Devolution and Party Change in the Scottish and Welsh Conservative Parties, 1997-2011

A thesis submitted by

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Abstract

This thesis compares the adaptation to devolution of the sub-state branches of the statewide UK Conservative Party in Scotland and Wales between 1997 and 2011. It uses a comparative analytical framework derived from the literature on party change, multi-level party politics and path dependency. Both parties had to change to accommodate the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly, and deal with the Conservative Party's weak electoral position outside England. Whilst the Scottish Conservatives concentrated on being a competent opposition party in a multi-party parliament, the Welsh Conservatives changed much more substantially in order to pursue the goal of being in office in Wales. Fundamentally, the Scottish Conservatives never rediscovered a central sense of purpose that might have served as a justification for the type of image and programmatic reform pursued in the UK and Welsh Conservative Parties.

This thesis suggests that in studying sub-state parties it is important to look beyond considerations of a party's constitutional structures to examine its organisation on the ground. In particular, it cannot be assumed that the default desire of sub-state branch parties is for more autonomy from the centre. The Welsh Conservatives achieved much greater party change despite being less organisationally distinct that the Scottish Conservatives. Alongside different institutional environments, the ideas and motivations of elected party elites are central to an explanation of party change in these parties. All of these issues raise wider questions about what it means to be a statewide party in an increasingly decentralised state.

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1. Introduction

> If you think back, we were seen as doing very well under devolution, as opposed to the Welsh, who were seen to be backward and the Welsh party is now of course…everyone: 'Oh, look at the Welsh model, that's what you need to learn from.'
>
> Interview with Scottish official 4, 30 November 2012

1.1 A Tale of Two Parties?

Reflecting on her 1979 speech to the Scottish Conservative Party conference, Margaret Thatcher remarked that, 'Life is not easy for Scottish Tories; nor was it to become easier' (Thatcher, 1993: 35). The Conservative Governments (1979-1997) were a particularly difficult time for the territorial Conservative Party. In Scotland and Wales, the party suffered a crisis of both popularity and legitimacy that led to the return of not a single Conservative MP outside England at the 1997 general election. The party then suffered the additional trauma of dealing with the implementation of the devolved territorial governments that it had long campaigned against and which seemed inimical to its conception of unionism. The sub-state Welsh and Scottish branches of the statewide UK Conservative Party both embarked on post-devolution life with a difficult inheritance.

However, the puzzle at the heart of this thesis concerns their seemingly contrasting fortunes since then. While the Welsh Conservatives appear to have staged a recovery since 1997, the Scottish Conservatives have been much less successful. It has also become accepted wisdom in the Scottish Conservative Party that it has lessons to learn from its Welsh colleagues. This thesis seeks to analyse how both parties have adapted to devolution and the reasons why one party may have changed more substantially or in different ways than the other.

The central research questions of this thesis are:

i. How did the Welsh and Scottish Conservative parties adapt to devolution between 1997 and 2011?

ii. What explains any differences in how the Welsh and Scottish Conservative parties have adapted to devolution?

iii.   How might the answers to i and ii inform a wider and comparative understanding of party adaptation and change in the sub-state branches of statewide parties?

Table 1.1 Conservative Party electoral performance in Scotland and Wales, 1999-2011

Election	Members of the Scottish Parliament	Members of the Welsh Assembly
1999	18	9
2003	18	11
2007	17	12
2011	15	14

Source: Rallings and Thrasher (2009); National Assembly for Wales (2011); Scottish Parliament (2013)

This thesis is therefore a comparative examination of party change which takes as its cases two branches of the statewide UK Conservative Party. In particular, it seeks to integrate the relatively well-trodden concept of party change with the more recent scholarly attention given to regional and sub-state politics and the multi-level political party (Jeffery and Wincott, 2010; Fabre and Swenden, 2013). Party change at the sub-state level is affected not only by processes in sub-state parties themselves, but also by internal interactions at different levels, particularly concerning sub-state party autonomy.

The main contribution of this thesis is twofold. First, whilst there have been recent in-depth studies of the Conservative Party in opposition since 1997 (for example, Bale, 2010; Hayton, 2012), they tend to concentrate on the party at the UK level. This thesis focuses explicitly and in detail on the territorial Conservative Party as an example of a statewide party operating in a multi-level context. If the Conservative Party as a whole has received somewhat less scholarly attention, then its Scottish and Welsh branches have been studied even less. This thesis attempts to redress this by providing an empirically rich account of the post-devolution Welsh and Scottish Conservative parties. To be sure, other studies have made a valuable contribution to understanding the territorial Conservative Party in a comparative context. However, these studies tend to lack the detail necessary to ask more probing questions that go beyond *how* the post-devolution Welsh and Scottish Conservative

parties are organised (Fabre, 2008; Bratberg, 2009; Hopkin, 2009; Detterbeck and Hepburn, 2010; Fabre and Méndez-Lago, 2009; Aughey, 2011; Randall and Seawright, 2012). Crucially, this thesis uses the depth of analysis available through a case study to ask in addition *why* the Welsh and Scottish Conservative parties changed in a certain manner in the period 1997-2011. In particular, it is interested in why they both may have reacted differently when confronted with similar pressures.

Second, this thesis contributes to an understanding of party politics and party change at the sub-state level. It considers what the case of the Conservative Party can tell us about processes of adaptation in statewide parties. Thus, other scholars may make use of the detailed history and arguments presented here to compare how other statewide parties (and in particular parties of the centre-right) deal with decentralisation.

1.2 Multi-Level Party Politics and Statewide Parties

A statewide party is a party that competes in elections simultaneously at the central or national level also and across more than one sub-state level. Such a definition would include the UK Labour Party, which competes at Westminster and in Scotland and Wales. However, it would exclude, for instance, the Scottish National Party, which has a presence at both the Scottish Parliament and Westminster, but which does not compete in Wales or Northern Ireland. Statewide parties may thus be distinguished from regionalist or non-statewide parties, such as Plaid Cymru in Wales (Fabre and Swenden, 2013: 343; Hepburn, 2009). The Scottish and Welsh Conservative Parties are sub-state branches of the statewide UK Conservative Party. It is an archetypal statewide party as it competes in Scotland and Wales, at UK elections, and at a supranational level in the European Parliament.

The sub-state branches of statewide parties face an acute dilemma in deciding how far to accommodate regional demands for autonomy or policy differentiation (Van Biezen and Hopkin, 2006; Detterbeck and Hepburn, 2010; Alonso, 2012). There is a tension between their belief in maintaining the integrity of the state and their desire to be seen as champions for regional issues. This tension is played out not only in terms of policy and candidate selection, but also in terms of the structure of regional parties themselves (Hopkin, 2009; Thorlakson, 2009). Roller and Van Houten (2003) have summed up the challenges facing the regional branches of statewide parties as the 'regional/national dilemma'.

There are five central reasons why it is important for political scientists to study the behaviour of statewide parties and their sub-state branches (Fabre and Swenden, 2013: 343). First, the trend in most OECD countries over the past 30 years has been one of decentralisation towards sub-state levels of government (Hooghe *et al.*, 2010). While the 20th century overall may have displayed a trend towards the nationalisation of politics (Caramani, 2004; Chhibber and Kollman, 2004), there is now increasing evidence of decentralisation in the nature of party competition in Western Europe (Hough and Jeffery, 2003, 2006; Johns *et al.*, 2013). In Scotland, for instance, party competition was always different from the UK level and is becoming more so (Miller, 1981; Bohrer and Krutz, 2005; Mitchell and Convery, 2013: 170). Parties increasingly operate as multi-level organisations that compete in elections with different dynamics and perhaps different party systems in several parts of a state. The study of only a party's 'core' level (Deschouwer, 2003) gives an incomplete picture of its activities, especially when it may face the challenge of competing against regionalist parties at a sub-state level (Meguid, 2010; Toubeau, 2011).

Second, as Fabre and Swenden (2013: 343) argue, 'By shifting the unit of analysis to the region (or the local level), the comparative method can be meaningfully applied to regional party systems and party organizations within the same state.' This allows us to compare strategies for territorial management across parties and different sub-state regions, and across time.

Third, statewide parties perform an important function in linking not only citizens to government, but also policies and governments at the different levels of a state (Filippov *et al*., 2004; Bolleyer, 2011; Fabre and Swenden, 2013: 343). Statewide parties contribute to the ties that keep a multi-level state together. They also provide the structures through which statewide party leaders attempt to influence sub-state politics and policy. When the same party is in power at a national and sub-state level, statewide parties can also smooth policy coordination or intergovernmental dispute resolution (McEwen, *et al.* 2012). The fact that they are closer to citizens may also help the sub-state branches of statewide parties do a better job of linking citizens to national political decisions (Fabre and Swenden, 2013: 350).

Fourth, statewide parties provide central party politicians and central government with a measure of legitimacy when they take decisions at a national level that have an impact on sub-state regions. Even if a statewide party performs poorly in sub-state elections, the fact of it standing candidates in every area of the country lends

it a degree of legitimacy. The structures of the statewide Conservative Party in Scotland also provide, for instance, the forum through which senior national Conservative politicians, such as the Prime Minister, engage in the debate on Scottish independence.

Finally, and of central importance to this study, parties operating simultaneously at different levels provide interesting cases through which to explore the nature of party change. Comparisons between parties at the national centre and at the sub-state level also allow us to explore the extent to which national party change affects sub-state parties and vice versa.

1.3 Devolution in the United Kingdom

The plurinational nature of the UK's 'state of unions' (Mitchell, 2010) and the strengthening of administrative devolution, particularly in the post-war period, have resulted in UK political parties that to some extent always operated as multi-level organisations. However, the 1997-2001 Labour Government's programme of devolution made the multi-level nature of the political system much more explicit and more urgent. For Bogdanor (2001: 1), devolution is the most significant constitutional reform in the UK since the Great Reform Act in the 19th century.

It required all of the UK's statewide parties to reconsider their territorial organisation (Fabre, 2008; Bratberg, 2009). They were forced to negotiate a response to a much more explicit 'regional/national dilemma' (Roller and Van Houten, 2003). Moreover, in the UK, this strategic decision was compounded by the nature of devolution itself. The devolution reforms of 1998 posed as many, if not more, questions as answers (Jeffery, 2007). Firstly, devolution in the UK is quite radically asymmetrical. Not only have different levels of autonomy been granted to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, there has also been no devolution to the regions of England. For Flinders and Curry (2008), this has resulted in a form of 'bi-constitutionality' in which the traditional Westminster rules of the game continue to apply to UK-level elections and government, alongside more consensual approaches in the devolved UK regions. The devolution reforms were explicitly designed not to interfere with the UK centre's ability to take decisions about the governance of England or the UK (Mitchell, 2010; Convery, 2013).

Secondly, in this context, the devolution arrangements did not create a federal system of government. Tony Blair in particular was ambivalent about the nature of

the reforms he was implementing (see, for example, Ashdown, 2001: 446) and the preservation of the doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty lies at the heart of both the Scotland and Wales Acts (1998). However, for Vernon Bogdanor (2009) the effect of devolution has been to create a *de facto* quasi-federal UK. Thus, whilst it is theoretically possible that the Westminster Parliament could still abolish the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly, it is almost impossible to imagine the circumstances under which it would do so. Such a decision would at best result in a constitutional crisis that could lead to Scotland leaving the Union. Moreover, the British Government has made it clear that it accepts the sovereignty of the Scottish people on the matter of secession. It recognises Scotland's unilateral right to secede. Compared to other federalised or decentralised states, this is a highly unusual feature of the UK (Melding, 2013: 11-12). Thus, as King (2007: 179) argues: 'With the coming of devolution to Scotland and Wales [the] single locus of sovereign authority no longer exists. Or, if it does exist, it exists only on paper.'

However, whilst the devolved legislatures (particularly the Scottish Parliament) have substantial *self-rule* powers, the extent of *shared rule* – sub-state government input into national decisions – is extremely limited in the UK (Swenden, 2010). They are allowed considerable freedom on the areas devolved to them, but there are few formal mechanisms for them to influence UK Government policy. Thus, the UK Government attaches no strings to the block grants it gives to the devolved governments. They may spend their money exactly as they choose. Crucially, they are also free to organise their public services in a manner that pleases them. This has led to substantial divergence from policies in England, particularly in the areas of health and education.

Statewide political parties in the UK must, therefore, negotiate the uneven structures of devolution. In particular, for Hazell (2006: 1), England is 'the gaping hole in the devolution settlement.' For parties whose core level is at the UK and who draw most of their MPs from England, this creates a tricky backdrop for territorial politics. In Jim Bulpitt's (1982: 144) words, 'for the Conservative Party the United Kingdom is, and always has been, a particularly difficult piece of political real estate to manage.'

1.4 The Scottish and Welsh Conservative Parties

In this context, the Welsh and Scottish Conservative Parties present an interesting case for comparison. Of all the UK statewide parties, the Conservatives had the furthest to travel in terms of accepting the new devolved institutions. Whilst the party had become adept at deepening and entrenching administrative devolution (Mitchell, 2003), it set its face since the early 1980s firmly against moving any further. All of the other statewide parties, alongside the Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru, supported devolution. In 1998, therefore, both the Welsh and Scottish Conservative Parties had to carry out an abrupt change in attitude if they were to participate in the new devolved institutions.

Both parties were also haunted by similar ghosts of the past. The legacy (economic, political and mythological) of the Thatcher Governments (1979-1990) and her perceived mishandling of territorial politics cast a shadow over Conservatives in Wales and Scotland. Well into the third term of the Scottish Parliament, MSPs were still invoking the memory of the Thatcher Governments to warn about the dangers of Conservative policies (Torrance, 2009: 254). The rapid economic changes of the 1980s and 1990s also had a disproportionate impact on Scotland and Wales due in part to the large concentrations of heavy industry (Stewart, 2009).

Thus, whilst it is a gross exaggeration to suggest that the Welsh and Scottish Conservatives both faced the same challenges in 1997, it would be fair to say that they started post-devolution life with a broadly similar inheritance: no MPs, a difficult past and new institutions that they had stridently campaigned against. Having both set out with a comparably poor hand to play, their contrasting fortunes since then present an interesting case study to examine how and why they might have responded to different pressures to change. Scotland and Wales might both be considered 'cold climates' for Conservatives (Kendrick and McCrone, 1989; Torrance, 2009).

1.5 Operationalising Party Change

In order to compare the Scottish and Welsh Conservative Parties, this thesis requires a measure of party change. This concept needs to be operationalised in a comparative analytical framework that can be applied to both parties. This thesis adapts Harmel and Janda's (1994) theory of party change and party goals so that it can be used for sub-state parties. The analysis of both parties is therefore split into a series of *drivers* and then *manifestations* of party change. This thesis freely acknowledges, however,

that such a split is inherently artificial. Party change cannot be easily broken down into dependent and independent variables. Changes in personnel, for instance, could be considered as both a driver and a manifestation of party change. Thus, the split between drivers and manifestations of change is not used as a hard theory; for this thesis it is instead a useful tool of analysis. It allows us to isolate and examine the most important factors in a broadly comparable way.

Party change is then analysed by combining Harmel and Janda's (1994) drivers (external shocks, leadership or faction change, electoral defeat) and manifestations (organisation, policy, personnel) of change with the literature on the behaviour and strategy of statewide parties in multi-level polities. Thus, in addition to these aspects of change, this thesis also explicitly considers sub-state parties' organisational autonomy on several indicators, including leadership selection and policy-making.

These drivers and manifestations of change are combined in an analytical framework that also examines the impact of path dependency on political parties. Parties may not simply react to functional pressures for change. These pressures are mediated through a party's history, 'usual ways of working' and internal dynamics. This thesis considers the possibilities for path-dependent processes in political parties to make change more difficult or prevent it altogether.

1.6 Outline of the Thesis

Chapter two begins by examining issues of methodology and research methods. This thesis is a case study that adopts a historical institutionalist approach. Chapter two demonstrates why a case study is the most appropriate method to address the research questions of this thesis. It also considers the advantages and problems associated with using semi-structured elite interviews and party documents to gather data. It concludes that while these are the most appropriate methods for this study, their limitations must be borne in mind.

Chapter three brings together the literature on party change and statewide parties to focus on an analytical framework for comparing the Welsh and Scottish Conservatives. They are compared along drivers of party change (devolution, change in dominant faction or leadership, and electoral defeat) and manifestations of party change (party organisation, autonomy, personnel, and policy). This chapter also

considers path dependent processes that may be at work in political parties and how these could make change more difficult.

Before proceeding to apply the analytical framework to the Scottish and Welsh Conservative Parties, chapter four sets out the wider context of changes to the UK Conservative Party and its attitude towards its sub-state branches in the period 1997-2011. The Scottish and Welsh Conservative Parties will have been aware of, and at times substantially affected by, changes and debates at the core level of the Conservative Party. In particular, it outlines the evolution of Conservative modernisation, culminating in David Cameron's leadership and the ideas associated with liberal Conservatism and brand detoxification. The extent of sub-state engagement with these ideas is an important component of party change.

Having set these UK-level issues in context, chapter five then applies the analytical framework outlined in chapter three to the Scottish Conservative Party. It finds that party change has been mostly limited to organisational reforms and that the party chose not to change on other areas, despite having the autonomy to do so.

Chapter six applies the framework to the Welsh Conservative Party. It finds that leadership change had a significant impact on the party's policies, strategy and presentation. However, there was no change in the party's organisation and it remained closely integrated into the statewide UK Conservative Party.

Chapter seven is a comparative discussion of the findings from the previous two chapters, placing the analysis back within the literature on party change and political parties. It notes the importance of studying a party's *enacted* autonomy on the ground as well as its *formal* autonomy, as found in its constitution and standing orders. Finally, chapter eight concludes the thesis by reflecting back on the issues of party change, multi-level politics and unionism discussed here.

1.7 Conclusion

In linking sub-state parties, party change and path dependency, this thesis seeks a detailed explanation for the behaviour of the post-devolution Welsh and Scottish Conservative Parties. However, although it sacrifices breadth for depth (it does not, for instance, compare all of the UK statewide parties post devolution), it still makes a comparative contribution to the study of political parties.

2. Methodology and Research Design

2.1 Introduction

This thesis is a comparative examination of party change in two political parties. This chapter outlines and justifies the methods it adopts in order to address its main research questions. There is no perfect methodological approach to the study of social phenomena. The same case or concept may be examined in a variety of different and equally useful ways. Instead, social scientists have to choose the methods of inquiry that best suit their aims. Designing social research involves a series of trade-offs (for instance, between breadth and depth or detail and generalisability). A choice of approach may be subject to perfectly legitimate criticism from scholars who come from a different perspective. It is therefore essential to explicitly acknowledge and justify the advantages, limitations and assumptions of the approach adopted (Gerring, 2001: 4-5).

This chapter begins by discussing the research questions of this thesis. It concludes that they are best addressed by a detailed qualitative approach. However, while such an approach has the potential to generate rich historical explanations, it may be criticised for being less generalisable than a comparison of several cases. This chapter then addresses the methods used to investigate the territorial Conservative Party: semi-structured elite interviewing, newspaper sources, memoirs and examination of party statutes, speeches and manifestos. Again, whilst these allow a rich and detailed narrative, they have limitations: manifestos may be written by a narrow group of unrepresentative elites; interviewees may unconsciously or deliberately misremember key events. Triangulating findings by combining these sources is therefore a useful way of building a picture of party change in the territorial Conservative Party.

2.2 A Qualitative Case Study: Trade-offs in Research Design

This thesis seeks to understand the processes of change and continuity in the Welsh and Scottish Conservative parties in the post-devolution period. The main research question of this thesis is: how did the Welsh and Scottish Conservative Parties adapt to devolution and multi-level politics? Answering such a question requires an in-depth focus on the post-devolution political environment and, most especially, on the people,

organisations and ideas that had the potential to drive party change. Only in this way will we be able to isolate and examine the complex social processes which affected these two parties.

This thesis is, therefore, explicitly concerned with the history of the post-1997 Scottish and Welsh Conservative parties. History matters here for three central reasons (Steinmo, 2008: 127). First, acquiring expertise in certain cases is an essential task for political scientists (Kavanagh, 1991; Gerring, 2001: 122; Tilly, 2006; Burnham *et al.*, 2008: 174). As Tilly (2006: 420) describes, 'Not only do all political processes occur in history and therefore call for knowledge of their historical contexts, but also where and when processes occur influence *how* they occur. History thus becomes an essential element of sound explanations for political processes.'

Second, as Steinmo (2008: 127) explains, 'behaviour, attitudes and strategic choices take place inside particular social, political, economic and even cultural contexts'. Actors are shaped by their surroundings in ways that cannot be explained fully if they are taken out of their temporal setting and treated simply as variables. We cannot hope to fully understand a party's behaviour by simply studying the raw output of election results or quantitative analysis of how many times words appear in manifestos. Although political parties in general have much in common, often their actions can only be explained through detailed knowledge of history, idiosyncrasies and people. Their specificities should not be viewed as a barrier to parsimonious theory building or as a difficult variable to codify and aggregate: they are instead a reflection of complex social realities (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 86; Della Porta, 2008: 207). A case study reaches the heart of these questions.

