

General Election Briefing 3

PAGODA PUBLIC RELATIONS POLITICAL INTELLIGENCE SERIES

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So no change at all in Scotland, then?

At first glance, it appears that nothing whatsoever has happened in Scotland. The result on the night is identical as it was in 2005. But the real story that emerges here is how different Scotland is, politically to the rest of the UK. As a nation it bucked the trend with the swing going towards, rather than away from, the Labour party.

It seems that despite the earlier polling, when voters were presented with a ballot paper, and the news from South of the border that of a decisive lead emerging, Scotland chose, instead, to try to keep the Tories out.

Labour increased their vote by almost 3% across Scotland, with the squeeze hitting the LibDems and SNP hardest. The Labour party succeeded in bringing back to the fold both seats they lost in by-elections since 2005.

The LibDem support so consistently reported in opinion polls seemed to evaporate overnight, with even the low hanging fruit of Edinburgh South suddenly out of their reach.

The SNP's loss of Glasgow East, the site of their

“earthquake” by-election is a bitter blow, and they failed to make any headway towards their 20 seat target. There is some minor consolation in increasing their share of the vote, but they still stand in the distant background to swell of support for Labour.

The Conservatives managed to hold onto their one seat in Scotland, with David Mundell, who may well be headed for the Secretary of State post. However, that post may be up for grabs, due to the poor Conservative representation in Scotland.

This arguable absence of a mandate to govern Scotland is already being seized on by the SNP, hoping to harness the anti-Tory feeling to boost their own mandate to govern, and support for independence.

So there are huge changes, in both the momentum of the Scottish parties, previously so close between Labour and the SNP, and the way in which the relationship will develop between the Scottish and British Governments.

The SNP Government, facing a Holyrood election next year, and a newly strengthened Labour party in Scotland, may seek to further emphasise divisions, rather than build bridges. How this dynamic unfolds will be crucial.

And the decisions the LibDems take in Westminster on whether they speak to Labour or Conservatives will in turn impact on the party in Scotland next year as to with whom, if anyone, they might be able to form a credible coalition.

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Party	2010 result	2005 result	Share of vote 2010*	Share of vote 2005
Labour	41	41	42.4%	38.9%
Lib Dem	11	11	18.6%	22.6%
SNP	6	6	19.9%	17.7%
Conservative	1	1	16.6%	15.8%
Turnout %	63.7%	60.6%		

* Figures do not include Orkney and Shetland seat, declared late. The final share of vote may be affected.

Cameron's constitutional calamity

The Scottish Conservatives failure to secure any electoral traction once again puts the constitutional question in sharp focus. Can Cameron legitimately, or at least morally, govern in Scotland with so few MPs? How will he meet the obvious challenge of developing a positive relationship between Holyrood and Westminster?

Much will depend on whether or not Cameron, if he gains the keys to Number 10, can change the perception that the Conservatives have no empathy with Scotland.

The Conservative Manifesto detailed the approach the Government would take in developing a relationship with the Scottish Government and Parliament. Their Manifesto stated;

“The Conservatives will repair the damage done to the relationship between our Governments and Parliaments by Gordon Brown and Alex Salmond. David Cameron will come to Scotland to meet with the First Minister.

“David Cameron will meet annually with MSPs at Holyrood.

“The Conservative ministers at Westminster will meet regularly with MSPs to discuss issues relating to finance and which require a combination of reserved and devolved powers to tackle effectively.

“The Conservatives will publish a White Paper on proposals to take forward the recommendations of the Calman Commission before the next Scottish Parliament elections in 2011.”

The legislative timetable on the Calman Commission proposals is slow, with legislation not expected until 2014.

However, in light of the Party's performance in Scotland, it may be that Cameron will decide to act boldly, take more radical action on the Calman proposals and move further and faster than expected.

Certainly, in the post election context, any perception that the Conservative Government is seeking to delay changes to the devolution settlement raises the risk that the Scottish Conservative Party will be further marginalised

at the May 2011 Scottish Parliament elections, thus reinforcing the Conservatives downward spiral north of the border.

And if the perception remains that the Scottish Conservatives are resistant to change, the future of the Union may come under greater pressure. Recent opinion polls suggest that under a Cameron Government (The Scotsman/YouGov poll; May 2010) 34% of Scots said that they would be more likely to vote for Scottish independence – a rise of 4% compared to February.

But will a referendum be held? In the coming months the SNP's Referendum Bill will be introduced at Holyrood. However, there is no possibility of the minority Government securing a referendum. Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives have all said they will vote against the Bill.

The latest Holyrood 2011 polls suggest that the SNP will lose power. The YouGov (April 25th) poll translated into seats in the Scottish Parliament gave Labour 53, the SNP 34, the Liberal Democrats 24 and the Conservatives 16. In that context it would be likely that any referendum would be based around an agreed Labour and Liberal Democrat “Calman Compromise”.

At this early stage however, it is impossible to predict what might happen, except perhaps, more unpredictability.



