blair's New Labour Party, who were at that time deep in preparations to attack Iraq (the UN's Resolution 1441 had been passed a month earlier). It was also Rhodri Morgan's intention to steal Plaid Cymru's mantle as being the party for Wales.

The speech could easily have been delivered by any Plaid Cymru politician. It's unsurprising that a First Minister for Wales should deliver a speech about Wales, but its content has a distinctive 'nationalist' tinge,

"As a socialist of the Welsh stripe..."

"It means doing things the Welsh way."

"In so many ways the relationship between economic and social policy was one forged in the industrial revolution which took place in Wales two hundred years ago and which set the tone for industrialisation across Europe. It was in Wales that we saw unprecedented change during the 19th century where the impact of massive industrialisation in mining, quarrying, steel making created a new kind of society based on mass production."

"This is the fabric of Welsh life with which we are all very familiar. This is the sometimes proud, sometimes agonising history of a nation built very largely on the efforts of working people in hard surroundings. This is the raw material, the social heritage out of which Welsh devolution has been created – and in which we can now make our own social policy in Wales, for Wales."

"It is a Welsh version of the so-called post-war consensus in the British body politic on the welfare state..."

"The small scale of the Assembly, and of Wales itself, is surely a major advantage to us in this regard. Wales is of a size where we are well placed to work together to make things work better. We know where the problems lie, and we know each other pretty well – both

institutionally and – very often – individually. We should therefore be able to take advantage of small scale to make big decisions more easily.”<sup>36</sup>

## Who’s a Nationalist?

It could be said that the turn of the millennium saw the decline of the old class-based politics, and the heralding of identity politics. After all the creation of New Labour had blurred the lines between the traditional left-right political axis,

“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. Hence in 1999, left-right position was a significant predictor neither of Labour versus SNP voting nor of defection from Labour vote in 1997”.<sup>37</sup>

The little evidence that is available here suggests that the situation was no different in Wales to that in Scotland. The Institute of Welsh Politics at Aberystwyth University surveyed 1,500 people who voted in the inaugural Assembly elections, and found that of those surveyed 83% thought that Plaid Cymru was the Party which best represented the working class in Wales.

New Labour, “was seen in Wales as a party which primarily looked after the interests of the middle class and English people.”<sup>38</sup>

This will have hurt Labour, and would undoubtedly have contributed to their rebranding, under Rhodri Morgan, as Welsh Labour later in 2000.

This in turn evolved, so that by the time the Conservatives were in Government at an UK level, ‘Welsh Labour’ could credibly pose themselves in 2011 as ‘standing up for Wales’.

Labour had embraced Welsh nationalism, or at least a façade of Welsh nationalism.

Labour was becoming ‘the Welsh party’. With the absence of a clearly identifiable USP, the ideological gap between Labour and Plaid Cymru was closing

In Scotland, there was no such problems with distinguishing between the SNP and Labour. The SNP’s Independence referendum policy had made that distinction clear. It forced the other parties to come down on one side or the other of the Scottish fence – were they for Scotland or for the Union. The Labour Party came down strongly for the Union. There was no question who therefore was defending the interests of Scotland. It was quite clearly the SNP.

As we see the decline of class based politics, valence voting comes into importance as a deciding factor with the electorate.

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<sup>36</sup> <https://www.sochealth.co.uk/the-socialist-health-association/sha-country-and-branch-organisation/sha-wales/clear-red-water/>

<sup>37</sup> Valence Politics in Scotland: Towards an Explanation of the 2007 Election, Robert Johns and James Mitchell, & David Denver (Political Studies: 2009 Vol 57, p209)

<sup>38</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/698688.stm>

Valence politics is defined by Wikipedia as, "Valence politics, also known as competence voting, is a model of voting behaviour that emphasises that individuals vote based upon "people's judgements of the overall competence of the rival political parties".

Therefore, the electorate judge the politicians and political parties on matters beyond their traditional class based identity.

John, Mitchell and Denver explain brilliantly how this valence voting came to play a crucial part in Scottish politics in the first decade of this century. Plaid Cymru should take notice of this paper, Valence Politics in Scotland: Towards an Explanation of the 2007 Election.

It argues that while the constitutional preferences of the voters might not be the deciding factor in how they vote (that is to say pro or anti-independence), they note that there is evidence that "voters endorse the constitutional option deemed most likely to deliver desired public policy outcomes; that is, their constitutional preferences are driven at least in part by valence concerns"<sup>39</sup>.