Finally, actors' perceptions and expectations are themselves shaped by the past (Steinmo, 2008: 128). Political actors are students of political history whose ideas and attitudes are products of their own past experiences and their own interpretations of events. The attitudes in government of Margaret Thatcher and Geoffrey Howe, for instance, were indelibly marked by their experience in Edward Heath's cabinet; John Major's feelings about inflation were influenced by his own personal circumstances; public policy-making in post-devolution Scotland is informed by an interpretation of the previous 18 years of Conservative government. This thesis is, therefore, also explicitly interested in the meaning which actors attach to their actions (Bevir and Rhodes, 2003). What to a political scientist may seem like a

'rational' course to follow may be ignored in a political party not only because change is difficult, but also because party elites interpret events and problems differently.

These assumptions about the nature of the research question may be summarised as a historical institutionalist approach. Steinmo (2008: 126) describes this approach as standing between a rational choice institutionalism (which emphasises how rules shape an individual's choices and interpretations of how to maximise personal gain) and sociological institutionalism (which emphasises how human beings naturally follow social norms in pursuing their goals). Instead, it views humans as '*both* norm-abiding rule followers *and* self-interested rational actors. How one behaves depends on the individual, on the context and on the rules (Steinmo, 2008: 126).

However, although historical institutionalist analysis of a case study is the most appropriate tool to explore the questions this thesis wishes to ask, it must be acknowledged that there are limitations to such an approach. Firstly, although it may provide detailed explanations for one case, it is less useful for explaining variances across several cases. This thesis unapologetically privileges depth over breadth (for a contrasting approach, see, for instance, Fiorina, 1995). Secondly, it might be argued that the conclusions produced from this type of research are necessarily subjective. A scholar with a different perspective might argue that all that is produced here is a subjective interpretation of events: 'the condescending remark 'that's only a case study'' (Punch, 2005: 147).

In response, in addition to the justification of the importance of in-depth understanding of specific cases outlined above, we can also point to the possibilities for triangulating findings. Elite interviews can be combined and compared with other sources, such as speeches and manifestos, to build up a picture that draws on several sources. It is also useful to compare the perspectives of party elites with other sources to highlight points of disagreement worthy of further investigation. Moreover, case studies in particular are ideally placed to complement larger-N studies by generating hypotheses and variables to be tested, or in explaining outlying or problematic cases. As Gerring (2004: 350) observes, 'in the real world of social science, inspiration arises from perspiration. 'Lightbulb' moments build on a close engagement with the particular facts of a particular case (unit).' He continues:

> …the very "subjectivity" of case study research allows for the
> generation of a great number of hypotheses, insights that may not be

apparent to the cross-unit researcher who works with a thinner set of empirical data across a larger number of units and with a more determinate (fixed) definition of cases, variables and outcomes. It is the very fuzziness of case studies that grant them a strong advantage in research at exploratory stages for the single-unit study allows one to test a multitude of hypotheses in a rough-and-ready way.

Thus, not only does a case study make an essential contribution to political science in its own right; it is also uniquely able to complement and enhance analyses from other methodological approaches. As with all approaches, it involves consideration of the trade-offs in research design (Brady and Collier, 2004; Gerring, 2001).

This thesis does not aim to contribute to a 'grand theory' of party change that explains all or most cases. However, it does aim to talk in a comparative conceptual language and address its conclusions to the comparative literature in such a way as it might be of interest to a scholar who studies sub-state party politics or party change but has no interest in the Conservative Party (Punch, 2005: 148).

2.3 Elite Interviews

This thesis uses semi-structured interviews with political elites as a central source of evidence about the reasons for the extent and nature of party change. Firstly, this allows us to probe the motivations and interpretations of the key actors involved in party change. In particular, it allows actors to express views that might be contrary to a party's official positions or policies. We can therefore go beyond analysing the manifestations of party change and start to ask *why* things happened (or did not happen) in a certain way. In the complex social system of a political party, this could equally be for reasons of personality and time constraints, as well as politics and ideology. Secondly, interviews allow us to explore changes that take place below the surface of a political party. A change in a party's strategy may be highly significant internally but fail in its main purpose because it does not show up in manifestos or public perceptions.

When interviewing political elites, a semi-structured format is preferred for two main reasons. Firstly, as Rossman and Rallis (2003: 192) point out, 'elites respond well to inquires about broad topics and to intelligent, provocative, open-ended questions that allow them the freedom to use their knowledge and imagination' (see also Odendahl and Shaw, 2002). Secondly, although the common format ensures

that the main research focus is covered, it also allows scope to respond to the interviewee's answers and deviate into areas that were not previously thought to be significant. The interview can thus become an in-depth conversation with a greater give and take that allows the interviewee in part to set the agenda according to what he or she perceives to be important.

For this thesis, interviewees are identified anonymously by number, except where they indicated that they were happy for their remarks to be attributed. This is designed to allow interviewees to speak more freely about their experiences and opinions. This was especially important for this study, as many of the interviewees were still serving politicians or officials at the time of the interviews. The majority of interviews were face to face. However, two interviews with politicians were carried out over the telephone and one responded to questions by email.

Interviewees were selected on the basis of their experience in the party and their knowledge of its internal workings. Interviewees were contacted in the first instance by email. Some took a long time to respond or did not reply at all. This part of the process also involved responding to requests for further information or clarification about the nature of the research. It was important to be mindful that it was not possible to achieve an exactly representative sample of people from different sections of the party (for instance, an equal number of MSPs or AMs or the same balance of officials and politicians). However, in this detailed, qualitative study such an exact sample is not essential. Instead, this thesis privileged depth of analysis in interviews and drew on this alongside other sources.

There was a 'snowballing' effect during the interview process: after being interviewed, interviewees suggested others who might be able to help. This allowed the identification of party elites who were previously unknown to the author. In particular, when interviewees understood the nature of the research and the relevance of this study to the party, they felt comfortable in recommending others. Establishing a tone of professionalism and trust is therefore a huge asset in conducting research of this nature. Researchers should be mindful of the potential for interviewees to put them in touch with other potential sources who may be either unknown or unwilling to be interviewed without a personal recommendation.

2.4 Examination of Speeches, Manifestos and Documents

The main outputs of a political party are its manifestos, elites' speeches and key internal documents such as constitutions and reports. In order to understand party change (or a party's attempts to change), these all require careful consideration. They are important sources of information about how a party wishes itself to be perceived and how it formally organises itself. We can thus tell a great deal about a party from its formal organisation, its policy positions over time and its main internal preoccupations (the way party elites define and try to deal with problems). However, it is important to acknowledge that documents are 'non-reactive' sources. They can only ever tell part of the story and may reflect difficult internal compromises (Webb *et al.*, 1994).

These can be triangulated with findings from elite interviews to highlight points of overlap or difference. In particular, it will be interesting to examine the extent to which manifestos are useful as an indicator of wider party change, or whether they merely reflect the views of a small team around the leader. Similarly, it is essential to try to detect in speeches and policy announcements what strategy a party is pursuing and how this might change or remain constant over time.

2.5 Conclusion

This thesis is driven by a case, rather than by variables (Della Porta, 2008). It seeks an in-depth understanding of the particular circumstances of the post-devolution territorial Conservative Party in Scotland and Wales. It adopts a historical institutionalist approach that is explicitly concerned with the interaction between people, the environment and ideas in their particular contexts.

3. Studying Party Change at the Sub-State Level: Towards an Analytical Framework

> 'Perception' is the intermediate variable that has to be placed between objective facts and the reaction of the parties.
>
> Deschouwer (1992: 17)

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an analytical framework that is designed to address the core research question of this thesis: how have the Scottish and Welsh Conservative parties changed in order to adapt to devolution? For the purposes of analysing and comparing the Welsh and Scottish Conservative parties, we need to modify our view of party change so that it can be operationalised at the sub-state level. Taking Harmel and Janda's (1994) model of national party change as its starting point, this chapter outlines a modified framework to analyse sub-state party change. In three broad sections, it examines: (i) the drivers of party change; (ii) the manifestations of party change; and (iii) the potential obstacles to party change presented by path dependent processes.

In order to operationalise the concept of party change for the Welsh and Scottish Conservatives, we need to combine the literature on party change with the literature about the behaviour and organisation of the sub-state branches of statewide parties. The analysis therefore explicitly involves consideration of parties as multi-level actors in which change at one level may influence change at another level, and as organisations that have to deal with the 'regional/national dilemma' (Roller and Van Houten, 2003).

This chapter begins by considering what we mean by party change. The following section examines the literature on the causes and drivers of party change. It presents a modified framework for viewing parties operating at the sub-state level adapted from Harmel and Janda's (1994) model of national party change. In particular, it incorporates more fully the idea of constitutional change as an external shock. The next section considers the mechanisms through which party change manifests itself in the branches of statewide parties. It operationalises the idea of party change by proposing a typology of manifestations of change based on organisation, personnel,

policy and autonomy. The final section explores the constraints on party change suggested by the literature on path dependency. It proposes a series of potential self-reinforcing mechanisms that could be at work in the sub-state branches of statewide parties.

Thus far, party change has mainly been studied at the national level (for example, Janda *et al.*, 1995; Harmel *et al.*, 1995; Bille, 1997; Müller, 1997; Levitsky, 2001; Dickson, 1993; Ramiro-Fernández, 2004; Samuels, 2004; Cheng, 2006; Langston, 2006; Duncan, 2007; Clemens, 2009; Fell, 2009; Bale, 2010; Bale, 2012; Hayton, 2012). Studies of party change at the sub-state level have mainly concentrated on the organisational aspects of change (for example, Fabre, 2008; Fabre and Méndez-Lago, 2009) or on the extent of sub-state autonomy (for example, Laffin *et al.*, 2007). With the freedom of being an in-depth case study, this thesis takes a slightly different and more expansive perspective. Here, party change at the sub-state level will be analysed across several dimensions beyond party organisation and autonomy (although these remain essential elements for study). It is a more explicitly bottom-up approach which views the Welsh and Scottish Conservatives as parties in their own right and not just their relationships with the statewide Conservative Party.

3.2 What Is Party Change?

In complex organisations like political parties, defining and measuring change is difficult (Mair, 1989). It involves an element of subjectivity, both in terms of what constitutes change in the first place, and perhaps more so in evaluating how significant that change is. For some parties, involving party membership in a leadership election could be a banal and evolutionary development; for others, it might represent something of a revolution. Moreover, party elites themselves may perceive changes to be more significant than they appear to an outside observer, particularly if they have been involved in implementing them.

For Harmel and Janda (1994: 275), 'party change (in the broadest sense) is any variation, alteration or modification in how parties are organized, what human and material resources they can draw upon, what they stand for and what they do.' However, for the purposes of theory building, they narrow this approach to include only 'party change that comes directly from a group decision or from action taken by a person authorized to act for the part in that sphere' (Harmel and Janda, 1994: 275). This thesis adopts this definition of party change. Party change is the deliberate

adaptation of any aspect of a party's activities, often (but not solely) in response to new external circumstances. This may be as significant as a wholesale reorganisation or as seemingly everyday as a change of staff in central office.

In analysing such change, this thesis does not attempt to comment on its effectiveness in terms of the wider party success of winning votes or office or policy concessions. It confines itself to what might be described as the 'internal life' of the Welsh and Scottish Conservative parties. It is therefore beyond the scope of this thesis to assess whether party change 'worked'. This would require a detailed (and perhaps quantitative) analysis of opinion polls and electoral results to gauge the extent to which internal party change registered with the public and with voters. The conclusions presented suggest that such an undertaking would be interesting and worthwhile, but the constraints of a single thesis mean that it is not attempted here.

3.3 Drivers of Party Change

Harmel and Janda (1994) provide a systematic framework for analysing party change and this has been applied to several case studies. However, like much parties research and theorising it deals only with change at the national level (Deschouwer, 2005; Fabre and Swenden, 2012; Jeffery and Schackel, 2013). In order to address the research questions of this thesis, it is adapted and refined to make it sensitive to the concerns of parties like the Scottish and Welsh Conservatives which operate at the sub-state level but nevertheless retain a link to the statewide party system.

Harmel and Janda's (1994) theory proposes that the most significant party change is linked to party goals. This chapter therefore begins by introducing the concept of party goals and relating it to more recent work by Strøm and Müller (1997). It then discusses in turn Harmel and Janda's (1994) three independent variables which are hypothesised to explain party change: external shocks; change in leadership; and change in dominant faction. We expand and refine these variables to include major constitutional change more fully, the change of leadership at different party levels and the effects of multi-level factions working together or against each other.

Crucially, this thesis agrees with Harmel and Janda's (1994: 262) other main premise, which is that party changes do not 'just happen'. Clearly, changes in a party's environment may *encourage* party change. However, these do not in themselves passively cause parties to change. Instead, changes in a party's

environment must be consciously absorbed by party elites in order to bring about change in political parties. Parties may choose not to change at all in response to changes in the society or institutions in which they operate. It is possible for parties to react in entirely different ways to the same environmental changes. They need not all follow strictly functional pressures (Fabre, 2008; Bratberg, 2009; Swenden and Maddens, 2009).

Thus, for Deschouwer (1992: 17), ''perception' is the intermediate variable that has to be placed between objective facts and the reactions of the parties.' Similarly, for Wilson (1994: 264), 'parties are not simply passive recipients of pressures from their socioeconomic, cultural, institutional and competitive environment.' It is therefore also the case that parties might change as a result of internal shifts which are unrelated to their outside environment (Panebianco, 1988: 241-242).

3.3.1 Party Goals and Party Change: Policy, Office, Votes…or Survival?

A fundamental premise of Harmel and Janda's (1994: 265) theory is that 'though all parties have numerous goals, each party has a 'primary goal', and the primary goal varies among parties – and perhaps within parties over time.' They propose that external shocks for parties are goal-specific: 'a 'shock' for one may be just another environmental change for another' (Harmel and Janda, 1994: 268), depending on the extent to which it affects that party's ability to achieve its primary goal. Harmel and Janda outline four broad primary goals: vote-seeking; office-seeking; policy-seeking; and internal democracy-seeking. Though parties will engage in some or all of these activities, one can be identified as central to its purpose. The generally office-seeking orientation of the UK Conservative Party can, therefore, usefully be compared to its Welsh and Scottish branches to see if the effects of, for instance, the new sub-state institutional and electoral environments have encouraged them to move towards a new primary goal.

The vote-seeking party

This model is most associated with scholars who make strong assumptions about the rationality of political parties. Downs (1957) proposes that parties seek above all else to win votes so they can win elections and govern. Thus 'politicians…are motivated by the desire for power, prestige, and income…their primary objective is to be

elected. This in turn implies that each party seeks to receive more votes than any other' (Downs, 1957: 30-31). For vote-maximising parties therefore 'the event that would most obviously send shock waves…is electoral failure or at least a pattern of electoral failures' (Harmel and Janda, 1994: 269).

Although making vote-seeking assumptions about the behaviour of political parties is extremely useful for parsimonious theory building, as Strøm and Müller (1999: 9) point out 'votes can only plausibly be *instrumental* goals.' Parties seek votes to achieve other ends, either through influence over policy or the benefits of government office.

The office-seeking party

There are two reasons to seek office: for the intrinsic perks of office itself and the benefits in the form of influence over policy (for instance, access to civil service resources and the ability to placate important constituencies); or because the prestige of holding office may help in winning votes at the next election (Müller and Strøm, 1999: 6). Because of the difficulty of deciding the precise purpose for which office is sought by political parties Müller and Strøm (1999: 6) suggest a wider definition of office-seeking behaviour: 'Is this behaviour aimed at increasing the party's control of executive office benefits, for whatever reasons, even if it means sacrificing policy objectives or our prospects in the next election?'

According to Harmel and Janda (1994: 270), for office-maximising parties the shock of being out of government will be a central driver of party change. In systems where coalition government is the norm it becomes especially important to be seen as a credible partner in government. The loss of such status is especially concerning for office-seeking parties. For Harmel and Janda (1994: 270), 'This is most likely to happen when the other relevant parties have changed themselves…or when circumstances in society have changed in ways that have altered the perception of your party's acceptability as a partner.' Similarly, if a party's preferred coalition partner comes to be seen as compromised, then this is likely to prompt a reassessment of that party's office-seeking strategy. In Scotland and Wales, the proportional electoral systems and the resulting possibilities for coalition government may affect Conservatives' calculations about the ways in which they need to change. Unlike at a UK level, being an attractive coalition partner may become more of a priority: 'if you're going to be invited to join them in government, you'd better not only look and

act like them, but even think enough like them to be considered acceptable' (Harmel and Janda, 1994: 264).

The policy-seeking party

If a party's primary goal is to influence policy, then in a multi-party polity where coalition government is the norm, the raw pursuit of more votes becomes less important. Instead, some parties try to place themselves in a position where they will have the maximum impact on policy decisions they deem important. This may involve taking government portfolios that allow the party to satisfy its policy interests. It may equally involve the judicious playing of opposition politics in order to win concessions from the government. This may come in the form of support for budget or confidence motions

The internal democracy-seeking party

For some parties the above primary goals are peripheral concerns: their priority is rather to ensure the maximum level of participation in decisions by their members. These parties are therefore especially sensitive to changes in their members' opinions. However, an external cause of this change may be societal or party system shifts (Harmel and Janda, 1994: 271). In Green parties and parties of the extreme left it is more common to see patterns of behaviour which suggest that the party is sacrificing its wider electoral interests in order to ensure that internal democracy remains robust. They may resist the professionalisation of party machinery or the adoption of a more moderate programme in order to attract more votes or appear a more plausible partner in coalition.

Survival?

However, beyond the neatness of the above goals, we must also consider that for some parties having a goal beyond survival is a distant luxury. Thus, for Panebianco (1988), attributing rational goals to political parties is intensely problematic because political parties are not rational organisations. It takes for granted something that is in fact a problem. Goals might instead be treated as a dependent variable in their own right because they emerge from complex internal processes and arguments (Panebianco, 1988: 8). In this context, organisational survival might be placed before achieving the original aims of a party, which can be retained for unity purposes but

largely ignored (Panebianco, 1988: 16). In Michels' (1968) formulation, there is a 'substitution of ends', in which the main goal becomes existence, rather than the pursuit of political change. For a party that suffered such a devastating defeat in 1997, particularly in Scotland and Wales, such considerations are especially worthy of attention in the Conservative Party.

Thus, whilst linking party change to party goals in this way is a useful heuristic device that can help to isolate or analyse different aspects of a party's motivations, it must be remembered that a party may not have any at all. Assuming a rolling programme of forward thinking in political parties may in fact obscure other processes worthy of study when, for instance, parties might be desperately in search of a goal.

3.3.2 External Shocks and Party Change: Changing the Constitution

For Harmel and Janda (1994) the nature and effect of external shocks are different for parties depending on their primary goal. Thus, for a democracy-seeking party, losing an election may not be a shock which prompts reflection and change; for an office-seeking party, the effect is likely to be more pronounced. However, Harmel and Janda's (1994: 267-268) discussion of external stimuli which prompt change does not quite deal adequately with decentralised or federal states.

The decentralisation within western European states over the past 30 years has prompted party change to deal with new levels of government (Keating, 2001; Hooghe *et al.*, 2010). Parties have more explicitly had to adapt to patterns of electoral competition and feelings of national identity in regions that were previously controlled by the centre. For instance, devolution in the UK to Scotland and Wales has prompted statewide parties to reconsider their structures and policy priorities. Similarly, in Spain, asymmetrical devolution to the regions has forced parties to adapt their organisation and strategy. Parties with different primary goals may not react in the same manner to decentralisation, but they will still be faced with pressure to adapt to the new institutional environment. Thus both an office-seeking party and a vote-seeking party will need to decide how best to change in order to achieve their goals at the sub-state level, unless they plan to protest about new sub-state institutions by refusing to take part in them at all. We must also consider the possibility that parties will pursue different goals at different levels. It is likely that the office-seeking

orientation of the UK Conservative Party will remain the same, regardless of how its sub-state branches perceive their main priorities.

3.3.3 Leadership change and party change

The Scottish and Welsh Conservative Parties have each had three different post-devolution leaders. However, the evidence on the impact of leadership change on party change is mixed. Harmel *et al.* (1995: 6) hypothesise that: 'Leadership change is associated with party change, even with all possible direct effects of poor electoral performance (and resulting leadership changes) already removed.' Thus it is 'a sufficient, though not necessary, condition for party change.' Leaders are central interpreters of the reasons for poor election results and are often the instigators of organisational or programmatic reform. Their assessment of whether reform is necessary and their attempts to block it may have a significant impact on the scope for change. As Wilson (1994: 264) points out: '…party leaders and reformers as the key intervening variable that determines whether or not parties will, in fact, respond to any of these factors that make transformation possible or desirable.' Moreover, as Harmel *et al.* (1995: 4) note: 'Different leaders will assess things differently; different leaders have different abilities with which to develop and implement changes when they do want them.' Leaders with an electoral mandate for change from the party membership may be in an especially powerful position to drive through party change.

However, the impact of leadership change on party change will be affected by the structure and culture of different political parties. For instance, in the highly centralised and office-seeking UK Conservative Party, a high degree of autonomy is given to the party leadership. A new leader therefore has considerable scope to radically alter strategy and policy positions without the express permission of party members or officials (Bale, 2010: 17). During the coalition negotiations in 2010, William Hague observed that the Conservative Party 'is an absolute monarchy but this is qualified by regicide' (quoted in Laws, 2010: 102).

Leadership change in a party that prizes internal democracy may not have as much impact. Thus, Harmel *et al.* (1995: 7) hypothesise that: 'The relationship between leadership changes and party change is stronger for parties with strong leadership structures than for parties with severely limited leaders'. In contrast, in parties where the membership exercise strong oversight and control over the party leadership, it might be expected that change is less likely because the leadership has

to a much greater extent to ensure they take the party members with them (Samuels, 2009: 1020).