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The subtle art of negotiation - what UK Parties can learn from Scotland

“It’s not just the people on the other side of the table that need convincing. There is also the task of convincing those not in the room—the Parliamentary party.”

Scotland exists in a perpetual state of “hung Parliament”. Being a proportional voting system, with four rather than three large parties, as well as smaller parties such as the Greens and Socialists able to win seats, it is almost impossible to achieve a majority.

Negotiation and coalition have been built into the system from the start. Who will negotiate with whom, and on what, dominate Scottish campaigns. The LibDems, as the most obvious potential coalition partner, come under early pressure to declare their preferred bedfellow, and the “red line” issues on which they won’t budge.

In 1999, they were happy enough to do this, stating that abolition of tuition fees was non-negotiable but were then criticised when they agreed to put it to a Commission to decide. In 2003 they therefore adopted a softer position, with proportional representation of councils never

quite stated as “red line”.

By 2007, there was an assumption on the part of the media that the LibDems would “prop up” whoever emerged as the largest party, so they took the tactic of instead making a red line of the SNP’s policy on which they said they wouldn’t negotiate—that of an independence referendum.

Nick Clegg hasn’t had eight years to think about handling these questions. He’s had two weeks. He quickly gave indications of who he’d talk to, and his red line issue of electoral reform. These may yet backfire if he talks to Labour, or can’t secure his top policy.

But much of this depends on the negotiations themselves. In 1999, following the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties were locked in negotiation for days, with sessions lasting often 18 hours or more. The Partnership Agreements that come out of negotiations are essentially a long list of policies that the parties have agreed to deliver.

Those agreements often come down to the work done on party manifestos. Scottish parties now have significant detail on policies, as it is hard to fight for ill-thought out ideas. But, in terms of detail in the UK manifestos, there is very little. The proportion of

manifesto promises that make it into a partnership agreement is important when it comes to defending a record and taking credit.

Often, however, it’s not just the people on the other side of the table that need convincing. There is also the task of convincing those not in the room—the Parliamentary party. And Westminster lends itself to rebellion far more than Holyrood.

This was a key factor in the 2007 decision of the Liberal Democrats refusal to negotiate with the SNP at Holyrood. Other than a referendum, the parties share many significant policy ambitions, but there was significant resistance in the LibDem MSP group, and the wider party, to get into bed with the Nationalists.

The resulting SNP minority was expected by the opposition, quite naively, to fail, and fail fast. But despite the opportunity to vote them out at any time they haven’t, as they know full well that the voter would punish those that bring down the Government for self-interest.

The key decisions ahead for the UK Parties are similar, and it will no doubt prove a significant learning curve.

The Minority Rules

There are advantages in going it alone, as evidenced by the SNP’s experience in Scotland:

1. You keep the element of surprise—no partnership agreement where all the fights are settled in advance means you can control the news agenda far better than when they know what is coming, and the vote is a foregone conclusion.

2. Alliances don’t have to be forever—votes can be sought with anyone, at any time. The SNP famously gave concessions to the Greens on the budget last year. When it was voted down, they then gave concessions to everyone *but* the Greens. There are no rules.

3. If you can’t get it done, it’s not your fault. Being a minority means even the most ambitious policies can be put before Parliament, just so they can be voted down. The blame is on the opposition for standing in the way. Like a referendum, for example.



4. You’ll get defeated a lot. The opposition will vote you down again and again. But you’ll soon discover...

5. You don’t have to listen to Parliament. The SNP effectively overturned a Bill passed by Parliament in cancelling the Glasgow Airport Rail Link.

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The Winners







The real winner, in terms of Scotland, was Gordon Brown. Scottish voters provided the resilience the party needed north of the Border to regain the seats than it had previously lost, and keep the seats in danger, even at the tightest margins. The only two gains were in Glasgow East and Dunfermline and West Fife.

Constituency	New MP	Former MP	Biography
Glasgow East	 Margaret Curran MP	John Mason (SNP)	<p>Ms Curran is a well known figure in Scottish Politics and the Scottish Labour Party and would be expected to adapt to Westminster without difficulty. She is likely to stand down from her Holyrood seat in the forthcoming 2011 Scottish election.</p> <p>Labour will be pleased to see one of the heartland seats return to their hands after the seat was won in the 2008 by-election by the SNP. Representing Glasgow Ballieston. She was first elected as an MSP in 1999. She became deputy minister of social justice (2002-3) before becoming Minister for Communities (2003-4) and Minister for Parliamentary business from (2004-2007).</p>
Dunfermline and West Fife	 Thomas Docherty MP	Willie Rennie (Lib Dem)	<p>Dunfermline and West Fife was the site of the by-election victory for the LibDems, who took the seat, overturning a large Labour majority in 2006. The by-election was caused by the death of Rachel Squire. Thomas Docherty is an experienced campaigner having contested North Tayside in 2001 and South of Scotland in 2003. He has strong links to the local Labour party as his father-in-law is Councillor for the Dunfermline North ward.</p>

New faces






These MPs are new faces in old seats. The only changes were in the size of their majorities. Some brief biographical information is below.