The paper explains in detail how valence is an important determinant of constitutional preferences, and how it consequently leads voters to prefer a particular constitutional option, and therefore choose their party accordingly. So, if a voter decided that Health was the most important political issue of the day, and that it was, in this instance, the Scottish Parliament which had the greater control over health but that the voter in turn wanted the Parliament to gain greater control over health matters, then the voter would vote for the party which offered him/her that option of strengthening the Scottish Parliament.

"Nonetheless, many studies emphasise the importance of parties being seen to support Scotland's interests.

Two points should be made about this. First, with the over-whelming majority of voters identifying as Scottish to at least some extent, support for Scottish interests is in effect a valence issue. While there may be disagreement about how Scottish interests are best served, there is no important section of the electorate that does not want them served. Second, 'support for Scotland's interests' is a rather abstract and general notion, and so voters may need more concrete and specific cues in order to estimate whether parties are willing and able to stand up for Scotland. The parties' constitutional preferences can give such a cue. Hence, for example, the Conservatives' unpopularity since the 1980s, and especially in the 1997 and 1999 contests, owed much to their opposition to devolution, not just because the majority of voters dis-agreed, but because it made them appear anti-Scottish. In contrast, 'standing up for Scotland's interests' is part of the SNP's *raison d'être*, and so even those opposed to independence may be inclined to believe that the party could deliver benefits to Scottish voters. Thus the SNP's stance on independence might win it valence support from voters, regardless of their own personal constitutional preferences. Given the acknowledged importance of standing up for Scotland's interests for a party's image, the potential gains from this valence-based support are considerable.

The second condition relates to a different aspect of party image: perceived moderateness. A strong commitment to independence may win the SNP credit for its commitment to Scottish interests even from opponents of independence, but is likely to cost it support if the party appears determined to secure that outcome as soon as possible and against the

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<sup>39</sup> Valence Politics in Scotland: Towards an Explanation of the 2007 Election, Robert Johns and James Mitchell, & David Denver (Political Studies: 2009 Vol 57, p211)



wishes of the electorate. It would thus risk being seen as a single-issue and perhaps also as rather an extreme party. Leaving aside voters' own constitutional preferences, they seem more likely to be impressed by a party with independence as a clear medium-term to long-term goal but conditional on public support, and with plenty else to say and do in the meantime.

That appears to be the image that the SNP sought to project in its campaigning, and – according to Philip Gould (2007) – it was largely successful. If anything, it was Labour that seemed more obsessed with independence during the campaign, their aim being to play on 'doubts about the SNP and the financial risk of independence' (Gould, 2007). The downside of this was that the campaign appeared predominantly negative – 'relentlessly' so, according to an adviser to Jack McConnell (Gray, 2007) – and that may have tarnished Labour's image."<sup>40</sup>

These are extremely important points which I felt were worth repeating in full.

If we accept what is said, the question for us, then, is how much of this is also true for Wales?

Most voters in Wales identify as being Welsh, but to a significantly less degree than that in Scotland. The border is far more porous here than it is there. However according to the 2011 census, 58% of the population of Wales identify themselves as being only Welsh. Therefore, a large proportion of the Welsh population will place an importance on Welsh issues.

'Supporting Wales' interests' is, like the Scottish equivalent, also an abstract notion. So, what would be the cues in order to estimate whether parties are willing and able to stand up for Wales? The paper quoted above suggests that the parties constitutional preference is a clear cue. But, different from Scotland, Plaid Cymru have put no real emphasis on independence, and have historically played the idea down, claiming it as a long-term ambition before moving quickly on to talk about other issues. The only other cue is the party name, but with it continuing to be seen (and used) as a monolingual Welsh title, the cue to the voters is that Plaid Cymru is a party for Welsh speakers, and not necessarily the whole of Wales.

In Scotland, we learnt that in contrast the Labour Party's vociferous opposition to any greater devolution played badly with a Scottish electorate which put importance on Scottish issues. This was also true of Wales in the formative years of the National Assembly for Wales. But, as we have seen, under Rhodri Morgan this quickly changed.

The difference is clear. The SNP's fearless propagation of independence, bookended with their promise of empowering the people to make that choice and respecting the people's voice, created a clear divide with the Labour Party. It gave the SNP an opportunity to run positive campaigns, with a positive vision of a prosperous Scotland. The Labour Party, on the other hand were forced to decide between Scotland and the Union, and they opted for the Union, and were forced into running negative campaigns against the SNP. Thus, the SNP set the political discourse, and Labour had to follow.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 211-2

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/23968226\\_Valence\\_Politics\\_in\\_Scotland\\_Towards\\_an\\_Explanation\\_of\\_the\\_2007\\_Election](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/23968226_Valence_Politics_in_Scotland_Towards_an_Explanation_of_the_2007_Election)

Here in Wales the Labour Party have been allowed to dress themselves up as the defenders of Wales, and while Labour have consistently run negative campaigns against Tory rule, Plaid Cymru's only contribution has been to run even more negative campaigns blaming both the Tories and Labour, and seen to be complaining that we are impoverished and treated unfairly.