Harmel *et al.*'s (1995: 12-14) cross-national data of six parties for the period 1950-1990 largely supports both hypotheses. Party change usually follows leadership change and this effect is most pronounced in parties (like the German CDU and the British Conservative Party) which have strong leadership structures. The effect is smaller in more decentralised parties like the German SPD and the British Labour Party. However, Samuels (2009) finds that in the Brazilian Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT), where the leadership's room for manoeuvre is quite substantially constrained by the input of party members, the party's success at a sub-national level resulted in party members feeling more accountable to a wider electorate. Combined with the taste of electoral success, this encouraged members to think more pragmatically about moderating the party's programme at a national level (Samuels, 2009: 1020).

There is therefore in any leadership-driven attempt to change a party a tension between what Panebianco (1988: 26-27) refers to broadly as party 'believers' and 'careerists'. For the former, adherence to the party's founding principles and traditions trumps electoral considerations; for the latter, more likely to be found at the party's elite level, pragmatism (tempered for internal consumption with 'constant and ritual references to the ideological goals') is the priority.

More in-depth case studies have generated further mixed evidence about the impact of party leadership changes. Müller (1997) finds that changes in leadership were the driving force behind changes in the Austrian Socialist Party's campaigning techniques. Indeed, alongside electoral defeats and changes in dominant factions, 'leadership change must be considered as the single most important factor' (Müller 1997: 309). However, Bille (1997) finds that in the Danish Social Democratic Party, changes of leadership tended to facilitate programmatic changes already in motion, rather than be the drivers of those changes themselves. In addition, no significant changes were made to party organisational rules as a result of efforts by changed leaders. It may also be that changes in leadership have much more slow-burning consequences for political parties. In the rather unwieldy structures of the German CDU, Clemens (2009) finds that the impact of Angela Merkel's leadership was a long process, rather than a single event.

In multi-level parties like the UK Conservative Party, it is likely that there will be tensions between the national and regional party leaderships, particularly over

issues like autonomy and candidate selection (Hopkin, 2003). Where leaderships at both levels are in agreement about organisational or programmatic change, then this change is more likely. Where there is significant disagreement (if, for instance, leaders at different levels come from different party factions), then the resulting arguments may make party change more difficult.

The effect of leadership change on party change is therefore mixed, but we may tentatively say that party leaders are in a strong position to drive change when they have the institutional resources to do so (in terms of a mandate, a culture of hierarchy or a perceived legitimacy) or if they move with the grain of the party membership who share an analysis of the problems that need to be solved (Panebianco, 1988: 246). However, party change may not follow leadership change simply because the leaders who take over do not believe it is required or because they are simply not dominant enough to impose it (Fell, 2009)

3.3.4 Dominant Faction Change and Party Change: Factions at Both Levels

Parties are coalitions of interests and factions (Kitschelt, 1989: 47). As Katz and Mair (1992: 6) emphasise:

> …*a party itself is a political system*. Within each of the three faces of party organization [voluntary, governing and bureaucratic], politics is endlessly played out, with different coalitions of forces and actors striving for dominance. Politics is clearly part of the interactions of all three faces, reflecting the tensions that underlie their various interrelationships, as well as the struggle for relative influence within the organization *tout court*.

Such factional tensions are played out, for instance, in the UK Labour Party in the split between Blairite and Brownite groups, and in the Liberal Democrats between 'Orange Book' liberals and more left-wing social democrats. If there is such strong disagreement between factions about the future direction of a political party, then the replacement in leadership positions or dominance of one faction over another could be expected to make party change more likely (Harmel and Janda, 1994: 267). Panebianco (1988: 244) also argues that party change is correlated with shifts in internal power dynamics which are often subsequently entrenched in changes to party rules.

In their analysis of five parties in the UK and Germany in the period 1950-1990, Harmel and Tan (2003) find that party change does tend to follow changes in a party's dominant faction. However, based on their mixed findings, they conclude that in situations where a new dominant faction's position is less secure (due, for instance, to lukewarm support in the party membership or bureaucracy), then new leaders from that dominant faction may be instrumental in driving change (Harmel and Tan, 2003: 422).

However, in addition to Harmel and Janda's (1994) treatment of factions we also need to consider the possibilities of intra-party factionalism which straddles the different levels of a party. In a federal or decentralised state, there exists the possibility for different factions to control different branches of a party. There is also the potential for alliances among factions with similar beliefs operating at different levels of a party. As Verge and Gómez (2010: 3) point out, 'factional conflict is potentially aggravated by territorial conflict between party levels.' They propose a framework for viewing factions which takes into account this more complicated picture in multi-level states. The dominant faction's reaction to a challenge is conditioned both by the extent of devolution within the party and the nature of the strategy used by the insurgent faction. Organisational change is therefore prompted not only by a dominant faction's vision of the future of a party, but also because it is a tool to control factions.

Thus, from an analysis of Spanish parties, Verge and Gómez (2009: 14) generate three hypotheses about factionalism in multi-level contexts: (1) when an opposing faction encourages dissent at a central (or party headquarters) level, dominant factions will attempt to use regional branches to undermine it; (2) when dissent emerges from the bottom up, the dominant faction will tighten its grip on regional branches; (3) where an opposing faction employs both strategies, the dominant faction's reaction will depend on the nature of the threat (in Spain, the Partido Popular increased the power of the central party in response to an opposing faction's multi-layered strategy; Izquierda Unida at different times both increased and decreased regional autonomy).

3.3.5 Electoral defeat

A particularly emphatic electoral defeat is likely to concentrate minds in any political party, particularly if that party tends towards seeking office or votes. However, the

impact of such defeats depends not only on how they affect a party's sense of its own purpose, but also, crucially, how they are *perceived* by party members and elites. The party leadership is thus, once again, one of the central interpreters of events and their significance (Deschouwer, 1992: 17; Wilson, 1994: 281).

It is therefore useful in this context to consider different types of electoral defeat. Janda *et al.* (1995: 182-183) propose a five-fold typology. A *calamitous* election is interpreted as a decisive rejection of a party or its policy stance or the clear endorsement of an electoral rival; a *disappointing* election will hurt but may result in a smaller loss of seats or the winning of fewer seats than the party expected; a *tolerable* election is accepted as the ordinary rough and tumble of politics with perhaps a small loss or gain in votes and seats; a *gratifying* election is one which can be interpreted as a vote of confidence in a party's performance or policies, accompanied perhaps by a gain in seats (beyond what was expected), allowing the party to enter government; and, finally, a *triumphal* election involves a big gain in seats and votes or the decisive defeat of a rival (Janda *et al.*, 1995: 182-183).

3.4 Manifestations of Change

Having been spurred on to change by external shocks, change of leadership or dominant faction or other factors, parties must then decide the extent to which they will reform themselves to adapt to new circumstances. In order to address the research questions of this thesis we are interested in change in the sub-state branches of statewide parties. For these parties, a change in the territorial structure of a state poses especially difficult problems. There is a tension between their belief in maintaining the integrity of the state and their desire to be seen as champions for regional issues. This tension is played out not only in terms of policy and candidate selection, but also in terms of the structure of regional parties themselves (Hopkin, 2009; Thorlakson, 2009). Roller and Van Houten (2003) have summed up the challenges facing the regional branches of statewide parties as the 'regional/national dilemma'. Thus, we operationalise party change by isolating and examining four broad principal elements: organisation and sub-state organisational autonomy; personnel (both elected and non-elected); and policy.

3.4.1 Organisation and Sub-state Organisational Autonomy

Party organisation is an important expression of a party's attitude and strategy towards its regional branches. It is also a key lever of party change. Parties which have just suffered electoral defeats often respond by engaging in organisational change (see, for instance: Kelly, 2003; Fell, 2009; Bale, 2010: 74; Scottish Labour Party, 2011). However, as Ball (2005: 12-13) points out in relation to the Conservative Party, 'activity here can be a substitute for tackling more fundamental and difficult problems in other areas.' This section will firstly assess the influences on organisational strategy and regional autonomy for statewide parties and their branches. These influences are grouped under four central themes: regional party competition; the nature of constitutional change; history and ideology; and the effects of being in office. This section will then consider indicators of autonomy for the regional branches of statewide parties. Finally, this section will consider theories of party organisation in multi-level contexts.

Influences on Regional Branch Party Strategy and Organisation[1]

In terms of party organisation for regional branches of statewide parties, Roller and Van Houten (2003: 6) suggest four potential 'ideal type' approaches of party change: firstly, breaking away completely from the statewide party to form a regional party; secondly, adopting decentralising reforms of the statewide party to cope with the regional challenge; thirdly, ploughing on with the existing structures despite regional devolution; or, fourthly, further centralising party structures to pursue a more coordinated approach to regionalist party competition. UK political parties have in the main opted for the second approach and have decentralised their existing structures to mirror the devolved parts of the country.

However, Bratberg (2009) finds that the nature of this change in the UK does not follow strictly functional pressures. Rather, it might better be explained by an institutionalist approach which emphasises the importance of party legacies, organisations and incremental change. Similarly, in her study of the UK and Spain, Fabre (2008: 326) notes that 'parties and their leaders remain crucial actors in processes of party change and that parties do not simply react to environmental changes.' For Bratberg (2009), the UK's devolution reforms do not represent a

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[1] This section draws on Convery (2012).

'critical juncture' which forces a substantial break with the past. However, he does suggest that more radical reform 'is typically preconditioned by a window of opportunity which may open in the wake of electoral failure' (Bratberg, 2009: 77).

Firstly, party strategy may be affected by the nature of party competition at the regional level. Some multi-level party systems display more marked differences than others. A fully integrated multi-level system would be one in which the same parties competed at different levels with roughly the same patterns of competition. A more divergent multi-level system may involve nationalist parties competing at only the regional level or statewide parties which compete in only certain regions. Parties which compete at all levels may receive different levels of support at regional and national elections (Swenden and Maddens, 2009: 6).

If a region has a strong sense of identity, this may affect the regional party system and play a part in determining how much it diverges from the statewide one. The presence of strong regionalist parties and a divergent sub-national party system require parties to more explicitly consider issues of regional and party autonomy and identity, although it may not automatically lead to more autonomous regional parties (Roller and Van Houten, 2003: 5). However, where regional elections are more strongly affected by the statewide context this may also affect the strategy adopted. For instance, Fabre (2008: 325) finds that the Spanish statewide parties tend to organise all of their regional branches in the same manner, regardless of whether particular regions have strong nationalist identities and movements. In contrast, in the UK, where regional elections are not considered to have a great effect on the statewide political system, greater regional autonomy is more likely.

A less integrated multi-level party system is more likely to occur where there are strong regional variations in the make-up of electorates. Where electorates at different levels display markedly different preferences it creates a 'region-specific pattern of competition' which has to be managed by state-wide political parties (Deschouwer, 2003: 223). Electoral competition is also affected by the voting system used at different levels of the state. In the United Kingdom, there are six different electoral systems in operation. This means that, for instance, the Conservative Party, which competes at all levels (including at the 2010 general election in Northern Ireland), has to devise strategies to cope with these differences.

Secondly, parties' adaptation to regional distinctiveness may be influenced by the constitution of the state. Generally we might expect that regions with greater

powers will have more autonomous branches of statewide parties. Swenden and Maddens (2009: 257) conclude that for the most part this is the case, but note that 'the effect of decentralisation does not play out uniformly across all statewide party organizations and may not manifest itself immediately.' The effect of regional power distribution will also depend on how a federal or quasi-federal state is organised (Deschouwer, 2003: 221-222; Thorlakson 2009: 158).

Swenden and Maddens (2009: 16) hypothesise that the organisation of the regional elements of statewide political parties will reflect the type and extent of decentralisation in a state. Thus where decentralisation is based on a jurisdictional design (where levels of government are more distinct and independent, like Scotland), it is expected that regional parties will have more autonomy. In regions where the devolution of powers follows a more functional design (shared competence and overlapping responsibility, as in Wales) regional parties will be less autonomous. Similarly, Swenden and Maddens (2009: 17) suggest that parties in regions with more autonomy will 'have acquired a special status within the party. This should result in high levels of regional autonomy or special participatory rights in statewide organizational affairs which other regional branches lack.'

As Harmel and Janda (1994) argue, parties are naturally conservative organisations which tend to have an inbuilt resistance to change. Strategies of adaptation may therefore be affected not only by practical considerations, but also by a party's history, ideology and internal dynamics (Panebianco, 1988; Hopkin and Bradbury, 2006). Institutional 'stickiness' and inertia often prevent parties from responding to new electoral arenas in an optimal way. What to a political scientist may appear to be a 'rational' response to new electoral circumstances may be ignored in favour of the status quo simply because internal change is too difficult (Hopkin, 2003: 228). Similarly, a party's ideological outlook may affect how it perceives the need to adapt to regional variations. Fabre (2008: 326) notes that the more centralised structures of the Partido Popular in Spain are a product of its history and views about devolution to the autonomous communities. Similarly, the unique history of the Scottish Conservative Party as the highly autonomous Scottish Unionist Party before 1965 has affected its present situation.

Finally, regional parties may be affected by being in government in one or more territorial levels (Hopkin 2003: 234). Being in opposition seems to make parties tend towards supporting more regional autonomy. Statewide parties may wish to use

greater regional autonomy as a means to gain the support needed to return to power at national level. Whilst in opposition statewide parties may also be less concerned if their regional branches decline to support statewide party policies (Roller and Van Houten, 2003: 8; Fabre, 2008: 325).

The eventual party strategy shaped by these factors is expressed through a party's attitude towards its regional organisation, autonomy and policy. Parties must decide how much autonomy to give their regional branches over issues like candidate selection, leadership selection, finance and policy-making (Laffin *et al.*, 2007: 90-92). This involves a delicate process of managing factions and interests to achieve a workable, and politically successful, relationship.

Theorising Statewide-Regional Party Relationships: From Unity to Stratarchy

All theories of regional party organisation incorporate the idea of trade-offs. Van Houten (2009) proposes that we view the relationship between a statewide party and its regional branch through the prism of a principal-agent model. Essentially, the statewide leadership of a party benefits from delegating tasks and authority to the regional branch, but also takes the risk that the regional party will over-step its mandate, resulting in a loss of control.

Van Houten (2009: 140-141) assumes that statewide party leaderships are motivated by a desire to do well in regional elections in order to pursue their policy goals. He also assumes that regional parties do not want to have their actions vetoed or circumscribed by the statewide leadership. He expects that 'the amount and type of authority delegated to the regional branch can be expected to vary with the need for regionally specific information, expertise or credibility.' (Van Houten, 2009: 141). Van Houten suggests that we should look at the things regional parties are not allowed to do in order to gain and understanding of how far they are set free by the national party. He hypothesises that we will see where ultimate authority rests during moments of crisis when issues need to be decisively settled. Again, it is suggested that candidate selection will be a central area of controversy.

Statewide parties face several possible costs and dilemmas when they delegate power to regional branches. For instance, the statewide party may be unable to,

> adequately assess the influence of the agent's action on the observed outcome…the national party needs to judge the extent to which the

regional branch leadership is responsible for a good or disappointing election result (Van Houten 2009: 143).

This may lead to the statewide party to wrongly dismiss regional agents who they perceive to be incompetent or hold on to ineffective ones because they cannot accurately attribute blame.

There also exist several potential 'conflicts of interest' between principal and agent here. A regional party may benefit from 'running against Washington' by disowning central parts of the statewide party's policy programme or by seeking special treatment for a region in a manner which is unpopular in the rest of the party or in other regions. This has the potential to damage the statewide party's interests in other elections (Van Houten 2009: 143-144).

Nevertheless the statewide party's leadership can exert several mechanisms of control over regional branches. For Van Houten (2009: 145), 'analysis of these procedures and mechanisms are at the heart of the delegation approach to the study of organisations.' One of the simplest ways this can be done is through trying to influence the selection of regional party leaders and candidates (a key measure of regional party autonomy). Statewide parties may also use other more formal means of control. These may involve:

> Procedures for the adoption and approval of election programmes, the existence of consultation bodies for party programmatic and organizational matters with representatives from different party levels, the creation of central party bodies to coordinate the actions of the party at different levels, and rules and conventions requiring a regional branch to seek approval from the national party for coalition formation decisions at the regional level…(Van Houten 2009: 146).

However, as Van Houten (2009: 148) concedes, one of the difficulties with this model is knowing precisely who is in control: 'it may be difficult to distinguish between a regional branch with autonomy because the national party allows this, and a regional branch which has autonomy because the national party no longer controls it.'

Carty (2004) suggests that we can view regional parties as users of a party franchise, implying a great deal of autonomy. Regional parties use the name and 'brand' of the national party but adapt it to local needs and tastes. Thus:

> Typically, parties' central organizations are responsible for providing the basic product line (policy and leadership), for devising and

directing the major communication line (the national campaign) and for establishing standard organizational management, training and financing functions.

Local or regional party organisations are then responsible for making the message work 'on the ground' and for tailoring it to suit their particular circumstances. This creates relationships of dependence and autonomy and necessitates all parts of the party working together to achieve a good result (Carty 2004: 12). Parties 'must find ways to institutionalize the structures that define their internal organizational bargains within a constitutional framework' (Carty 2004: 14). Carty labels the resulting layers of interdependence 'stratarchy'.

However, whilst Carty (2004) locates federal parties as a sub-category within his franchise model, Bolleyer (2011) suggests that they are in fact a distinct organisational type. She also points out that the functional logic of viewing parties through the prism of business franchises may fail to capture the institutional forces examined above which may be at work. The 'stratarchical' imperative is thus expanded and refined by Bolleyer (2011: 316) who describes it as 'characterized by the interplay of organizational units that act, to varying extents, autonomously, but in the end remain interdependent.' She proposes a continuum of three party structures in which stratarchy can be identified as midway between a party hierarchy and a party federation. These three models are designed to capture: procedures for conflict resolution; the power of the centre to dictate to lower levels; and how far a party is willing to tolerate regional distinctiveness which may interfere with national programmes.

Table 3.1 Bolleyer's (2011: 320) three models of multi-level party organisation

	Party hierarchy	**Party stratarchy**	**Party federation**
Locus of power	Central	Divided (across levels)	Regional
Basic organizational principle	Power concentration	Power dispersion	Power dispersion
Logic of competence distribution	-	Functional	Territorial
- National policy	Central (leadership dominated	Central (member access)	Central (territorial access)
- Candidate selection	Central	Local	Regional

- Membership	Central	Regional or local	Regional or local
Mode of formation	Top-down	Top-down or bottom-up	Bottom-up
Logic of representation of national leadership	Elite-based	Member-based	Territorial
Dominant decision-makers on national level	Individuals	Individuals	Group representatives
Definition of organizational membership (national)	Selective/individually based	Inclusive/individually based	Inclusive/group-based
Local autonomy	Low (strictly local matters only)	Medium (coherence of national brand as limit)	High (potentially at costs of national brand)
- Central integration of local/regional units	High	Low	Medium (indirect via central organs)
Conflict regulation	Central	Central	Shared
Dominant mode	Ignorance/expulsion	Tolerance/negotiation	Tolerance/negotiation
Protection of dissenters against sanctions	Non-existent	Medium	Extensive
Dominant direction of conflict	Horizontal (between competitions for national leadership)	Vertical and horizontal (between individuals and/or factions)	Vertical and horizontal (between territorial units)
Finance	Central	Shared	Regional

Testing her model on 10 newly established parties in Western Europe since 1981, Bolleyer (2011: 331-332) suggests three conclusions: firstly, that centrifugal forces which encourage dispersal of power in political parties occur in all institutional settings; secondly, that party hierarchies tend to occur in parties of the right; and, thirdly, that federal systems tend to favour power dispersal: 'the presence of a tier of directly elected (potentially powerful) regional governments implies that the success at national elections is not such an overriding priority as in unitary systems, which makes it more difficult for central elites to justify the need to strengthen central steering.'

However, Bolleyer tests her model only on newly established parties. As she points out 'parties at a much later stage of their organizational development than the new parties analysed here might spread differently across the types' Bolleyer 2011: 332). The well-established Conservative Party therefore presents an interesting case to

which her template can be applied. Indeed, Bolleyer (2011) questions whether older and new parties need to be treated as entirely separate categories.

Any movement in a party's relationship with its statewide parent is thus a key focus of analysis for sub-state party change. Increasing or decreasing autonomy in particular is highly significant for the branches of statewide parties. Organisational changes may signal wider shifts in attitudes and priorities and are in part an expression of how party elites treat the territorial dimension of statewide politics. Overall, however, as with the drivers of party change, it is difficult to detect an overall pattern on how parties respond to regional challenges. Detterbeck's (2012) detailed study of west European multi-level party politics concludes that: 'there is no uniform response of the major statewide parties towards territorial asymmetries in party competition' (Detterbeck, 2012: 240; Detterbeck and Herpburn, 2010).

3.4.2 Personnel

The type of candidates a party attracts and retains has a substantial impact on its behaviour (Hazan and Rahat, 2006: 109). It is strongly linked with a party's processes for formulating policy and strategy (this is particularly the case in the highly-centralised Conservative Party). A party's perception in the media and public image is also determined to a great extent by its elites and how they present themselves. Thus, as Ranney (1981: 103) notes:

> It is therefore not surprising that the most vital and hotly contested factional disputes in any party are the struggles that take place over the choice of its candidates; for what is at stake in such a struggle, as the opposing sides well know, is nothing less than the control of the core of what the party stands for and does.