Edinburgh South	 Ian Murray MP	Nigel Griffiths (Labour)	<p>The surprise victor in Edinburgh South, widely expected to go Lib-Dem, was elected a Councillor for Liberton and Gilmerton in 2003. He is also Labour's Finance and Social Inclusion spokesman on the City of Edinburgh Council. After graduating in social policy and law, Mr Murray worked at the Royal Blind Asylum and in pensions management. He also set up his own event management company and currently runs a small bar/bistro in Newington.</p>
Rutherglen and West Hamilton	 Tom Greatrex MP	Tommy McAvoy (Labour)	<p>For the last three years, Tom worked as a special adviser to Des Browne and later Jim Murphy as Secretary of State for Scotland. He worked five years as an official for the GMB union before working on PR for East Dumbartonshire Council and was previously Director of Corporate Affairs for NHS 24. Aged 35, he lives in Cambuslang with his wife and twin daughters.</p>

<p>East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow</p>	 <p>Michael McCann</p>	<p>Adam Ingram Labour</p>	<p>Michael was elected in 2007 to represent the new East Kilbride West ward of South Lanarkshire Council and is the deputy leader there. He formerly worked for the Department for International Development. He is married to Tracy and has two children.</p>
<p>Airdrie and Shotts</p>	 <p>Pamela Nash</p>	<p>John Reid Labour</p>	<p>Pamela worked as a parliamentary researcher for John Reid MP. Aged 25 she was born and grew up in the constituency.</p>
<p>West Dunbartonshire</p>	 <p>Gemma Doyle</p>	<p>John McFall Labour</p>	<p>Gemma previously worked as a political officer for the Parliamentary Labour Party. Prior to that, she worked for the Institute of Civil Engineers and as a conference development manager. Aged 28 she is from Dumbar-ton.</p>
<p>Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East</p>	 <p>Greg McClymont</p>	<p>Rosemary McKenna Labour</p>	<p>Gregg has been active in the Labour Party for many years and has written speeches for Dr John Reid. Aged 31 he is from Kildrum. A former Cumbernauld High School pupil, he currently teaches history at Oxford University.</p>
<p>Kilmarnock and Loudon</p>	 <p>Cathy Jamieson</p>	<p>Des Browne Labour</p>	<p>Cathy was elected to the Scottish Parliament in 1999. In 2001, she was appointed Minister for Education and Young People. Following the 2003 election, she was appointed Justice Minister, and held this post until May 2007, when the administration changed. Cathy was Deputy Leader of Labour in the Scottish Parliament from 2000 until June 2008, when she stood down.</p>
<p>Glasgow Central</p>	 <p>Anas Sarwar</p>	<p>Mohammed Sarwar Labour</p>	<p>Brought up in Glasgow, he works as an NHS dentist. He has been involved in several community based programmes and campaigns. In 1999 he campaigned with other party members and local people to get 80,000 signatures to save the Govan shipyard. Anas was the No.1 Glasgow Regional List candidate at the recent Scottish elections. He is the son of Mohammed Sarwar the previous MP</p>

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New faces — continued

East Lothian	 <p>Fiona O' Donnell</p>	<p>Anne Moffat Labour</p>	<p>Fiona grew up in the Highlands, studied at Glasgow University, and lives in Edinburgh. She formerly worked in the voluntary sector specialising in children with emotional and behavioural problems, and adults with mental health problems. She was latterly a campaign specialist with the Labour Party based in the Lothians.</p>
East Edinburgh	 <p>Sheila Gilmore</p>	<p>Gavin Strang Labour</p>	<p>Formerly an elected member of Edinburgh City Council where she served as the Executive Member for Housing and Communities. In this role she led the unsuccessful housing transfer bid. She is well known as a lawyer and has a reputation as a local campaigner. She is married with two children.</p>
Livingston	 <p>Graeme Morrice</p>	<p>Jim Devine Labour</p>	<p>A business graduate of Napier University in Edinburgh, Graeme has held various local government positions, including Leader of West Lothian Council when it won UK Council of the Year in 2006.</p>
Edinburgh West	 <p>Mike Crockart</p>	<p>John Barratt Liberal Democrat</p>	<p>Over the last 25 years, Mike has worked in the public service and in financial services in Edinburgh. He served as a police officer in Lothian & Borders Police for eight years and worked as a systems developer and IT Project Manager for Standard Life for eleven years. Mike was born and brought up in Perth, before moving to Edinburgh to study Politics at Edinburgh University in 1984. He lives in the constituency with his wife and two children.</p>
Banff and Buchan	 <p>Dr Eilidh Whiteford</p>	<p>Alex Salmond SNP</p>	<p>Eilidh replaces Alex Salmond, who stands down from his Westminster seat. For over six years, she worked for Oxfam as a policy advisor and campaigns manager. Before she was co-ordinator of the Scottish Carers Alliance. Growing up in Banffshire, she attended Banff Academy and Glasgow University. After post-graduate studies in Scotland and Canada she taught Scottish Literature at Glasgow University and Newbattle Abbey College.</p>