Devolution is here to stay. Each and every opinion poll shows a steady if not a growing support for the National Assembly of Wales. It is therefore distinctively Welsh, and delivers Welsh solutions to problems in Wales (regardless of funding abilities).

The electorate are therefore looking for a Government who can provide those uniquely Welsh answers.

It's ironic that at a time when being Welsh, having Welsh answers, being pro-Wales is the currency which should win a Welsh general election, that the only party whose *raison d'être* is Wales is languishing in third place in the Welsh national polls, behind both Labour and the Conservatives who are staunchly unionist parties.

This is because both these parties (to a greater or lesser degree) have dressed themselves up as being Welsh, and, due to the simple fact that we have a Welsh Parliament, both must devise Welsh policy for Wales. They're all Welsh nationalists now.

So, what distinguishes Plaid Cymru from these parties?

Up until the summer of 2015 the party's Socialist credentials set it aside from all the other major political parties. Again, it's ironic that, in an age when class-based politics have given way to identity politics, that the Nationalist Party in Wales gained more recognition because of its class based politics than because of its defence of Wales.

I'm not in any way criticising the party's policies, nor the party's campaigning to challenge the rightwards march of Western politics. But it doesn't have to be one or the other. It's doesn't have to be that Plaid Cymru's ambition for an Independent Welsh State sitting next to Cyprus at the UN is exclusive from the radical progressive policies which have been Plaid Cymru's signature over the last generation. Both can and should complement each other. One ambition doesn't have to be to the detriment of another.

What's clear is that promoting Independence, or more correctly an independence referendum, where the people of Wales hold the power, contrary to being a turn off to voters, would likely instead be appealing to voters in Wales.

This in turn would set Plaid Cymru apart from the other Welsh parties. It would also call the bluff of the Labour Party in Wales who's Assembly Members can currently say completely different things about the Welsh constitutional question to that said by their Parliamentary colleagues in Westminster.

Being Welsh and pro-Wales is a vote winner. It's a positive.

With all their talk of 'defending Wales', which side of the fence would Labour ultimately come down on, would it be the pro-Wales side, or the pro-union side? This in itself would open up the debate about the benefits or otherwise of Wales' continued participation in the Union.

The Scottish and Brexit referendums have taught us that those who have nothing to lose vote for change because they have nothing to lose, and those who have something to lose support the status quo.

Considering Wales' relative poverty, it would seem that most people in Wales have nothing to lose. Yet they've not yet had that debate.

The discussion around Welsh independence has been allowed to be lead and dictated by Unionists.

Promoting Independence would allow Plaid Cymru to run a positive campaign, based on vision and a better future for all. It would force those opposing the idea to run a negative campaign. Plaid Cymru, instead of defining itself as not being Labour or Tory, would define itself as being a party of builders.

If Claire Howell taught us anything, it was that positivity trumps negativity. The SNP's 2007 election success was proof of this. Let the others tell the people of Wales why Wales must remain poor; why Wales should not have greater ambitions to improve the lot of her people; why Wales cannot be like Finland, Denmark, Iceland, New Zealand. It's our job to give hope to people, and say that this is not as good as it gets.

We've tried everything else. We've nothing to lose.

Independence is the one clear USP that we have, which separates us from the others. It's the one thing that says that Plaid Cymru, more than any other party, will always defend the interests of Wales.

As well as this what both Alex Salmond and Rhodri Morgan show us is the importance of having a recognisable, well-liked leader.

With Carwyn Jones coming to the end of his term in office as Wales' First Minister, it is said that the contenders for his position will be Ken Skates, Vaughan Gething, Huw Irranca-Davies; Eluned Morgan, or Alun Davies.

Based on the valance voting theory above, I would discount the first two, as they don't speak Welsh and would not be able to convince most of the population that Wales is their central project. It is my opinion that the likely successor will be Eluned Morgan, Huw Irranca (if he brushes up on his Welsh) or an outside bet on Alun Davies.

Therefore, it's my view that we will have to pitch our candidate for First Minister against either Eluned Morgan or Huw Irranca. The longer Carwyn Jones takes to retire, the less time the next First Minister will have to establish him or herself in the public eye as a competent national leader. It is precisely at this time we need an established AND well-liked leader for Plaid Cymru, who we can put forward as the realistic contender for First Minister.