When selected, the power of incumbency is strong (Somit *et al.*, 1994). This can be particularly the case in parties where the 'selectorate' is composed solely of a small number of party members. This allows high-profile candidates who are already in a legislature to spend time courting individual groups and highlighting their work (Hazan and Rahat, 2006: 115-116). Hazan and Rahat (2005) find that more exclusive candidate selection procedures (involving only members or elites) are likely to be less competitive than those involving a broader section of the electorate (like party primaries).

Certain patterns of behaviour may be sustained over time therefore simply due to the difficulty of deselecting sitting members of a legislature. These elites also have a stake in defending the strategy they have pursued and the institutional arrangements that have allowed them to remain in an elected position. It is difficult for parties to change when their elites are committed to, and have a substantial stake in, the status quo.

Changes in candidate selection methods are therefore a key variable in examining party change. Procedures that make the selection of candidates from certain party factions more or less likely affect internal power struggles and over time may shift a party in a new direction. In order to change a party at any level, people with new ideas must become candidates.

3.4.3 Policy

Bale (2008: 273) defines a measure of party change for the Conservative Party in terms of policy as 'de-emphasizing (although not ignoring completely) the issues it traditionally 'owns', and ranging into enemy territory'. Programmatic change is often used as a way for parties to demonstrate internal change to voters.

For the regional branches of statewide parties, there also exists the possibility to differentiate themselves from other levels by pursuing a distinct and regionally focused policy agenda. Broadly, in comparing regional branch parties' policy platforms with their statewide parents, we can suggest three 'ideal-type' approaches:

- pursuing the same policy agenda as the statewide party;
- adapting statewide policies for regional contexts; or
- formulating distinctive regional policies which differ significantly from statewide practice.

However, it is important to recognise the difficulties parties face in deciding how to react to public opinion (at a national or regional level) in order to strengthen their position. As Budge (1994: 445) points out, even opinion polls are not necessarily reliable indicators of how policy affects votes:

> They may in general terms identify certain issues as important to electors, but leave it open as to whether these will necessarily affect their vote. For example, an overwhelming majority of British electors in the 1980s and 1990s placed welfare among their top priorities, at the same time as a plurality voted

for a tax-cutting Conservative government whose attitudes were hostile to welfare.

Faced with these uncertainties, parties use their ideology as a guide for approaching issues of policies and strategy. Budge (1994) concludes that while parties' policies may shift, their core ideological beliefs remain fairly stable over time. He argues that parties use different models of decision-making in order to decide their policy platform (Budge 1994: 461). Adams *et al.* (2004) also find that past election results have little systematic affect on a party's ideology. Instead they find that parties tend only to shift their policy positions when public opinion moves substantially in the opposite direction. Thus parties on the left will shift in a rightward direction only when public opinion moderates significantly (Adams *et al.* 2004: 590). Parties also react to the movements of other parties in a system. Adams and Somer-Topcu (2009) find that parties tend to shift their policies in the same direction as their opponents in the last election. Parties are also particularly sensitive to shifts in other parties of the same ideological family. However, overall, any attempt to change a party's policy programme is likely to encounter resistance.

For parties whose brands have been damaged by unpopular decisions taken when in government, it can be important to attempt to draw a line under previous controversies. Thus the deliberate disavowal of previous policy positions or the adoption of new ones which are more closely associated with a party's rivals are important means of signalling party change. For a party which was previously associated with radical free market reform, for instance, the tempering of that image by emphasising more pastoral concerns would be an important signal of a strategy of change. The Dutch Christian Democrats attempted to achieve such a change in their image (Duncan, 2007). Similarly, the UK Conservative Party under the leadership of David Cameron attempted a delicate process of distancing itself from some of the more hard-line neoliberal elements of Margaret Thatcher's legacy, whilst still acknowledging achievements which were dear to party members (Bale 2008: 280-281; Bale, 2010; Hayton, 2012).

3.5 Path Dependency and Constraints on Party Change

Scholars of path dependency argue that the cumulative weight of decisions taken in the past shapes present choices. The literature on path dependency is detailed and varied. It stems from theories derived from historical, sociological and rational choice

institutionalism. Broadly, we can summarise it as: a concern for the importance of timing and order; the idea of increasing returns; and an argument that change is still possible and is likely to occur at certain 'critical junctures'. It is important to note from the outset that scholars of path dependency do not claim that change is not possible or that it can *only* occur at critical junctures. Instead path dependency highlights the difficulty of change: both as a result of the accommodations made to support a particular policy and that comfort and self-reinforcement that people find in inertia.

In addition to creating groups with often significant stakes in the status quo, institutions and particular policies can also create actors who find it difficult to admit they were wrong. A self-reinforcing bounded rationality that refuses to admit counter-arguments conspires against significant changes. Sometimes changes of direction require changes of personnel. This could be particularly the case in political parties, especially those like the Conservative Party where policy-making is concentrated in the elected leader's office. Candidate selection in particular allows us to observe effects that might be labelled 'locked in'.

The idea of path dependency is prone to conceptual stretching (Sartori, 1970). That history matters is self-evident so we must be clear about precisely what represents behaviour that can be labelled path dependent (Pierson, 2004: 21). Lack of clarity about path dependence can lead to all institutions being described as path dependent until change occurs, regardless of their particular circumstances. Levi (1997: 28) suggests the following definition:

> Path dependence has to mean, if it is to mean anything, that once a country or region has started down a track, the costs of reversal are very high. There will be other choice points, but the entrenchments of certain institutional arrangements obstruct an easy reversal of the initial choice. Perhaps the better metaphor is a tree, rather than a path. Although it is possible to turn around or to clamber from one to the other –and essential if the branch dies – the branch on which the climber begins is the one she tends to follow.

Once actors have decided to pursue a particular path, the costs of changing course increase with time. Similarly, for Pierson (2004: 21) path dependency refers to 'social processes that exhibit positive feedback and thus generate branching patterns of

historical development.' Modifications to the status quo are easier than wholesale change.

Having defined path dependency, we must also be clear about the exact mechanisms we think are at work in sustaining a particular institutional dynamic. As Thelen (1999: 391) observes:

> Among other things, we need to know exactly who is invested in particular institutional arrangements, exactly how that investment is sustained over time, and perhaps how those who are not invested in the institutions are kept out. Attending to these issues is likely to generate insights into differences in the mechanisms of reproduction that sustain different kinds of institutional arrangements, or even the same kinds of institutions in different contexts.

In order for path dependency to move beyond description we need to pay attention to these concerns. This requires detailed analysis of who and what is at work explicitly or behind the scenes to constrain a change in behaviour.

3.5.1 The Importance of Timing and Order

A concern for the importance of time and the effects of the historical sequence of events is a key theme of path dependent explanations. Pierson (2004) provides the analogy of cooking to illustrate this point. A chef giving you a tour of her kitchen explains that it is divided into two parts:

> On the left, she has all the ingredients (which to your puzzlement she refers to as "variables")…On the right is an extraordinary profusion of measuring devices. You express astonishment at their complexity and detailed ornamentation, and the chef explains that each requires years to learn how to operate properly (Pierson, 2004: 1).

The chef goes on to tell you that she does not care about the sequence in which her ingredients are used: 'As long as you have the correct ingredients and they are properly measured, she insists, how, in what order, and for how long they are combined makes no difference' (Pierson, 2004: 1). In politics this is not the case: where events occur in time makes a difference.

In particular, events which occur at the beginning of a set of institutions tend to have a substantial effect. 'Getting there first' has advantages. As Pierson (2000: 263) argues, in patterns of path dependence 'earlier parts of a sequence matter much

more than later parts; an event that happens 'too late' may have no effect, although it might have been of great consequence if the timing had been different.' Events which occur at the beginning of a sequence set the tone for those which follow. If actors can mould institutions to their preferences at the outset when 'pieces are in flux' and no set patterns are established, they can substantially affect the developments which follow (Greener, 2002). Seemingly inconsequential decisions taken at the beginning can generate enduring patterns of positive feedback because it is easier for people to adapt the branch they are on, rather than change it entirely. The status quo offers the path of least resistance in part because of a sequence of 'increasing returns'. The continuing existence of the QWERTY keyboard, despite the availability of more efficient alternatives, is frequently cited as an example of this (David, 1985).

3.5.2 Increasing Returns and Positive Feedback

Once a set of institutions or procedures has been established, actors adapt to the new circumstances, generating a reinforcing 'positive feedback'. As Pierson (2000: 4) points out:

> New social initiatives – such as the creation of organizations or institutions – usually entail considerable start-up costs; individuals, as well as organizations, learn by doing; the benefits of our individual activities or those of an organization are often enhanced if they are coordinated or 'fit' with the activities of other actors or organizations; it is frequently important to bet on the right horse, so we adapt our actions in light of our expectations about the actions of others.

Thus the more we adapt our ways of working to suit a set of circumstances, the more entrenched they can become. Moving to a new system entails changing these processes and deleveraging from behaviours or actors in which we may have invested heavily. This could involve the long nurturing of relationships with important players or the public defence of positions which over time become more difficult to disown. In short:

> once historical events take place, path-dependent sequences are marked by relatively deterministic causal patterns or what can be thought of as 'inertia' – i.e., once processes are set into motion and begin tracking a

particular outcome, these processes tend to stay in motion and continue

to track this outcome (Mahoney, 2000: 511).

Adaptation creates more and more players with a stake (financially or personally) in the status quo. The positive feedback or increasing returns this generates make change more difficult.

3.5.3 Change and Critical Junctures

Critical junctures are the points at which the most substantial change is most likely and where the decisions are made which will likely affect the trajectory of future adaptations. These may occur at moments of crisis when the legitimacy of present arrangements is called into question. For political parties, this may be in the wake of a significant electoral defeat. However, the failure of the strategy of the current regime may not be enough to facilitate change. If those in charge perceive their strategy to have been correct or if they lack the resources to change, then a party may endure several electoral defeats before a critical juncture for change occurs.

3.5.4 Path Dependency and Political Parties

Path dependency has been applied to the creation of democratic institutions (Alexander, 2001); organisations such as NASA (Bruggeman, 2002) and the NHS (Greener, 2002); and technologies such as computer keyboards (David, 1985). In terms of political parties, we may see Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) theories about the frozen state of European countries' party systems as an early example of a path dependent explanation. Political parties organised social divisions into organisations: 'Once they have surmounted the initial start-up costs and fuelled processes of adaptive expectations, these parties are reproduced through time, which generates 'frozen' party systems' (Pierson, 2000: 7).

Bale *et al.* (2005) have also applied path dependency to the formation of a post-election coalition in New Zealand. They conclude that 'the birth of a coalition can at least in part be explained by its conception and its sometimes lengthy gestation – both of which combine what starts out as agency and becomes structure in so-called self-reinforcing processes' (Bale *et al.*, 2005: 497). In applying theories of path dependency to political parties' organisation, we focus on three main features that help to sustain certain patterns of behaviour: the critical juncture of new

governing arrangements and electoral systems; candidate selection and the power of incumbency; and the positive feedback of credible election results and status.

New governing arrangements: a critical juncture?

Pierson (2000: 258) argues that the collective action requirement of designing new political institutions imposes formidably high costs on political actors. Interests and preferences must be managed and compromises must be reached. There are in short high short-term transaction costs and uncertain long-term political gains (Alexander, 2001). The creation of new governing arrangements is thus difficult and infrequent.

Hopkin (2009) argues that political parties play a central role in the design of new governing arrangements. Where this involves devolution in a multi-level context, parties must also adapt their internal structures to reflect the new arrangements. This process of change is a critical moment where new paths and ideas may be considered. It provides an opportunity for parties to pause and undertake a more fundamental review of their organisation. Interests and factions may use this time to push certain agendas (for example, strengthening the role of activists) or party elites may take the opportunity to consolidate their power.

However, after new internal arrangements are put in place, they become more difficult to challenge. Those who have been given new positions of power or prestige wish to hold on to them; those who have seen their preferences reflected in the new organisation have a stake in maintaining it. The return of the daily pressures of running a political party also makes wholesale change less attractive. The critical juncture of new governing arrangements therefore provides a window of opportunity for significant institutional change in parties. This temporary flexibility fades when the new organisation becomes entrenched.

In the case of the United Kingdom, the 1999 devolution of power to Scotland and Wales had the potential to be such a critical juncture. The statewide political parties had to decide the extent to which they would adapt their internal structures to suit the new governing arrangements. This moment for change was grasped to a greater or lesser extent by all of the political parties. For the territorial Conservative Party, it was intensified by the crisis of having lost all MPs in Scotland and Wales, giving a greater sense of the party having to change significantly in order to win again.

Candidate selection and incumbency

Certain patterns of behaviour may be sustained over time simply due to the difficulty of deselecting sitting members of a legislature. These elites also have a stake in defending the strategy they have pursued and the institutional arrangements which have allowed them to remain in an elected position. This encourages an inertia that may be described as path dependent. It is difficult for parties to change when their elites are committed to, and have a substantial stake in, the status quo.

Positive Feedback through Election Results and State Funding

Path dependent processes are sustained in part because of the 'positive feedback' they generate. In the case of political parties this feedback could come through reassuring electoral results and the possibilities of state funding.

The legitimacy of party elites and the strategy they pursue could be undermined by unexpectedly poor election results. This may even precipitate a crisis that requires wider soul-searching, such as the one experienced by the territorial Conservative Party in 1997. However, where election results remain unspectacular but steady, this engenders less of a mood for reform. Instead, this reinforces the strategy that elites have already been pursuing.

If a party's elites prioritise policy and retaining their place in the legislature over government office, then vote maximisation becomes less strategically important. Of greater interest could be retaining state support for constituency staff, researchers and other resources. The provision of these resources lends legitimacy and prestige to party elites and allows the party's money to be directed towards other areas. Researchers and constituency workers also provide a pool of talent and a training ground for potential future candidates.

This could lead to a self-reinforcing dynamic among party elites who may prioritise retaining these resources above other considerations. It entrenches their view about the effectiveness of the party's present strategy and justifies a conservative view of the extent to which a party should change.

Table 3.2 Location of possible self-reinforcing mechanisms in political parties

Political process	*Path dependent pattern*	*Positive feedback*
Candidate selection	Few changes in sitting candidates leads to political and strategic inertia.	Difficult to remove sitting candidates due to awkward institutional processes. Candidates have stake in retaining present selection procedures. Candidates defend record.
(Barely) credible election results	Broadly electoral results remain the same and meet existing (possibly low) expectations.	Justifies (don't-rock-the-boat) strategy adopted by party elites. Leads party elites to believe existing strategy maintains their position (reinforcing patterns detected under candidate selection).
Parliamentary status and provision of state funding	Sustains functioning of the party	Elites use status and state funding to justify present strategy. Elites have stake in maintaining prestige (and salary) of committee and administrative parliamentary positions. Provides veneer of respectability and possible policy concessions or sense of influence. Increases visibility and prestige of candidates which is useful in processes for candidate selection that may involve party members.

Figure 3.1 A potential positive feedback loop in political parties
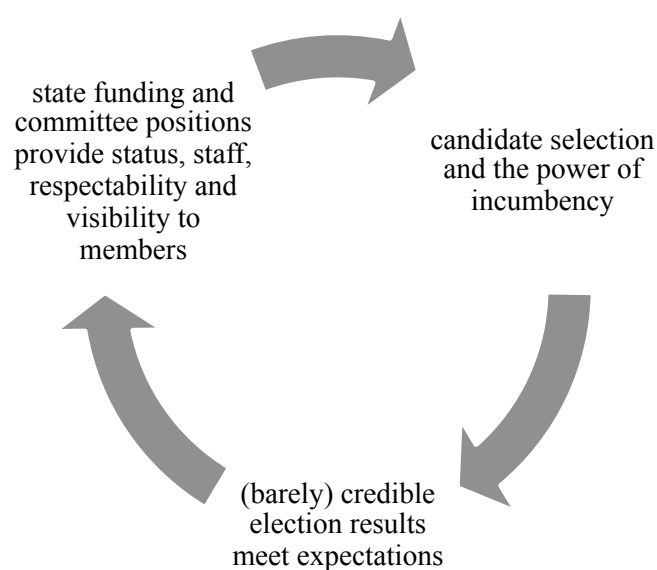
Thus, in political parties as in other complex organisations, the past can weigh heavily on options for the future. In analysing the Scottish and Welsh Conservatives, it may be useful to be mindful of the difficulty of change in terms of the path dependent processes outlined here. We may be able to go beyond merely stating that change is difficult and pinpoint some of the specific interactions that act as long-term barriers to change.

3.6 Conclusion

The evidence on what causes parties to change is mixed. It is not possible to conclude, for instance, that generally some drivers matter more than others. Similarly, it is not possible to detect a distinct pattern of how change manifests itself, for example after a party's resounding electoral defeat. However, this chapter has used the existing literature in three main ways. Firstly, it has used insights from previous studies with a national focus in order to construct a framework for studying sub-state party change. A sub-state study will inevitably focus on many of the same elements. However, it also opens up several new dimensions worthy of study, such as the specific impact of decentralisation and constitutional change and the possibility of interactions between the different levels of a party.

Secondly, and relatedly, this chapter has highlighted the importance of studying sub-state party autonomy and organisation. The analytical framework presented here attempts to capture parties as multi-level organisations. Thus, it

attempts to integrate the literature on statewide parties and territorial politics with the literature on party change by making sub-state autonomy over policy, personnel, finance and candidate selection key variables for examination.

Thirdly, this chapter has used the existing literature to provide a general guide about the areas to look out for, based on scholars' studies of other political parties. It will be useful to examine how the internal territorial politics of the Conservative Party compare to multi-level parties in other states. This will allow us to highlight points of difference or similarity and say how the Conservative Party fits into a wider understanding of multi-level party politics.

This thesis will consider the post-devolution Scottish and Welsh Conservative Parties through the analytical prism of the three central elements outlined here: the drivers of change (external shocks, leadership or faction change, electoral defeat); the manifestations of change (organisation/autonomy, policy, personnel); and the difficulties of changing established organisations (the presence or perhaps lack of path dependent processes). In short, the framework presented here allows both a detailed systematic examination of the case of the Conservative Party and ensures that this analysis is situated in a comparative theoretical context so that it can inform wider debates.

4. The UK Conservative Party: Statewide Level Context, 1997-2011

> [The Tories] were as culturally inept as they were economically successful. They created the substance of the new country but they couldn't articulate it.
>
> Andrew Sullivan, *New York Times Magazine,* February 1999 (quoted in Snowdon, 2010: 58).

4.1 Introduction

The post-1997 Conservative Party famously took a long time to realise the extent it would have to change in order to regain office (Norris and Lovenduski, 2004; Bale, 2010; Snowdon, 2010). Before going on to examine the territorial Conservative Party in detail, this chapter establishes the wider UK context for the changes that occurred at the sub-state level. The Scottish and Welsh Conservative Parties may have been affected by wider UK-level concerns and party elites will certainly have been fully aware of developments at the top of the party. However, the same may not be said for party elites at the centre. It would be safe to assume that, beyond implementing new structures to deal with devolution, Scotland and Wales were not often at the top of the UK leader's agenda or strategy. The essential linkage functions of statewide parties make changes at the core or central level of a party of interest to studies of sub-state parties. For instance, only the UK Conservative Party can determine how much the Scottish or Welsh Conservatives can promise about further devolution of powers to the Scottish Parliament or Welsh Assembly. The decision about this most territorial of issues lies in office and opposition with the leader of the UK Conservative Party.

This chapter firstly examines and updates Jim Bulpitt's account of the statecraft biases of the Labour and Conservative Parties when it comes to territorial management. It argues that both parties have made a priority of preserving the centre's governing autonomy, both in government and internally within the party. For the Conservative Party, this means it is mostly relaxed about sub-state governments and the sub-state Welsh and Scottish Conservative parties using their self-rule powers to a full extent. It is less clear how relaxed it would be about increasing shared rule, either through the devolved governments gaining more powers or the Welsh and

Scottish Conservative Parties having a more formal input into national party decisions and policy-making.

This chapter then briefly examines stages in the party's post-1997 UK development (insofar as they are relevant to the analysis of its sub-state branches) through the prism of each of its different leaders. The Conservatives found it extremely difficult to break out of the inheritance of Thatcherism and to accept that the political strategy of the previous 18 years would not necessarily lead them back to power. For Seldon and Snowdon (2005), 1997-2005 were the Conservatives' 'barren years'. However, conclusions about party change at the UK level have to be qualified by consideration of the extent to which the party has repackaged and refocused rather than repudiated or replaced policies and attitudes from the past (Hayton, 2012).

4.2 Conservative and Labour Territorial Statecraft[2]

Parties at the centre face a number of challenges in dealing with territorial management. The Conservative Party has to deal not only with its own internal structures, but also since 2010 with the demands of intergovernmental relations within the UK. In order to analyse the Conservatives' territorial strategy since 1997, this section combines Jim Bulpitt's (1983) Tory-focused statecraft perspective with more recent comparative scholarship on intergovernmental relations within the UK (McEwen *et al.*, 2012). It aims to examine the specific tension between what appears to be the Conservative Party's overall macro-level bias towards maintaining the centre's autonomy with the everyday problems of party and policy management in government and opposition.

Bulpitt suggests four models of centre-periphery relations (Bulpitt, 1983: 67-68). In the *coercive power model* the centre achieves what it wants by the threat or use of coercion; however, Bulpitt (1983: 67) emphasises that centres rarely possess the capability necessary to entirely control the periphery in this way. Under a *centre authority model* peripheral forces accept that the centre has the legitimate right to command them to follow its instructions, allowing the centre to achieve its aims. The *capital city bargaining model* suggests that the structure of the state allows peripheral groups and governments to use the institutions of the centre to pursue their goals (perhaps through 'colonising' those central levers of power which concern them

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[2] This section draws on Convery (2013).

most). Finally, in the *central autonomy model* the centre seeks the space to avoid the distractions of peripheral issues in order to pursue what it regards as matters of 'high psolitics'. Thus 'the centre will act like a garrison state, seeking to insulate itself from peripheral interests by restricting the extent to which they can penetrate its fortress' (Bulpitt, 1983: 68).

According to Bulpitt, the Conservative Party in the 20th century pursued a statecraft strategy which was concerned primarily with maintaining the centre's autonomy. This involved the core aim of achieving majority Conservative governments at Westminster. The party may have made use of clients for electoral benefit, but crucially, in office, the party sought to wall itself off from peripheral and external constraints. Thus 'in brief, what the Conservatives wanted to achieve in government was a relative autonomy for the centre [Cabinet and senior civil service (Whitehall)] on those matters which they defined as 'high politics' at any particular time (Bulpitt, 1986: 27).

Bradbury (2006: 577) argues that New Labour followed the same centre autonomy strategy in government as the Conservative Party when devising and managing the new devolution arrangements. Peripheral matters were hived off to be debated in territorial parliaments and assemblies; potentially controversial issues like negotiations over territorial finance were placed on auto-pilot through the Barnett formula; and, in general, as Bradbury (2006: 578) points out, 'the scope of the devolved institutions was limited to essentially distributive and regulatory policies in areas generally previously covered by the former territorial offices of state.' Devolution was thus designed to be strictly a low politics affair. It democratised functions the centre had previously decided could be safely be given a more territorial character without compromising its autonomy. As Gallagher (2012: 199) concludes: 'Devolution involved a big reorganisation of government but the costs of change were remarkably low.'

Matters of high politics or English domestic policy were shielded from interference or negotiation with the periphery (Keating, 2010: 223). Budgets continued to be written in the Treasury and approved by the House of Commons. The Scottish and Welsh governments could argue for more generous settlements like previous Scottish and Welsh secretaries, but Whitehall retained ultimate control. For accounting purposes, there is not a great deal of difference between the Scottish block grant and the budget for another Whitehall department (see HM Treasury, 2012: 55).

For instance, the Treasury rules about whether Scotland and Wales can use end year flexibility to carry forward unspent funds to the next financial year are exactly the same as those for other Whitehall departments. The Treasury retains the final say (Gallagher, 2012: 207). Crucially, there was no possibility of Scottish or Welsh policies constraining or contaminating high political matters or major English domestic reforms. The fact that Wales chose to abandon market-based reforms in public services was of little consequence to the English health or education departments who pursued their own reforms regardless (Bradbury, 2006: 578). Now, far from worrying about policy divergence, ministers at the centre are keen to contrast their approach with what they see as the inferior Welsh alternative (see, for instance, the Prime Minister: HC Hansard, 2013, 5 June).

The automated nature of the Barnett formula and the low politics functions of the devolved administrations have contributed to the informality and pragmatism which characterises the UK's intergovernmental relations since devolution. Matters such as fiscal transfers and welfare which cause friction in other countries are less contentious in the UK: the Barnett formula is not subject to annual renegotiation and both Scotland and Wales have been keen to develop welfare regimes which they see as more generous than the English system (McEwen *et al.* 2012: 334-335).

This logic of bilateralism and informality is not in general resisted by the devolved administrations which value privileged access to the centre. Thus, even the SNP government pursues an 'insider' strategy in dealing with Whitehall. As Cairney (2012: 241) points out, projecting an image of governing competence 'is not consistent with a strategy of *continuously* venting its frustration with the power of the UK government.' The SNP prizes Whitehall knowledge so highly that in 2010 an English permanent secretary was appointed to head the civil service in Scotland. As Parry (2012: 301) concludes: 'Far from being a check on the policy autonomy of the Scottish Government, the unified service became a facilitator of the intergovernmental projection of the Scottish position.'

Overall, the UK government's relaxed attitude to territorial low policy divergence and the pragmatic strategies pursued by the devolved administrations have resulted in a subnational environment which is not taxing for the centre. Thus, upon coming to office in 2010, the Conservative Party inherited a set of arrangements which did not involve making painful concessions. Centre autonomy in terms of devolution had largely been achieved. Before the more recent Scotland Act and the

proposals of the Silk Commission, some of the key elements of a Tory statecraft strategy were in place. The arrangements meant that domestic policy in Scotland and Wales could be ignored because it did not interfere with the party's priority of governing alone at Westminster.

This also explains why the Conservative centre was so relaxed about the idea of the Scottish Conservative Party breaking away to form a new separate party of the centre-right in Scotland. During the 2011 Scottish Conservative Party leadership election when one of the candidates proposed such a move, no objection in principle was raised by the centre and, even among the candidates who opposed breaking away, there was no question of the Scottish Party's ability to do it. The centre simply assumed that the UK Conservative Party would continue as before and merely lose a loss-making division. As Keating (2010: 369) points out, this also explains English elites' relaxed attitude towards Scottish independence: they are confident 'their own polity will carry on regardless.'

4.3 1997 to Hague

William Hague's leadership of the Conservative Party is widely considered to have been a tale of a talented politician who reached the top too early. Hague faced a party that had just suffered its worst electoral defeat in over a century and was still dealing with the internal splits and bitterness evident towards the end of John Major's term. For Bale (2010: 131), 'It is far-fetched to suggest that the Conservative Party that lost the election of 1997 was capable – ideologically, institutionally and individually – of moving as far to the centre as it needed to in order to stand any chance of seriously troubling Labour in 2001.'

Table 4.1 Conservative Party Performance at UK General Elections, 1979-2010

Year	Votes	Percentage share	Number of MPs
1979	13,697,923	43.9	339
1983	13,012,316	42.4	397
1987	13,760,583	42.3	376
1992	14,093,007	41.9	336
1997	9,600,943	30.7	165
2001	8,357,615	31.7	166
2005	8,784,915	32.4	198
2010	10,726,614	36.1	307

After some perceived success at the European Parliament elections, Hague followed a strategy in 2001 that concentrated on traditional Conservative concerns and the protection of the pound (Garnett, 2003: 57). The Conservative Party made almost no progress at the 2001 general election.

For the sub-state Conservative Party, the most significant legacy of Hague's leadership was the *Fresh Future* (1998) organisational reforms. In addition to reorganising the English party's structure and the procedures for selecting the party leader, these reforms created new structures in Scotland and Wales in order to deal with devolution. In Scotland, the structure in part reflected the path-dependent processes set in train by the existence of the previously separate Unionist Party (see chapter 5).

The new structure of the Conservative Party thus preserved and enhanced the autonomy and separate organisation of its Scottish branch. It retained formal autonomy over candidate and leadership selection, and its own separate structures through a Scottish central office. In the case of the Welsh Conservatives, a more explicitly separate party was created for the first time. However, it was considerably less organisationally distinct than in Scotland (see chapter 6). This organisation has been described as 'confederal' (Detterbeck and Hepburn, 2010: 121).

In both cases, Hague's reforms continue the tradition of a highly centralised political party. There are high self-rule but extremely limited shared rule provisions for its sub-state branches (Fabre and Méndez-Lago, 2009: 103). Thus, while candidate and leadership selection (and to a great extent policy-making) are highly decentralised, the Scottish and Welsh parties have extremely limited input into national party decisions. There is only the provision for them to be represented on the UK party board. They have no formal right to vote or be consulted on national issues, beyond their members being able to attend the UK party conference and vote for the UK party leader.

For Detterbeck and Hepburn (2010), therefore, the Welsh and Scottish Conservative parties are 'autonomist' parties in their relationship with the UK Conservative Party. They have effective control over most sub-state matters, but do not have (and, as we will discover, mostly do not desire) substantial or formalised

input into national decisions. Hague's organisational reforms entrenched this split between strong self decision-making and weak joint decision-making.

Table 4.2 Detterbeck and Hepburn's (2010: 116) Typology of Statewide Party Strategies

	Strong joint decision-making	*Weak joint decision-making*
Low autonomy for sub-state branches	Federalist	Centrist
High autonomy for sub-state branches	Modernist	Autonomist

Elsewhere, following wider trends towards party democracy (see, for instance, Le Duc, 2001), the *Fresh Future* reforms also democratised the party's leadership selection procedures. This also continued a trend in the Conservative Party towards more inclusive leadership elections, having moved from a closed-door process of consultation in the 1960s towards the elections of Heath, Thatcher and Major by Conservative MPs (Kittilson and Scarrow, 2003: 65). MPs would have their say first and narrow the field down to two candidates, one of whom would then be elected by the party membership. However, beyond this democratisation of leadership selection and changes to the party's relationship with Scotland and Wales, the overall effects of *Fresh Future* were not democratising or decentralising. For Kelly (2003), the new system merely introduced a 'reformed oligarchy' which still placed enormous power in the hands of the central party leadership.

Hague was the first Conservative leader to have to deal with having no MPs in either Scotland or Wales.[3] This presented a clear problem of party management and touched on difficult issues of legitimacy. At first Hague appointed Michael Ancram as Shadow Spokesperson for Constitutional Affairs, including responsibility for Scotland and Wales. Liam Fox later took over this post during 1998 and 1999, before he was promoted to Shadow Health Secretary.

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[3] However, even in government and with MPs from Scotland and Wales, the limited pool of potential ministers for the territorial offices of state was a problem for the Conservative Party. Teddy Taylor (2008: 145) records that he felt that he was a ministerial candidate in the 1970s almost solely on the basis that he represented a Scottish constituency and was not 'an alcoholic, womaniser or illiterate'. Major (1999: 417) also worried that he would not have enough able ministers for the Scottish Office if the Conservatives won the 1997 general election.

Table 4.3 Conservative Shadow Secretaries of State for Scotland, 1997-2010

Dates	Name	Constituency
June 1997 – September 2001	Post vacant	
September 2001 – November 2003	Jacqui Lait	Beckenham (England)
November 2003 – May 2005	Peter Duncan	Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Scotland)
May 2005*	James Gray	North Wiltshire (England)
May 2005 – December 2005	Eleanor Laing	Epping Forest (England)
December 2005 – May 2010	David Mundell	Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (Scotland)

*James Gray resigned after one week in the post (see below).

Table 4.4 Conservative Shadow Secretaries of State for Wales, 1997-2010

Dates	Name	Constituency
June 1997 – September 2001	Post vacant	
September 2001 – July 2003	Nigel Evans	Ribble Valley (England)
July 2003 – December 2005	Bill Wiggin	Leominster (England)
December 2005 – May 2010	Cheryl Gillan	Chesham and Amersham (England)

In Wales, the party faced similar problems. At first, Jonathan Edwards was appointed as the party's chief spokesperson on Wales. After he left to seek election to the European Parliament, Nick Bourne (a future leader of the Welsh Conservative Party) took over this position. In both cases, Hague opted not to appoint shadow secretaries of state who represented English constituencies. Instead, he did the minimum to cover parliamentary duties at the UK level and ensured that there were Scottish and Welsh spokespeople underneath to handle questions on domestic matters. In any case, after 1999, Westminster ceased to be the main focus for Scottish and Welsh politics. However, although it may not have made much difference at a practical level, the lack of shadow secretaries of state for Scotland and Wales was symbolically difficult for the Conservative Party. It drew attention to their weakness outside England and made their opposition to devolution even more problematic. As Major (1999: 417) concedes,

the lack of Scottish MPs in any future Conservative majority government would have made devolution inevitable 'and I would have had to introduce it.'

Overall, faced with other challenges and other internal party management issues, Hague was not unduly distracted by Scotland and Wales. Having supported the campaign against devolution at the UK level, he quickly accepted the outcome and moved to restructure the party to reflect it. He was relaxed about policy divergence, particularly in Scotland, telling the Scottish party that 'you've got powers, you now deal with issues that have nothing to do with Westminster, you are absolutely in control over policy-making' (interview with MSP 9, 24 October 2012).

Table 4.5 Leaders of the UK Conservative Party, 1997-2013

Dates	Name
1997-2001	William Hague
2001-2003	Iain Duncan Smith
2003-2005	Michael Howard
2005-	David Cameron

4.4 Duncan Smith

The 2001 Conservative Party leadership election did not feature Scotland or Wales (Alderman, 2002). Territorial issues were never at the forefront of UK party concerns during this period. Michael Portillo's pitch for his leadership campaign was a full-blooded defence of a modernisation strategy. Although David Cameron subsequently picked up many of these themes, his strategy was regarded by some commentators as too radical for the party to accept at this stage (Snowdon, 2010: 85; Bale, 2010: 142). The other candidates were Ken Clarke, David Davis, Michael Ancram and Iain Duncan Smith. After the initial ballots of MPs, Duncan Smith and Clarke emerged as the two candidates who would face a vote of party members.

Iain Duncan Smith comfortably won the leadership election, in part because Clarke's pro-European views were still considered to be unacceptable to large sections of the party. Duncan Smith began his leadership by attempting to move the party away from traditional Conservative concerns and onto new ground about public services and social justice. However, as Hayton and Heppell (2010: 432) argue, 'Duncan Smith inherited a Conservative Party that was still fundamentally divided

and remained prone to internal squabbling.' Combined with his own tactical errors and lack of presentation skills, this meant that Duncan Smith was ultimately unable to deliver a full programme of change for the Conservative Party.

Under Iain Duncan Smith's leadership, therefore, the party continued mainly to concentrate on areas in which it felt comfortable, rather than challenging the Labour Party on areas where it needed to strengthen its message. However, he did begin to sketch out a broader agenda relating to social justice, partly inspired by a visit he made to Easterhouse in Scotland with David McLetchie MSP, then leader of the Scottish Conservatives.

For Scotland and Wales, this was not a period of significant change at the centre. However, for the first time since 1979, Iain Duncan Smith did appoint Shadow Secretaries of State for Scotland and Wales. In Scotland, one MP was returned at the 2011 general election, so Peter Duncan was an obvious choice to be Shadow Secretary of State for Scotland. In Wales, again not a single Conservative MP was returned. Duncan Smith therefore had no choice but to appoint an English MP to this post. He chose Nigel Evans, who was born and educated in Wales, but represented Ribble Valley in England. This inaugurated a trend for the UK Conservative Party of appointing Shadow Secretaries of State for Scotland and Wales who did not represent constituencies in those regions, but could claim to have strong links to them.

4.5 Howard

The main achievement of Michael Howard's leadership was twofold: steadying the ship and putting in place the next generation of party leaders. Howard was installed as leader without a vote following the resignation of Iain Duncan Smith in July 2003. Although he launched his leadership with a speech that pointed in the direction of thoroughgoing modernisation (in the mould urged by figures such as Francis Maude), it became clear later that Howard would stick much more closely to traditional Conservative themes. Howard was ultimately (and understandably) unable to fully distance himself from the 1979-1997 Conservative Governments because he latterly played such a substantial part in them and was overall proud of their legacy. However, Howard managed to restore a sense of party discipline and, particularly in the House of Commons, the idea that the party had a credible candidate to be prime minister.

Howard also promoted David Cameron and George Osborne to senior posts in the shadow cabinet. This enabled them to become more well known in the party and

allowed them to prove themselves as parliamentary and media performers. In particular, Cameron was in charge of drafting the 2005 general election manifesto. Howard appointed Osborne as Shadow Chancellor after the 2005 election and this is a position he has held since in opposition and government.

After he had announced his intention to resign, Howard also attempted to introduce changes to the leadership election rules. He sought to return the final say over leadership election to the party's MPs. Howard wanted to avoid another leadership election that followed the same pattern as 2011: Iain Duncan Smith was elected leader without securing the confidence of a majority of Conservative MPs. However, this reform was strongly resisted by party members (including the ConservativeHome website) and some MPs. Howard conceded that it would not be possible to change the rules and the 2005 leadership election took place under the rules introduced by William Hague (Bale, 2010: 272).

Howard's decision to downgrade the post of Shadow Secretary of State for Wales from the Shadow Cabinet resulted in the resignation of Nigel Evans (BBC News, 2003). Howard turned to Bill Wiggin who represented an English constituency, but had served in the Royal Welsh Fusiliers. His tenure as Shadow Secretary of State is not fondly remembered. In particular, Wiggin's stated view that the Welsh Assembly should be scrapped was at best problematic for the Welsh Conservative Party (Shipton, 2005). Peter Duncan was retained as Shadow Scottish Secretary. However, this was again outside Howard's slimmed shadow cabinet.

Peter Duncan lost his seat at the 2005 general election. In the traditional post-devolution way, therefore, Howard appointed a Scottish-born MP who represented an English constituency. However, James Gray resigned after one week in the post after reportedly suggesting that MSPs should be replaced with Scottish MPs sitting at both Holyrood and Westminster. The Scottish Conservative Party did not take kindly to this intervention (BBC News, 2005). Eleanor Laing (born in Glasgow and educated at the University of Edinburgh) took over as Shadow Secretary of State for Scotland until Cameron's election as leader.

4.6 Cameron, 'Cameronism' and Territorial Politics[4]

David Cameron's leadership of the Conservative Party is widely held to have changed the party more significantly than any of the previous post-1997 leaders (Bale, 2010). He was elected on a platform of changing the look and feel of the Conservative Party (Snowdon, 2010). Both the strategy of Cameron and the circumstances came together to enable more substantial party change.

David Cameron made the obvious choice for Shadow Scottish Secretary in appointing Scotland's only Conservative MP, David Mundell, to the post when he became leader. In Cheryl Gillian, however, Cameron again found an English constituency MP with Welsh connections who competently dealt with Welsh issues from 2005, and was his first Secretary of State for Wales in government.

'Cameronism' (or the style of Conservative Party change most closely associated with David Cameron) might usefully be distilled as: a broad commitment to social liberalism (particularly on areas such as gay rights and family structure); a belief that the Conservative Party's brand became toxic and that rebranding and maintaining a rebranded image is essential for the party; a commitment to what might be termed a broadly Blairite agenda in public services (no 'opting out' or up-front charges alongside choice and competition and devolution of power); and an aversion to talking about tax cuts or Britain's place in the European Union.

However, such a conception of Conservative Party modernisation has difficulty in accommodating a territorial dimension. Traditional views about the constitution and the nature of parliamentary sovereignty make it difficult for some in the Conservative Party to engage imaginatively with debates about the future of devolution (Keating, 2010). However, part of the problem is also that territorial devolution does not fit easily into the Cameron modernisation agenda. Its constitutional scope tends to be limited to questions of localism and human rights. Thus, while much thought and energy was expended on the Localism Act, this involved only devolution to local councils and communities; it ignored the territorial dimension of the UK. Much of the Conservative writing on the Big Society is also explicitly concerned with devolving power downwards through co-ops and employee ownership (see, for instance, Norman, 2010).

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[4] This section draws on Convery (2013).

In his book about the future of the coalition, the Conservative MP for Grantham and Stamford, Nick Boles, states that instead of solely focusing on the percentage of GDP consumed by the state, 'Liberal Conservatives are more interested in the power of the state and its lack of accountability' (Boles, 2010: 37; see also Boles, 2001). However, this has not been extended to apply to Scotland or Wales where potentially a Conservative case for greater fiscal accountability could be thrashed out based on the same principles. Thus while Thatcherism could only devolve economic and not political power, it seems that Cameronism seeks only to extend localism to public services and local government. On a visit to Scotland in 2012, for instance, the Prime Minister encouraged Scotland to follow England's example by adopting policies like free schools (*Scotsman*, 2012, 20 April). Leaving aside the fact that headlines like 'David Cameron tells Scotland to copy English reform' may be unhelpful, it is not even clear that there is any appetite for such reforms in Scotland, even if the Conservatives were in a position to introduce them. Instead, it might be more fruitful for a Conservative to engage in a debate about creating the correct fiscal incentives to make Scotland think more carefully about public sector productivity.

The statewide Conservative Party has not considered the links between the principles it claims guide its policies and its attitude towards Scotland and Wales where it is still stuck in a mind-set of agreeing case-by-case concessions, rather than (as in the case of elected mayors in England, for example) thinking about what might best serve its interests in the long term. Beyond keeping the union together, its position on these issues is vague and it is not clear how far it is willing to accept the increasingly federal nature of the UK which would accompany the deepening of fiscal devolution. The Conservatives have undoubtedly gone to great lengths (particularly in Scotland and especially through the Edinburgh Agreement) not to repeat the mistakes of the past and to be seen to be governing Scotland and Wales with respect. After signing the Edinburgh Agreement the prime minister emphasised that, 'I always wanted to show respect to the people of Scotland - they voted for a party that wanted to have a referendum, I've made that referendum possible and made sure that it is decisive, it is legal and it is fair' (BBC News, 2012a). Nevertheless, beyond dealing well with day-to-day intergovernmental and intra-party relations, the Conservatives

lack a longer-term strategy. A bias towards centre autonomy sits uncomfortably with support for further devolution in the UK.

Nevertheless, in the short term, David Cameron made clear he was willing to go to extraordinary lengths to repair the damaged Conservative brand in Scotland. He began to talk about a 'respect' agenda for Scotland and contrasted his open approach with what he portrayed as Gordon Brown's negativity about devolution (and his attitude towards Alex Salmond's SNP administration in particular). Indeed, Cameron was so willing to atone for the perceived injustices of the Conservative Governments (1979-1997) in Scotland that on one occasion he in fact went beyond the point where Scottish Conservatives felt comfortable. A senior Scottish party official recalls a draft of a speech Cameron was due to make in Scotland:

> I remember in January 2006, there was a speech written for the Prime Minister [Cameron] which contained a lot of stuff about Ravenscraig, poll tax, all the rest in terms of that's all wrong, and Annabel [Goldie] said you can't use that because that's not true. Scotland was in a dreadful sate. Of course Ravenscraig needed to be closed. We were right (interview with Scottish official 4, 30 November 2012).

David Cameron signalled a clear departure from both previous Conservative and (more recent) Labour attitudes to devolution. He noted that that 'devolution is about attitudes, not just institutions'. Thus he said that: 'I would be a Prime Minister who would work constructively with any administration at Holyrood for the good of Scotland, and I would be in regular contact with the First Minister no matter what party he or she came from' (Cameron, 2009). Similarly, he told the Scottish Conservative conference in 2012 that, 'you can be even prouder of your Scottish heritage than your British heritage - as many in Scotland are - and still believe that Scotland is better off in Britain' (Cameron, 2012). However, although this may be presented as reflecting a strong commitment to the Union and perhaps an attempt to atone for past mistakes, it is also in part an obvious (indeed perhaps the *only*) way for a Conservative prime minister to proceed to govern parts of the UK where his party's electoral mandate is weakest.

Since the 1980s, Conservative prime ministers have struggled with the question of how to staff the Scottish Office. A potentially very awkward situation about the appointment of a Secretary of State for Scotland was avoided in 2010 thanks to the coalition with the Liberal Democrats (Randall and Seawright, 2012: 113;

Mitchell and van der Zwet, 2010: 722). The Liberal Democrats' 11 seats in Scotland made one of their number an obvious choice for the Scotland Office. Scotland's only Conservative MP, David Mundell, serves as a junior minister there. However, had there been a Conservative majority, David Cameron would have had no choice but to appoint a minister to the Scotland Office who did not represent a Scottish constituency.

The first issue to confront the Conservatives' Scotland team in government was the Scotland Bill. In 2007, alongside Labour and the Liberal Democrats, the Conservatives set up the Calman Commission on Scottish devolution. This inquiry examined how devolution might be improved in light of the experience of the first decade and in light of the SNP's narrow victory at the 2007 Holyrood elections. The final report recommended a modest increase in the Scottish Parliament's powers over some domestic matters. Most significantly, it proposed further devolution of tax powers so that 10 pence in the pound of income tax was set and raised in Scotland (see Calman Commission, 2009: part three). Despite some internal dissent about pandering to the SNP's priorities, the Scottish Conservatives supported these changes. The UK Conservative Party 2010 manifesto committed to implementing this further transfer of powers to Scotland (Conservative Party, 2010: 83). The broad thrust of the Calman proposals became law in the Scotland Act 2012.

Politically, it would have been extremely awkward to oppose these measures. The Conservatives played a full part in their formulation and the Calman Commission enjoyed cross-party support. Distancing themselves from the report's conclusions could have reinforced the impression that the Conservatives were anti-Scottish. However, support for the Calman proposals has not translated into a coherent Conservative approach to the challenge of devolution. In the event it did not do much to improve the Conservatives' image in Scotland; nor did it demonstrate a set of principles which the Conservatives were applying to Scotland in order to further their interests and keep the United Kingdom together. It was an obvious and easy way to fill a gap in political thinking: granting relatively painless concessions from the centre but finding the strategy inadequate when it is overtaken by events. The Prime Minister thus found himself in a position of championing a Bill which received lukewarm support from all quarters: the SNP saw it as a first step; unionist-minded Conservatives in Scotland disliked the transfer of powers but saw it as the price of looking 'pro-Scottish'; and more radical voices on the centre-right in Scotland (and

England) thought the fiscal powers did not go far enough to deal with English resentment or Scottish dependency.

In terms of policy towards Wales, the Coalition was faced firstly with the prospect of the referendum on transferring full legislative powers to the Welsh Assembly. This would trigger the implementation of Part IV of the Government of Wales Act 2006. After some initial reluctance, during which it was suggested that a future Conservative government might only legislate for a referendum in its second term, a commitment to holding the referendum was included in the 2010 manifesto (Conservative Party, 2010: 67). Welsh Conservatives pointed out to senior party figures that refusing to legislate for a referendum requested by a two-thirds majority in the Welsh Assembly might be unwise. There was thus a pragmatic agreement that the Conservatives at Westminster would not stand in the way of such a referendum request (Melding, 2012).

Upon taking office in 2010 the new Secretary of State for Wales, Cheryl Gillan, said that she discovered much 'unfinished business' on her desk in relation to preparations for the referendum and suggested that her predecessor, Peter Hain, had been dragging his feet on the issue (BBC News, 2010b). The Conservatives certainly faced less internal opposition to the measures than the Labour Party who did not expect the agenda to move as swiftly towards a referendum (Wyn Jones and Scully, 2012: 22). However, their pragmatic response to the prospect of a referendum can also in part be explained by the extremely limited ways in which the centre would be affected by a positive result. The legislative powers transferred related only to low politics matters (most of which were already under the Assembly's control) and as Scully and Wyn Jones (2011: 119) point out, 'Welsh devolution is still rather less far-reaching than granted to Scotland or, indeed, Northern Ireland.' Moreover, the Government of Wales Act 2006 had in fact already conceded the principle that the Welsh Assembly should have primary law-making powers; the implementation of Part IV merely enhanced these powers and extended them to new areas (Wyn Jones and Scully, 2012: 21-22). Thus this concession from the centre could hardly have been more painless.

However, beyond the territorial dimension, the extent of change under Cameron must also be qualified by consideration of how far underlying policies have moved beyond the Conservative Governments (1979-1997). For Richard Hayton (2012: 147), 'Cameron succeeded in presenting a fresh face of modern conservatism,

but this was in large part a case of rebranding and repackaging a neo-Thatcherite product, rather than re-orientating the ideological trajectory of his party.' In particular, Hayton argues that on the major economic arguments, the position of the Conservative Party has remained consistent. He also notes the unresolved divides that remain within the party on social issues.

4.7 Conclusion

Upon hearing the news in 1990 that John Major had replaced Malcolm Rifkind as Secretary of State for Scotland, Mrs Thatcher apparently remarked: 'I was told I couldn't do that' (Torrance, 2009: 242). This mostly sums up the attitude of elites at the centre of the UK Conservative Party towards Scotland and Wales: benign incomprehension alongside a willingness to take advice. This stems from the statecraft priorities of the Conservative Party. Scotland and Wales are not essential to achieving a parliamentary majority at Westminster and can therefore be safely ignored, providing they stick to the low politics remit of the devolved institutions. As one 'Conservative aide' puts it, 'Anything in Scotland will be a bonus, but we need to be able to build a UK majority without any Scottish MPs' (quoted on ConservativeHome.com, 2011).

In the post-devolution period, Conservative statecraft in opposition had to navigate the difficult terrain of its obvious weakness in Scotland and Wales. The party's UK leaders sought mainly to avoid controversy and accommodate Scottish and Welsh concerns in a way that did not interfere with their other priorities. It would be fair to conclude, however, that Scotland and Wales (and the Scottish and Welsh Conservative Parties) did not dominate their agenda. If, as in the Labour Party for instance, large numbers of Conservative MPs had represented Scottish constituencies, then this may not have been the case.

In government, the Conservative Party has supported the further devolution of powers in both the Scotland Act 2012 and the Government of Wales Act 2006. However, although these have been short-term successes, the Conservative Party lacks an overall strategic vision for the future of devolution in the UK. During this period, it agreed case-by-case concessions, rather than thinking about what a Conservative-designed model of devolution might look like. Thus, unless its sub-state branches fill this gap, there is a lack of strategic thinking at this level in the Conservative Party.

In terms of party change at a UK level, the most significant shift was the transition to David Cameron's leadership. The pursuit of a clear modernisation agenda at the centre of the party with its assumptions about the damage to the Conservative Party brand will have had an impact on the party in Scotland and Wales. It will therefore be important to investigate the extent to which they accepted, rejected or pursued an alternative to the strategy outlined at the centre of the party.

5. Devolution, Party Change and the Scottish Conservative Party

> Conservatism has played a long and historic role in Scottish politics and the Tory Party has deep roots in Scotland. However, many people do not realise this.
>
> > Margaret Thatcher, Foreword to *The Scottish Tory Party: A History* by Gerald Warner (1988: i)

> Author: Would it be fair to say that the party has never really got over the 1997 referendum result?

> Conservative MSP: I think it is gradually getting over the referendum result.
>
> > Interview with Conservative MSP 8, 2 October 2012

5.1 Introduction

Having established the wider UK context in which it operated, this chapter now applies the analytical framework outlined in chapter three to the post-devolution Scottish Conservative Party. It finds that while the Scottish Conservatives did adapt organisationally to the external shock of devolution, they spent the following decade trying to repeat the same pre-1997 political strategy. Contrary to some assumptions in the literature about sub-state party demands for autonomy, the Scottish party in fact had more autonomy than it wanted or needed.

This chapter finds overall that the potential for party change beyond constitutions and management charts was for the Conservatives in the gift of a leadership that chose not to attempt radical change. Faced with a significant section of the party which remained hostile to devolution, the party leadership instead concentrated on more 'banal' issues of everyday parliamentary business, policy-making and campaigning (Smith, 2011), giving the impression of progress without much internal struggle. In short, the Conservative leadership in Scotland concentrated

most of its energy on being a competent political party in a multi-party parliament. It generally ignored more fundamental questions about the party's declining support and the future of devolution. Whilst this allowed it to claim some limited policy successes during the SNP minority government (2007-2011), it was not accompanied by substantial party change in any other area.

This chapter begins by examining the history of the Scottish Conservative Party. The party still bears the mark of its original independent existence and its previous successful incarnation as the Scottish Unionist Party still informs debates in the party today. It only merged with the UK Conservative Party in 1965. This chapter then examines the potential drivers of party change for the Scottish Conservatives. Devolution prompted some organisational changes, but the most important driver of change in the post-devolution period was electoral defeat at the 2010 UK general election. The 2011 leadership election had the potential to install a new leader who was committed to substantial change, but in the end the party decided to elect a candidate who represented continuity.

This chapter then examines the manifestations of party change in the post-devolution Scottish Conservatives. The party's organisation changed quite substantially after the 2010 election result following an internal report. However, no organisational changes have granted the Scottish Conservatives any further autonomy from the UK party. Similarly, policy-making has been marked by continuity and still draws substantially on the political thought of the Conservative Governments (1979-1997). There have also been no major changes in personnel that have driven party change. Change has thus been confined mainly to party organisation and this has primarily been driven by electoral defeat.

5.2 History of the Scottish Conservative Party

As Panebianco (1988: 50) argues, 'the characteristics of a party's origin are in fact capable of exerting a weight on its organizational structure even decades later.' The Scottish Conservative Party's previously independent history is evident in its present organisation. The Scottish Conservative Party is the oldest political party in Scotland and traces its origins to the great debates about the status of the Reformation and royal succession in the late 17th century. As Warner (1988: 9) explains, the word 'Tory' 'is a corruption of the Irish Gaelic *tóiridhe*, meaning 'pursuer' or 'brigand'; when applied

by the Exclusionists to the supporters of the Catholic prince, James, it had the derogatory implication of 'Irish papist bandits' or rebels.'[5]

Thus, the UK Conservative Party in Scotland exists for the most part as a result of territorial *diffusion*, rather than territorial *penetration*. Eliassen and Svaasand (1975: 16) make a distinction between those parties formed by the amalgamation of distinct units (*diffusion*) and those formed because a party at the centre has created a presence in a region from scratch (*penetration*). A party which develops through consolidation of previously separate units is likely to be more decentralised than one in which its constituent parts owe their existence and loyalty to elites at the centre (Panebianco, 1988: 51). The historical development of the Scottish Conservatives and the distinctive place of Scottish institutions within the United Kingdom have resulted in a party which throughout its existence has enjoyed a greater measure of autonomy from the centre and a separate identity. Within the Scottish party itself, divisions and associations until 1965 operated as much more independent units than their equivalents in the English Conservative Party (Urwin, 1966: 146).

In 2013 the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party was a territorial branch of the statewide UK Conservative Party (Deschouwer, 2003: 220). However, until 1965 the Scottish Conservatives were a distinct political party, the Scottish Unionist Party, which had a link to the UK Conservative Party more akin to that between the statewide CDU and Bavarian CSU in Germany (Hepburn, 2008). The Scottish Unionist Party itself was a coalition of different groups. In local government, for instance, many Scottish Unionists stood as Progressives in the 1950s (Seawright, 2002: 80). At the 1955 general election, in which the Unionists won 50.1% of the vote in Scotland, many of its candidates stood as National Liberals.[6] It was, as Richard Finlay argues, 'the most successful organisation in Scottish politics in the period from after the Great War to the mid-1960s' (Finlay, 2012: 29).

In 1965, the Unionist Party in Scotland decided to integrate more fully with the UK Conservative Party. It dropped the distinctive Unionist Party label and became instead the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party. Most scholars pinpoint this as a key moment on the party's road to losing touch with the coalition of Scottish voters

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[5] A fuller history of the early Tory Party in Scotland is given in Warner (1988). On party organisation in the twentieth century, see Urwin (1965) and Ward (1982).
[6] For instance, Teddy Taylor's election leaflet in 1964 in Glasgow Cathcart does not mention the Conservative Party at all and instead talks about the need for a 'Unionist Government' (Taylor, 2008: 83-84).

that helped it to be so electorally successful and politically relevant (Seawright, 1999; Dyer, 2001; Kidd, 2008: 22-23; Arnott and Macdonald, 2012).

Table 5.1 Conservative electoral performance in Scotland at Westminster elections

Year	Votes	Percentage share	Number of MPs
1950*	1,222,010	44.8	31
1951*	1,349,298	48.6	35
1955*	1,273,942	50.1	36
1959*	1,260,287	47.2	31
1964*	1,069,695	40.6	24
1966	960,675	37.6	20
1970	1,020,674	38	23
1974 (February)	950,668	32.9	21
1974 (October)	681,327	24.7	16
1979	916,155	31.4	22
1983	801,487	28.4	21
1987	713,081	24	10
1992	751,950	25.6	11
1997	493,059	17.5	0
2001	360,658	15.6	1
2005	369,400	15.8	1
2010	412,855	16.7	1

*Includes National Liberals

Source: Rallings and Thrasher (2009); BBC News (2010)

The old eastern and western divisions of the party which existed before 1965 were amalgamated into a single party structure along the lines of the English party's more centralised model (Seawright, 1999: 26-27; Urwin, 1966).

5.3 Explaining Scottish Conservative Decline

From the high point of the 1955 general election, the decline of the Scottish Conservative Party has been striking (Seawright, 1999). This section discusses briefly the competing explanations for Scottish Conservative decline. Post-devolution debates about party change in the Scottish Conservative Party are in part informed by an attempt to recapture the success of the pre-1960s. The tension between being distinctively Scottish and being loyal to the UK Conservative Party and policies will be evident throughout this chapter. In many ways, the pre-1965 Conservative Party was a quite sophisticated multi-level party before the term existed.

For Kendrick and McCrone (1989) Scottish Conservative decline can be broadly explained by two central factors: greater Scottish dependence on the public sector and the emergence of Scotland as a separate unit of economic management. The idea that Scotland faced different economic issues from the rest of the UK that required a specific policy response did not sit well with the Conservatives' increasing commitment under Thatcher to a sense of 'Britishness' in which the state was largely meant to withdraw from industrial policy. Thus Kendrick and McCrone (1989: 589) conclude that: 'The Scottish economic dimension had made Scotland an ideological category largely incompatible with Conservative English/British national rhetoric as employed by Mrs Thatcher.'

Dyer (2001) argues that the Conservatives' decline in Scotland is explained by 'a waning of the cultural conditions which produced the centre-right coalition which dominated Scottish politics, 1931-64, and its fragmentation into Conservatism, Liberalism and Scottish Nationalism' (Dyer, 2001: 30). The various factions which united under the banner of 'unionism' in Scotland created a uniquely powerful electoral constituency. However, this grouping was very much of its time. Towards the latter half of the 20th century, 'a change in Scottish political culture…rendered a once-powerful unionism old-fashioned and redundant' (Dyer, 2001: 32). The Conservatives' failure to reinvent themselves to adapt to the new circumstances in Scotland led to their steady drop in support.

However, Seawright (1999) rejects what he terms the 'received wisdom' about explanations for the Scottish Conservatives' decline. Firstly, in contrast to Kendrick and McCrone (1989: 601), Seawright argues that difference in social structure between Scotland and England is not a compelling explanation for the weakening of support for the Conservatives. Although more Scottish people identify as working class than English people, Seawright (1999: 196) finds that 'social class and housing tenure trends were similar on both sides of the border, and that such trends were moving in a direction commonly thought of as beneficial to the Conservatives.'

Secondly, he argues that changes in religious cleavages cannot account for the Scottish Conservatives' decline. According to Seawright (1999: 196), the idea Conservatives in Scotland benefited in the 1950s from an 'Orange' Protestant vote which has been in decline ever since is a 'shibboleth to be addressed'. His data show that there has not been a significant religious dealignment in the Scottish electorate and that 'the decline in Conservative support has occurred in those of all religions and

of none' (Seawright, 1999: 109). The decline of Conservative Party support amongst protestants can therefore be explained by the wider overall drop in support for the Party. However, the data show that support for the Conservatives among protestants remains strong. Thus, according to Seawright, 'the Conservatives are still a protestant party, simply not a very successful one' (Seawright 1999: 197).

Thirdly, unlike Mitchell (1990), Seawright argues that there is no link between the Conservative Party's support for devolution and its electoral success. He points out that the Conservatives might have expected to do well in Scotland in the 1970 general election after Edward Heath's 'declaration of Perth' statement on devolution. In the event, the party held its share of the vote in Scotland, but performed worse than in England. In contrast, the party did better in the elections of February 1974, following the failure of the Heath Government to implement devolution, and in 1992, when the party stood on an uncompromisingly unionist platform. Seawright (1999: 198) concludes that 'the constitutional question can neither continually swing the Scottish electorate nor permeate any one party with a Scottish consciousness or Scottish identity.'

Fourthly, Seawright rejects any explanation based on the idea that Scottish people are consistently more left wing than the English. According to his analysis of the data, 'Scots were in fact relatively more right wing in the fifties and they did not take a substantive move to the left until the 1970s. It was not the case that the party managed to match their message to the Scots' more left-learning economic and social preferences in the 1950s' (Seawright, 1999: 199). The Unionist philosophy and approach which the Party adopted in the 1950s was flexible with regard industrial policy and in particular to state interventions to aid declining industries. However, after Margaret Thatcher became leader of the Conservative Party, a more dogmatic 'new right' ideology began to inform the party's policies. Thus 'as the Scots took that substantive move to the left in the mid 1970s, the party simultaneously decided on a substantive move of its own towards what was hitherto regarded as extremism' (Seawright, 1999: 199).

Overall he concludes that the main explanation for Tory decline lies in drift of the Scottish Conservatives from the moderate section of the Scottish electorate from which it drew its support. Seawright's explanation is therefore more of a modification of what he described as that fourth 'received wisdom' (that the Scots are relatively

more left wing), rather than a total rejection of it: the Scots did not abandon the Scottish Tories; the Scottish Tories abandoned Scotland.

The entrenchment of an ideological shift under Thatcher combined with earlier organisational changes to create the impression that a once distinctly Scottish Party had started to become 'alien' and 'English'. The internal structural changes in the party in the 1960s, including changing the name of the Party from the Scottish Unionist Party to Scottish Conservative Party, helped to create the circumstances under which this negative perception could take root.

In trying to dispose of the sectarian connotations of the past once and for all, the Party also ditched one of its unique selling points: its Scottish distinctiveness. According to Seawright, this further integration with the British Conservative Party, alongside an ideological shift which was perceived as abrupt and dangerous for post-industrial Scotland, created a lethal combination for the Scottish Tories. For Seawright (1999), their decline was in the end due to a mixture of ideology and image, rather than class or religion.

It is outside the scope of this thesis to settle definitively on an explanation for Scottish Conservative decline. However, regardless of its precise origins, this historical inheritance of success and decline informs present debates within the party about the future. Murdo Fraser's campaign in the 2011 leadership election drew explicitly on the pre-1965 organisation of the party to argue that a separate Scottish party merely returned the Scottish Conservatives to their natural state. All those in leadership roles within the Scottish Conservative Party have in part sought unsuccessfully to recapture the distinctive Scottish roots of the Unionist Party and use these to pursue a Scottish agenda within the UK. Thus, invoking the 'spirit of the Unionist Party' has become an important historical reference point for post-devolution debates. In the same way that UK Conservatives' positions on Cameron's modernisation agenda are informed by differing interpretations of the reasons for decline, so in Scotland the ownership of narratives about (historical) decline and (more recent) lack of progress have become a key battleground for party elites.

5.4 Drivers of Party Change for the Scottish Conservatives

This section examines in turn the potential drivers of change for the post-devolution Scottish Conservative Party. After establishing the overall office-seeking bias of the UK Conservative Party and how that translated into a Scottish context, this section

considers in turn: devolution as an external shock; changes in dominant faction or leadership (including the milestone of the 2011 leadership election); and the impact of electoral defeat and decline.

This section concludes that whilst the external shock of devolution necessitated some significant organisational changes, it had a more limited impact on the party's overall Westminster bias. Similarly, although it may be argued that the issue of acceptance of the reality of the Scottish Parliament divided the Scottish Conservative Party, there did not exist strongly developed factions on either side of this debate. Although this split became more explicit and acknowledged after the 2011 leadership election, it has not become a focus for party change. Moreover, this thesis finds no evidence of significant ideological factions of the sort that might exist at the UK level (and which came to the fore in the 2005 leadership election between David Cameron and David Davis); nor is there evidence of a 'modernisers' versus 'traditionalists' split occasioned by the differing interpretations of Conservative decline and Cameron's strategy for the party.

Instead, the quiet existence of a section of the party that was opposed fundamentally to devolution – what one MSP calls the 'refuseniks' (interview with Conservative MSP 8, 2 October 2012) – acted as a brake on the leadership of the party fully engaging with the issue of devolution. This resulted in a party which concentrated on being a competent (and, to be sure, not insignificant) player in a multi-party parliament. More fundamental issues about Scottish Conservative decline and the future of the Parliament were not discussed; instead the party engaged in what might be termed 'banal parliamentarianism' (adapted from Smith, 2011). The fact that there was little realistic prospect of ever being in office in Scotland also meant that there was no pressure on the party to try to change its policies or image so that it looked like a plausible coalition partner for the other parties.

Finally, this section notes for the Scottish Conservatives the importance of the context of electoral defeat as a driver of party organisational change. The party's results had been declining for over a decade without much effect on the party's strategy, policies or image. However, the disappointing results in Scotland of the 2010 general election had a much greater impact because they occurred at a time when the English and Welsh parties were recovering and because the Scottish party contributed to the Conservatives' failure to be able to govern alone at Westminster.

5.4.1 Devolution as an External Shock

In the post-war era, the Scottish Conservative Party shared with the UK Conservative Party an over-riding desire to be in power. This was the product not only of a highly majoritarian two-party system, but also of a deeply engrained culture in the Conservative Party itself. John Ramsden (1998: 495) describes 'the party's quite remarkable facility for adaptation and, closely allied to this, its appetite for power, often indeed its readiness to subordinate all other considerations to that one objective.' Robin Harris (2011: 4) observes that, 'The Conservative Party exists, has always existed and can only exist to acquire and exercise power, albeit on a particular set of terms.' In short, the UK Conservative Party is an office-seeking party *par excellence*: 'its public identity and its own self-image are bound up with being a party of government' (Ball, 2005: 1). Opposition is considered as 'an aberrant state of affairs rather than part of the normal cycle' (Ball, 2005: 1).

Before 1999, the only way for the Conservative Party to be in power in Scotland was to ensure that it had a majority at the UK level. The sights of Conservative elites and activists were therefore focused firmly on Westminster. The priority was to ensure that a Conservative Secretary of State for Scotland was appointed. In comparative terms, this is quite unusual and is a feature of the way in which administrative devolution in the UK developed (Mitchell, 2003). Although gradually more Scottish domestic policy came to be decided by ministers and civil servants in Edinburgh, the only way to access these levers of power was through Westminster. The Westminster bias of the Scottish Conservatives is therefore entirely reasonable and understandable. The more the Conservatives struggled in local government in Scotland, the more important it became.

Table 5.2 Secretaries of State for Scotland, 1945-2013

Dates	Name	Party	Constituency
August 1945 – October 1947	Joseph Westwood	Labour	Stirling and Falkirk
October 1947 – February 1950	Arthur Woodburn	Labour	Clackmannan and East Stirlingshire
February 1950 – October 1951	Hector McNeil	Labour	Greenock
October 1951 – January 1957	James Stuart	Unionist	Moray and Nairn
January 1957 –	John Maclay	National Liberal	West Renfrewshire

July 1962			
July 1962 – October 1964	Michael Noble	Unionist	Argyll
October 1964 – June 1970	William Ross	Labour	Kilmarnock
June 1970 – March 1974	Gordon Campbell	Conservative	Moray and Nairn
March 1974 – April 1976	William Ross	Labour	Kilmarnock
April 1976 – May 1979	Bruce Millan	Labour	Glasgow Craigton
May 1979 – January 1986	George Younger	Conservative	Ayr
January 1986 – November 1990	Malcolm Rifkind	Conservative	Edinburgh Pentlands
November 1990 – July 1995	Ian Lang	Conservative	Galloway and Upper Nithsdale
July 1995 – June 1997	Michael Forsyth	Conservative	Stirling
May 1997 – May 1999	Donald Dewar	Labour	Glasgow Anniesland
May 1999 – January 2001	John Reid	Labour	Hamilton North and Bellshill
January 2001 – June 2003	Helen Liddell	Labour	Airdrie and Shotts
June 2003 – May 2006	Alistair Darling*	Labour	Edinburgh South West
May 2006 – June 2007	Douglas Alexander*	Labour	Paisley and Renfrewshire South
June 2007 – October 2008	Des Browne**	Labour	Kilmarnock and Loudoun
October 2008 – May 2010	Jim Murphy	Labour	East Renfrewshire
May 2010	Danny Alexander	Liberal Democrat	Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey
May 2010 – October 2013	Michael Moore	Liberal Democrat	Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk
October 2013 –	Alistair Carmichael	Liberal Democrat	Orkney and Shetland

*Combined with Secretary of State for Transport.

**Combined with Secretary of State for Defence.

Source: Torrance (2006)

This attitude is also partly due to the nature of unionist political thought in the Conservative Party and in Scotland. The priority of Westminster office was a goal

that required little articulation or justification. The institutions of the Union were for Conservatives in Scotland the natural place in which to invest their time and energy. Unlike for the other main Scottish parties, they were never perceived as illegitimate or the source of a threat to Scottish distinctiveness. For the Conservatives, they were not English institutions; instead, they formed part of the institutional architecture of a UK 'fifth nation' (Aughey, 2011; Rose, 1982: 3) to which Scotland had privileged access (articulated in: HM Government, 1993; Lang, 2002: 202-206; Kidd, 2008: 35). Moreover, as Kidd (2008: 25) points out, 'The Union occupied a position of such unchallenged dominance in Scottish life between about 1750 and 1970 that there was no need to make a vigorous case on its behalf.'

However, since the political element of the Scottish Question sharpened in the 1970s, the Conservatives found it extremely difficult to incorporate their understanding of unionism with a sense that Scottish (political and policy) identity could only be fully preserved and enhanced through new Scottish political institutions. Thus, as Mitchell (1990: 12) argues, 'The problem for unionism has been that, in maintaining a distinctive Scottish aspect, the danger always existed that a demand to incorporate a democratic component would be made or even that the Union should be abandoned. [For Conservatives] the defence of the Union comes first, before the retention of the Scottish aspect whenever the question is put.' In the post-devolution period, it is difficult to argue that this is not still the case for the Conservatives. The external shock of devolution did provoke the kind of soul-searching necessary to fundamentally change the party's conception of unionism (Mitchell and Convery, 2012). It did not prompt any significant figure in the party to ask stark questions along the lines of: have we been anti-Welsh? (Melding, 2010: 136). Instead, the Conservatives in Scotland allowed their unionist ideology to wither, becoming gradually shriller and less tolerant (Kidd, 2008: 303).

Thus, the sense of the priority of Westminster office proved to be so deeply entrenched across the whole party that after 1999 it was extremely difficult to reorient its priorities towards being in power in the Scottish Parliament. Indeed, anecdotally, according to one party official in 2012, 'if I went round hard-core Conservatives, knock on the door, they'll say, 'that joke of a Parliament'. They'll still say it', with some members adding for good measure, 'and I was better off under the poll tax' (interview with Scottish official 4, 30 November 2012). Thus, although devolution

was undeniably an external shock for the Scottish Conservatives, it had a more limited impact on the party's internal culture of priorities.

There is a long tradition of Scottish MPs standing for Westminster seats. South of Scotland MSP David Mundell became the MP for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale in 2005. Ben Wallace, a North East regional MSP elected in 1999, became the MP for the English constituency of Lancaster and Wyre in 2005. In addition, Phil Gallie MSP stood in Ayr in 2001 and Alex Johnstone MSP and John Lamont MSP stood for Westminster seats in both 2005 and 2010 (Torrance, 2012: 102).

When the author put it to a senior Scottish Conservative MSP in 2012 that the Scottish Conservative Party had never got over the 1997 referendum result, he paused before replying that, 'I think it is gradually getting over the referendum result.' He continued:

> There are a lot of people in the party who would just not accept that it is over and that the way that we had done things was not going to be the way that it would have to be in the future. In fairness, there were some who did say that and came up with quite radical ideas, shall we say, but there were others, principally people who were actually not in the Parliament, but who could never get their heads round where we were in this regard (interview with Conservative MSP 8, 2 October 2012).

Despite repeated commitments to the reality of devolution made in forewords to manifestos and leaders' speeches, the Conservative Party in Scotland found it extremely difficult both philosophically and practically to accept that the Scottish Parliament was now the major forum in Scottish politics to which most of their attention should be devoted. Ironically, for the same senior MSP, devolution may in fact have acted as an impediment to substantial party change in other areas. He poses an interesting counter-factual to capture the mood of some in the party:

> I would say that it's a faction of the membership. It all goes back to this fundamental issue of the Scottish Parliament, what was it for, etc, etc. I mean, I don't think there would have been anything like the same problem had there not been a Scottish Parliament, if Labour had just won the election and that was it, you know, and we would have got used to focusing without a Scottish Parliament, etc, etc. Now, we

might not have won any elections any earlier, but we would have gone with that. The fact of the matter is that the Scottish Parliament has changed the characteristics in this respect and we have been slower than many others to actually catch up with that (interview with Conservative MSP 8, 2 October 2012).

Devolution never therefore succeeded in providing the kind of shock necessary to move the party forward into recognising the Scottish Parliament as the important institutional expression of Scottish identity to which the Conservatives had to seem wholeheartedly committed. This acted as a major brake in other areas:

some of the difficulty was because we are...we are in a situation where we have our clump of supporters who are no great fans of the Scottish Parliament at all. They basically don't really want you to do anything other than kind of ignore it if you can. And then you have got other people who are actually more alive to the possibilities of what we could do, and if you are the leader in that situation, you have got to try and then balance up the respective interests. I would say that in 2003 we did that by focusing on some of the peripheral issues, what in the grand scheme of things have turned out to be peripheral issues, but things like, you know, the cost of the parliament building, isn't this a scandal, etc? And there was a huge amount of time and energy went into focusing on the costs of the parliament, but of course that was never going to be anything other than a peripheral issue. I mean, by 2005 it was all basically done and dusted and, you know, we were where we were. So I think probably in some respects if I had a failing it would be that I probably did not move the party on far enough, fast enough in that particular time, but, you know, that's the way you see it (interview with Conservative MSP 8, 2 October 2012).

Conservatives had also to deal with the fact that the pursuit of office was not a realistic priority for them in the Scottish Parliament. They simply saw no prospect of being in coalition with the other parties. This potential driver of change was therefore absent. Moreover, according to one MSP:

We knew a lot of the Conservative voters in the early years of this parliament had never voted for the Scottish Parliament in the first place and therefore it was a hard enough sell for us to get them to come out

and vote at all in a Scottish Parliament election. If we had said, you know, given it was a PR system, come out and vote for us so we can go into coalition with the Labour Party or the SNP, that would have been even worse and put more of them off, so sticking to very core Conservative messages, we thought, was the best way to try and motivate our voters, who we knew would come out in a Westminster election, to come out also in the Scottish Parliament elections (interview with Conservative MSP 1, 6 March 2012).

This uneasy standoff at a national level was also reflected at a local level in Smith's (2011) ethnographic study of how the local Dumfries and Galloway Conservative Party attempted to cope with the impact of devolution and the widespread antipathy towards the Party. Smith spent a year embedded in the local party, leading up to the Scottish Parliament elections of 2003. He concludes that the party busied itself with what he terms 'banal activism' in order to try to maintain a sense of purpose and unity in a difficult organisational and political climate (Smith, 2011: 131). Thus the focus of activists' lives became the production of the *In Touch* electoral leaflet and the processes surrounding it. In short, 'the busy work of the banal activist had propelled and sustained them during the campaign' (Smith, 2011: 132). In the absence of a compelling national agenda to follow, the local party had to find its own way of keeping together and running a campaign. In the end, a reasonable result was achieved, but this represented more the management of difficult circumstances, rather than a Conservative renaissance. Smith concludes that the Conservatives in Scotland have reached the end of the line with this sort of muddling through:

Buffeting against the limits of what they can achieve through their focus on local level activism and issues, they have successfully postponed the kind of vexing philosophical and policy debates that would have no doubt exacerbated internal divisions but remain essential to any attempts by the Party to argue that it has undergone change and renewal (Smith, 2011: 135-136).

Thus, the external shock of devolution did not result in the Scottish Conservatives refocusing their office-seeking instincts from Westminster to Edinburgh or recalibrating their philosophy of unionism to incorporate a Conservative vision for the Scottish Parliament (despite working hard for several important causes within it – see, for instance, Douglas-Hamilton, 2009). Instead, the comfort the party found in 'banal

activism' (or what might be termed 'banal parliamentarianism' at the national level) and the steady results it has produced against a background of low expectations enabled the Scottish Conservatives until at least 2010 to avoid facing up to more fundamental questions. This resembles a path-dependent process of positive feedback: banal activism allows the party to hold together and claim just enough electoral success to justify ignoring more controversial issues on which significant disagreement bubbles just below the surface.

Overall, the force of devolution as a driver of party change was blunted by a deeply engrained conception of unionism and the idea that governing at Westminster remained the Scottish Conservatives' priority. While devolution could certainly act as a driver for *organisational* changes, it had a much smaller impact on the Scottish Conservatives' certain idea of a central purpose. Fundamentally, it could not reorient the Scottish Conservatives' priority from contributing seats to a Westminster Conservative majority to being in government in the Scottish Parliament. Such a change in priority would have had the potential to drive other substantial changes in policy and leadership.

5.4.2 Change in Dominant Faction or Leadership

For one official, the Scottish Conservative Party had after 1997 'become not a very political organisation in a sense' (interview with Scottish official 2, 2 November 2011). There were no major ideological or policy splits of any note in the post-devolution party (although there was one principled resignation over fisheries policy). The only change of leadership before Ruth Davidson's election in 2011 did not bring to power a new faction or leader within the party with a radically different agenda. There were no major ideological factions in the Scottish Conservatives, except the gaping philosophical fault-line that ran through the party about devolution itself. This may in part be explained by the fact that the main economic and fiscal levers remained at Westminster. Overall, changes in leadership or faction were not a central driver of party change.

From the 1980s to 2011: Dormant Factions?

As Finlay (2004: 370) has argued, 'one of the features of the Scottish Conservative Party was that it had missed out on the Thatcher ideological revolution that had swept through its southern counterpart.' With the exception of Michael Forsyth, the

Conservative Secretaries of State for Scotland in the 1980s and 1990s were either old-style patrician Tories who had little time for ideology (George Younger); associated explicitly with the left-leaning Scottish Tory Reform Group (Malcolm Rifkind); or generally regarded as Conservative moderates (Ian Lang). Ideological debates between different factions of the party tended to play out on a UK level. The Scottish party's political leadership was more concerned with protecting Scottish public spending and securing Scotland's privileged access to the UK centre (Lang, 2002). This lack of an overall strategic plan contributed to the party's gradual decay during the 1980s (Stewart, 2009: 49). Even Michael Forsyth's tenure as Secretary of State did not produce a belated Thatcherite revolution in the Scottish Office (Torrance, 2006: 326-335).

In the post-devolution period, there were no significant changes in the ideological factions which led the Scottish Conservative Party. Firstly, decisions about the main ideological direction of the party were taken at a UK level. The Scottish Conservative Party was not on the whole dissatisfied with this situation. Indeed, it could be argued that from at least the early 1990s the party pursued an explicitly 'assimilationist' strategy which meant that it increasingly saw itself 'as linked by an umbilical cord to the UK Conservative Party. And it didn't see itself separately' (interview with Scottish official 2, 2 November 2011).

Secondly, the limited economic and fiscal levers in the hands of the Scottish Parliament meant that significant ideological debates about, for instance, the proper balance between the state and the market were not essential for the Scottish Conservative Party. Debates (such as there were any during this period) and ideological positions were concerned with valance issues about the running of public services devolved to Scotland. Major splits about domestic policy direction are not a feature of the post-devolution Scottish Conservatives.

Table 5.3 Leaders of the Scottish Conservative Party, 1999-2013

Dates	Name
1999-2005	David McLetchie
2005-2011	Annabel Goldie
2011-	Ruth Davidson

Thirdly, it is difficult to discern any major ideological difference among either the three post-devolution leaders of the Scottish Conservative Party or its MSPs. It would be unfair to characterise any of them as true-believing Thatcherites in the mould of Michael Forsyth, for instance. David McLetchie (1999-2005) pursued a continuation of much of the pre-1997 Conservative agenda within the limits of the Scottish Parliament's authority. Thus, there would be a continuation of the NHS internal market, but the party set its face against tuition fees for university students (Scottish Conservative Party, 1999). Annabel Goldie (2005-2011) mostly continued in the same vein, with nods towards greater public service choice and mutualisation of Scottish Water, alongside clear spending commitments for pensioners and health visitors (Scottish Conservative Manifesto, 2011). During the Scottish Conservatives' first-ever contested leadership election, Ruth Davidson's campaign website contained standard centre-right fare on school standards and choice in pubic services with which few Conservatives could disagree (Convery, 2012). Scottish Conservative domestic policy in the post-devolution period is not the subject of the kind of debates that might allow the identification of those clearly on the 'left' or 'right' of the party.

The 2011 Scottish Conservative Leadership Election[7]

Instead, the major split in the Scottish Conservative Party does not concern economic policy, public services or even Europe: it is about devolution itself. However, this split did not come to a head until the 2011 leadership election. Only at this point do we see the emergence of two distinct factions of any significance in the Scottish Conservative Party (although they result from tensions which can be detected from the beginning of devolution). The 2011 leadership election was the first contested leadership election for the post-devolution Scottish Conservatives. It thus provided the opportunity to air debates that had hitherto only taken place behind closed doors.

The two factions that emerged concerned both the constitution of the UK and the Conservative Party. Broadly, on the one hand were those who felt that devolution had gone far enough and that the Scottish Conservatives should remain integrated with the UK Conservative Party; on the other were those who believed that the Scottish party had to become much more visibly autonomous and that it should be open to leading the debate on further devolution to Scotland.

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[7] This section draws on Convery (2012).

Murdo Fraser's campaign captured the attention of the media and of Conservatives from across the UK. He boldly declared that 'there is no future for the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party in its current form' (Fraser, 2011). He proposed that the party be dissolved and reformed into a new Scottish party of the centre-right. This new entity would be entirely separate from the UK Conservative party but its MPs would take the Conservative whip at Westminster. Fraser received the backing of a (bare) majority of Conservative MSPs and of the party's only Member of the European Parliament, Struan Stevenson. The former Scottish Secretary Sir Malcolm Rifkind also supported Fraser's proposal for a new party.

His idea had been widely floated before either he or the Sanderson Commission considered it. In 1997, the chairman of the Scottish Tory Reform Group, Arthur Bell, called for a separate Scottish party with a new name in order to distance the Conservatives from their opposition to devolution (Torrance, 2012: 94). Seawright (2002: 80) suggested that reviving the 'Progressives' label that some Conservatives used in local government in the 1950s might be beneficial to the party. In 2007 *The Spectator* reported that the then UK Conservative Party Chairman, Francis Maude, and his team had been secretly drawing up plans for a 'velvet divorce' from the Scottish Conservatives, involving the creation of a new and separate party in Scotland (*The Spectator*, 2007). This plan received the endorsement of the influential grassroots Conservative Home website (Conservative Home, 2007). However, nothing subsequently came of this and it was unclear how serious the plans were or how far the party in Scotland had been consulted. Interestingly, after Fraser's announcement it also emerged that Nick Bourne, until 2011 the leader of the Conservatives in Wales, had briefly considered but rejected a change of name for the Welsh Conservative Party (Bourne, 2011). Welsh Conservative AM David Melding still supports this change (Melding, 2011). Nevertheless Fraser's intervention was the first time a senior Scottish party figure had discussed name change and separation publicly. Fraser was at pains to point out that his proposal merely returned the party to its original state before the 1965 reforms folded it more formally into the UK Conservative Party.

Table 5.4 The 2011 leadership candidates and the constitution

Candidate	Background	Constitutional view
Murdo Fraser	• MSP since 2001 • Shadow Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing • Deputy Leader since 2005	• Supporter of Scotland Bill and does not rule out future changes short of 'full fiscal autonomy'
Ruth Davidson	• MSP since 2011 • Candidate in Glasgow North East by-election, 2009	• Scotland Bill and no further
Jackson Carlaw	• MSP since 2007 • Shadow Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change	• (reluctantly) Scotland Bill and no further
Margaret Mitchell	• MSP since 2003 • Convenor of Equal Opportunities Committee, 2007-2011	• Referendum on Scotland Bill in which she would campaign for a no vote.

Ruth Davidson's campaign responded to Fraser's challenge. Davidson had entered the Scottish Parliament only two months previously. Described by the media as a lesbian who enjoys kick-boxing (see, for instance, *Holyrood Magazine*, 2011), she came to prominence as the Conservative candidate in the Glasgow North East by-election in 2009. She declared her total opposition to Fraser's proposal that she felt was an unnecessary distraction from the real work at hand to rebuild the party from a grassroots level. Davidson's platform was based on a five-point plan to revitalise the party. This included a drive to attract new members and comprehensive party policy reviews (Davidson, 2011). Davidson was supported by two of the Scottish Conservatives' constituency MSPs, John Lamont and John Scott. She also had the support of former Scottish Secretary Lord Forsyth, who was highly critical of Fraser's plan. Margaret Mitchell and Jackson Carlaw were also both sceptical about the need for the party to be open to further devolution. They opposed Fraser's plan for a new party in Scotland.

There were thus broadly two visions for the future of the party presented to Conservative members. They could continue with their present party and a new leader (presumably attempting to emulate the success of the Welsh Conservatives) or take a

much more radical interpretation of the realities of devolution and try to form a new Scottish party of the centre-right.

Ultimately the choice for Conservative members concerned two central factors: constitution and personality. All of the candidates were understandably light on policy proposals and specific questions about public policy did not dominate the campaign. Moreover, unlike, for instance, the 2005 UK Conservative party leadership election, there was no obvious significant left-right split among the candidates (Denham and Dorey, 2006: 36). Rather, it was the question of the constitution, both of the Conservative Party and the United Kingdom, which split the candidates and caused the most heated arguments during the campaign. At one end of the spectrum, Fraser proposed complete separation from the UK Conservatives and was 'open minded' about further devolution to Scotland; at the other Mitchell wanted to maintain the link with the UK Conservatives and opposed even the Scotland Bill. Davidson and Carlaw both rejected the Fraser plan but viewed the Scotland Bill as a 'line in the sand'. These two factions might be characterised as 'integrationists' and 'devolutionists'. Although they had always existed in some form in the post-war Scottish Conservative Party, this was the first time in the post-devolution period that the split was publicly debated.

The leadership election used the alternative vote system. The result was a close win for Ruth Davidson with Murdo Fraser behind. Carlaw and Mitchell did not come close to winning.

Table 5.5 Results of the 2011 Scottish Conservative leadership election

Total valid votes: 5676   **Turnout:** 63.4%

Round 1

Candidate	Votes
Ruth Davidson	2278 (40.1%)
Murdo Fraser	2096 (36.9%)
Jackson Carlaw	830 (14.6%)
Margaret Mitchell	472 (8.3%)

Margaret Mitchell eliminated.

Round 2

Candidate	Votes

Ruth Davidson	2469 (191 transferred from Margaret Mitchell)
Murdo Fraser	2180 (84 transferred from Margaret Mitchell)
Jackson Carlaw	980 (150 transferred from Margaret Mitchell)
Non transferable	47

Jackson Carlaw eliminated.

Final Round

Candidate	Votes
Ruth Davidson	2983 (514 transferred from Jackson Carlaw)
Murdo Fraser	2417 (237 transferred from Jackson Carlaw)
Non transferable	229

Ruth Davidson wins.

Source: Scottish Conservative Central Office (2011)

It is apparent from the results that the majority of Carlaw and Mitchell's second preferences went to Davidson. Party members opposed to breaking away from the UK party used their other preferences to vote for candidates other than Fraser. This logic appears to have made it very hard for Fraser to win unless he won in the first round, or was sufficiently ahead of Davidson in the first round to counter-act the likely redistribution of second preferences. Nevertheless Fraser's achievement in convincing so many members of the need for radical change is not insignificant. Fraser came within 200 votes of having the support from a majority of members to disband and reform the Scottish Conservative Party.

There now exist in the open, therefore, two clear factions in the Scottish Conservatives. Once-implicit disagreements are now difficult to conceal. There are those who support Murdo Fraser's plan for a separate party (the majority of the MSP group and a significant number of party members) and those who still take a dim view of further devolution and wish to maintain the integrated UK Conservative Party (many ordinary members and Margaret Mitchell MSP).

Despite Ruth Davidson being on paper a symbolic change for the party, by standing so explicitly against Murdo Fraser's plan she became in fact the continuity or no-change candidate. Had Murdo Fraser been elected and separated the Scottish Conservative Party from the UK party, there would have been a strong case for saying that a change in leadership and dominant faction had been a central driver for party change. However, by electing Ruth Davidson, the Scottish Conservatives opted to continue along broadly the same post-devolution path, but with a leader who

represented a change of generation and perhaps a change in attitudes to some social issues.

Impact of UK Factionalism on the Scottish Conservatives

As Verge and Gómez (2011: 3) point out: 'factional conflict is potentially aggravated by territorial conflict between party levels.' The UK's electoral system and the party's history have resulted in a Conservative Party that is a broad coalition of different interests. In the post-war Conservative Party, we may detect a distinction between those broadly on the left and the right of the party. The most significant factional split that began to emerge in the UK Conservative Party in the post-devolution period was between the traditionalists and the Cameroons (Bale, 2010; Snowden, 2010).

However, it is notable that the Scottish Conservative Party managed largely to insulate itself from wider debates in the Conservative Party about where it was all going so wrong, particularly after the election of David Cameron. The absence of any contested leadership elections until 2011 certainly contributed to this lack of introspection. However, at a much deeper level the lack of factionalism and discussion at the Scottish level also demonstrated the extent to which members of the Scottish Conservative Party saw the UK party as the appropriate forum for such discussions. It also demonstrated the extent to which the Scottish Conservatives had found a comfortable stasis in which deeper questions were parked in order to concentrate on the more manageable (and achievable) goals of the discharging of the functions of a competent political party (see Smith, 2011). Around 15-20 MSPs gives a political party in Scotland access to attractive parliamentary resources both for the party machine and its elected representatives.

Yet the 'Cameroon' diagnosis of the problems for the Conservative Party arguably applied more to Scotland than to any other part of the UK. If Lord Ashcroft (2005: 4) felt compelled to state bluntly that the UK 'Conservative Party's problem is its brand', then it would be difficult to overstate the extent of the cultural phenomenon that hatred of the Conservative Party brand had become in Scotland by 1997. Indeed, Hassan (2012: 77) argues that: 'in Scotland anti-Toryism and anti-Thatcherism are still the current defining political narratives, with a backstory about the 1980s, what Scotland is, why we are different and what our politics and values are today.' The Scottish Conservatives chose largely to ignore this fact. When confronted with questions about whether the Scottish Conservatives needed to detoxify their brand,

party elites in the main questioned the very premise of such an analysis. For instance, one senior MSP in Scotland:

> by and large people don't talk about a detoxified Labour brand, I mean they have just lost an election. But we seem to spend our whole time talking about a detoxified Conservative brand, so I am not convinced that the problem exists in the way that it has been presented and there is no obvious evidence to my mind that it exists, other than it feeding on itself (interview with Conservative MSP 8, 2 October 2012).

Another former leader was also unimpressed with appeals to the concept of brand detoxification:

> It's not a word I ever used. One colleague in particular used it and commentators picked it up, and it wasn't an adjective that found favour with me because I felt that the only way to represent the Conservatives and try and emerge from this somewhat unwelcome umbrella of what I describe as a kind of generic hostility, which varied (interview with Conservative MSP 9, 25 October 2012).

Instead:

> …about representation or rebranding or re-imaging, I felt one of the best ways of addressing that was to actually literally give people the proof of the pudding in the eating. In other words, don't judge us on your perceptions based over 30 years; judge us on our achievements based over the last four years. Now I think we made some headway with that (interview with Conservative MSP 9, 25 October 2012).

For another MSP, the idea of 'brand detoxification' was a rather tawdry activity for marketing consultants, and not the real work of a serious political party (interview with Conservative MSP 4, 10 April 2012). There was also a feeling post-2005 that any branding issues could be sorted out at a UK level and that the results would automatically follow in Scotland (interview with Conservative MSP 5, 17 April 2012). Thus, there has been little opportunity for a faction against Cameronism to form in Scotland because nobody has yet tried to provide or support it.

During this period, thinkers in the UK Conservative Party began to articulate the kind of diagnosis and analysis which would form the basis of Cameron's modernisation plan (see, for instance, Vaizey *et al.*, 2001). Lord Ashcroft's analysis (2005) became particularly influential. The Conservative Party in Scotland largely

ignored this debate. In 2006, one senior UK Conservative commented: 'I'm not really sure we know what to make of them, really. They're certainly not very close to what we're trying to do here' (quoted in Torrance, 2012: 103). Similarly, recalling the 2010 general election campaign, George Bridges remarked that, 'the organisation up there was completely ramshackle. They didn't understand what we were trying to do at all and I had almost no control up there as Director of Campaigns. It was a complete struggle, so they employed an extra person for us to liaise with but it didn't make much of a difference' (quoted in Snowden, 2010: 247).

One of the central reasons for this lack of engagement with the idea of a problem with the Conservative brand was the manner in which senior Scottish Conservatives read polling data. There was a perception in Scottish Conservative Central Office and elsewhere in the party that it was hardly worth reaching out to new voters when the party could not even attract all of the Conservative Party identifiers in Scotland. When the author asked a senior party official about Lord Ashcroft's analysis of the problems of the Conservative Party, he revealed something significant about strategic electoral thinking in the party up to 2010 and the reasons why 'brand detoxification' never really found a home in Scotland:

> The brand issue? Well, I think it's worse in Scotland because the brand actually does better. So if you, if you imagine a poll, if we were to do a poll now and say, which party do you identify with across the UK, about 26-27 per cent of the people in Scotland would say they identify with the Conservative Party and regard that as the party which is closest to their values. Ask them how they are going to vote, and that falls to sort of, whatever, 14, 15 usually. So actually, so you've got that gap, and then in England and Wales, it's then getting from the 33 per cent, 34 per cent of people in England and Wales who say they identify with the UK Conservative Party up to the 40 per cent to get us a majority, so the big issue there is toxicity, the NHS, and things that swing these people. We've got an issue where we are not even getting the people who, even toxic as we are, who still recognise that party as being their party…between 2005 and 2010, we got into a position where we were never really thinking about the next level of voters to go through, because we have always got this situation that there is this bunch of voters who won't vote for us, most of whom probably vote

SNP, who should be voting for us and identify with us (interview with Scottish official 4, 30 November 2012).

The perceived existence of these 'missing Conservatives'[8] had a significant impact on strategic thinking within the Scottish Conservative Party:

> I'd like to think it was as strategic as that, but it wasn't. I think in the first decade, I mean between 1999 and 2005 it was continuing to exist. I think between 2005 and now, you know, at every strategy meeting or anything I am ever at, the key group we work on is those who should be voting Tory but aren't (interview with Scottish official 4, 30 November 2012).

The party primarily sought out lost sheep, rather than new voters. Combined with the idea that any improvements to the Conservative brand could be achieved at a UK level, this meant that (particularly post-2005) there was no faction in the Scottish Conservative Party that promoted a radical reappraisal of the Conservative brand until the 2011 leadership election.

5.4.3 Electoral defeat

Devolution required the Conservative Party to change. However, this thesis argues that devolution was not the main driver of party change for the Scottish Conservatives. Instead, the greatest driver of change was electoral defeat at Westminster elections. This is because electoral defeat at the UK level in 1997 and 2010 struck at the heart of what many Scottish Conservatives saw as their primary purpose. Boin (2004: 168) argues that 'a crisis occurs when the institutional structure of a social system experiences a relatively strong decline in legitimacy as its central service functions are impaired or suffer from overload.' Whilst the results of the 2001 and 2005 general elections could be explained away by wider UK Conservative weakness, the 2010 general election result tested to destruction assumptions about the importance of returning to power at Westminster. As the Sanderson Commission (2010: 8) notes: 'There is no doubt that the Scottish Conservatives' lack of progress since the Conservative defeat in the 1997 general election contributed to the lack of an outright Conservative victory in the general election this May.' This stark

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[8] The perceived existence of these 'missing Conservatives' was also apparent after 1997 in the UK Conservative Party. Some MPs thought they could be brought back if the party moved to the right on certain issues (Snowden, 2010: 42; see also Bale, 2010: 72).

realisation resulted in the wider crisis of legitimacy in structures and strategy which prompted the party in 2010 to appoint a commission to examine further organisational change. The all-too-familiar lack of progress in the 2007 Scottish Parliament elections (nearly a decade after the introduction of the Strathclyde reforms) did not result in such a fundamental reappraisal of what the party was doing.

Table 5.6 Scottish Conservative performance at Scottish Parliament Elections

Constituency

Year	Votes	Percentage Share	Number of MSPs
1999	364,425	15.6	0
2003	318,279	16.6	3
2007	334,743	16.6	4
2011	276,652	13.9	3

Regional List

Year	Votes	Percentage Share	Number of MSPs
1999	359,109	15.4	18
2003	296,929	15.5	15
2007	284,005	13.9	13
2011	245,967	12.4	12

Source: Rallings and Thrasher (2009); Scottish Parliament (2011)

Reflecting on the 2005 and 2010 general elections, one senior party official recalls that:

> We didn't come out of the 2005 general election feeling dreadfully upset. I think we come out of it thinking that it's a shame that Peter Duncan lost obviously, but one for one. And we almost won Angus, we almost won Perth and North Perthshire, we did better in Eastwood than we expected, so therefore there is a path one can see us going down and once we win at Westminster again we will win all these areas (interview with Scottish official 4, 30 November 2012).

Similarly, results of the first Scottish Parliament elections proved for most in the party to be a pleasant surprise following their disastrous Westminster results (interview with MSP 8, 2 October 2012; interview with MSP 9, 24 October 2012). However, the 2010 general election generated a different response: 'the fact we came out with exactly what we had, I think, was just a real shock for the party and that's where the

Sanderson thing came from' (interview with Scottish official 4, 30 November 2012). Another senior official puts it like this:

> Sadly, I think there was a bit of an excuse that, as long as the party was doing badly down south, it didn't expose the party up here to the same extent. It can be put down to a general malaise in Conservatism and it was worse here because we were starting from a lower base. So I think it was only when the party started to pick up there and we didn't, that then I think the issues of 'hang on a minute, is there not something more fundamental that is holding us back?' (interview with Scottish official 2, 2 November 2011).

The idea that the failure of the Scottish Conservatives had directly harmed the chances of forming a Conservative government at Westminster is a powerful one in a party that still set great store by regaining office at the UK level. Thus, defeat in this context drove change because it tested a particular strategy and set of assumptions to destruction (Bale, 2012: 216). The 2010 election result led to the establishment of the Sanderson Commission, which recommended party organisational reform. In Janda *et al.*'s (1995: 182-183) typology of electoral defeats, the 2010 general election for the Conservatives may be considered *calamitous*: a decisive rejection of the party or its policy stance or the clear endorsement of an electoral rival (primarily the Labour Party).

5.4.4 Political Opportunity Structure

If a set of changes comes to be considered as essential for a party to regain office, then this can act as a powerful driver for change. This driver of change was absent for the Scottish Conservatives because of the structure of political opportunities created by the Scottish Parliament electoral system and the Scottish party system. The Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) electoral system means that a coalition government in Scotland is the most likely outcome. Thus, in order to be in power the Conservatives would have to be a viable coalition partner for one of the other parties. In the post-devolution period, this was unlikely for several reasons. Firstly, the other parties were in 1997 united in their opposition to the Conservative Government. In the case of Labour and the Liberal Democrats, they had been brought together in the Scottish Constitutional Convention to formulate a plan for devolution that the Conservatives

stridently opposed. The Scottish National Party, which was also archly anti-Conservative, had internal rules stipulating they could not work with the Conservative Party. Secondly, even leaving to one side the other parties' aversion to working with a party they considered a common enemy, their combined strength meant that they did not even need to consider doing so. The other parties could ignore the Conservatives and still combine the numbers necessary to form a coalition administration in the Scottish Parliament.

The possibility of government, therefore, seemed a very remote one. If there had been a realistic chance of being in a coalition government, then this could have acted as a driver, for example, to change the party's image or ensure its manifesto contained an implementable agenda. However, even had there been such an opportunity, it is not clear that the Scottish Conservatives considered government in Scotland a high enough priority to make the changes necessary to seem like a viable coalition partner for other parties that considered themselves ant-Tory.

5.5 Manifestations of Party Change

In the post-devolution Scottish Conservative Party, the main manifestation of party change affected party organisation. This was prompted by the results of the 2010 general election in Scotland. On all of the other indicators identified for examination in the analytical framework (territorial organisation autonomy, policy-making and personnel) there have been no significant changes. Instead, the party has preferred to concentrate on being a competent opposition player in a multi-party parliament. In particular, despite some of the literature pointing towards sub-state parties' demands for further autonomy (see, for instance, Detterbeck 2012: 42; Hopkin 2003: 230; Van Houten 2009: 140-141), the Scottish Conservatives' position in the post-devolution period could never be characterised as straining at the leash. The assimilationist strategy it adopted was not as a result of any pressure or lack of autonomy from the UK Conservative Party.

5.5.1 Party Organisation

One of the most obvious and easy ways for a party both to adapt and be seen to be adapting to new circumstances is to reform its internal structures. However, organisational changes do not necessarily accompany changes in a party's attitudes, policies or power structures. It is easier to come to terms with devolution in an

organisational chart than in reality. Organisational reform in the Conservative Party is often displacement activity that distracts attention from more pressing but difficult issues (Ball, 2005: 13; see also Kelly, 2003). This has been the experience of the Scottish Conservatives through their two major post-devolution internal restructuring exercises: the Strathclyde Commission (1998) and the Sanderson Commission (2011).

The Reforms of the Strathclyde Commission (1998)

It is commonly understood that the Conservatives were 'wiped out' in Scotland at the 1997 general election. In terms of parliamentary representation this is certainly true. The Conservatives lost all 11 Scottish MPs and suffered a steep decline in vote share. However, organisationally, the party of the government of Scotland for the past 18 years remained largely intact. That is to say that it retained the kind of constituency and national structures required to service up to around 20 MPs at the same time as governing. The Conservative Party in 1997 did not approach the issue of party organisation with anything like a clean slate. One senior party official recalls:

> Inevitably if you are at, you know, as we were, especially before 1999, at 6, 7 per cent in the opinion polls, and you still have the apparatus of a significant political party, so, you know, losing all the MPs in 1997, you still had whatever, I don't know what the membership would have been in 1997, probably about 40,000 people, and the money and everything else, and these people are horrified by what's happening, but things just continue as normal, the associations continue as normal, they select candidates, so everything just keeps going on. And so, you know, if there had been a real wipe-out in 1997, you would have had a position where you could do what you wanted because there was nothing to stop you, but actually, we went to a conference immediately afterwards, 1200 people at the conference, very well-attended conference, absolutely determined to oppose devolution. So everything just continues as it is. And I do think that that in terms of strategy it made it very difficult (interview with Scottish official 4, 30 November 2012).

It was in this context that Scottish Conservatives asked Lord Strathclyde to chair a commission to recommend organisational changes to adapt the party to the challenge of the Scottish Parliament. The pre-1997 structure of the Scottish Conservatives

maintained a split between the voluntary, professional and parliamentary wings of the party. Party members were technically not members of the Conservative Party, but of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Association (SCUA).

The structure of Strathclyde's recommendations therefore still bears the mark of not only the pre-1997 organisation, but also the bias towards securing power at the Westminster level. Although the Strathclyde Commission prompted some significant organisational changes, its overall (perhaps unintended) effect was to leave the Scottish Conservatives with a confused leadership structure and a party organisation that was still directed towards a primary goal of power at Westminster. Strathclyde's organisational plan placed the Scottish Parliament firmly as a secondary concern. This structure remained in place until 2011. However, the Strathclyde reforms did begin to reverse some of the integration with the UK Conservative Party initiated under Margaret Thatcher in opposition in the 1970s (Stewart, 2009: 26).

In its interim report published on 13th December 1997, the Strathclyde Commission recommended that the party be joined together in a single unified structure. This was one of the most significant organisational changes. Thus, the previously separate professional, voluntary and parliamentary wings of the party should be united under an elected Chairman and an appointed Convenor. Management of the party would be split between a Scottish Executive and a Management Committee. However, in response to members' concerns (expressed during specially-convened Strathclyde 'road-shows') about unclear lines of accountability under a 'two-headed monster' (Strathclyde Commission, 1998: 4), the final report published in 1998 revised this structure. Instead, there would be a single Scottish Executive running the party, with a Chairman appointed jointly by the Executive and the UK party leader and a Deputy Chairman elected by Scottish party members.

The report notes considerable discussion about the exact roles of Chairman and Deputy Chairman. For instance, we learn that 'the Commissioners have wrestled to find the right solution that would provide a direct chain of command, give a clear role to the national [UK] Leader of the party *and* produce a Chairman that would always be acceptable to members in Scotland' (Strathclyde Commission, 1998: 4). Moreover, although 'many members of the party thought that the way forward was to have an *elected* Chairman, others doubted this would work and could possibly deny the job to someone who had a career outside politics (Strathclyde Commission, 1998:

4). Crucially, the report is concerned with ensuring that the Chairman is 'safe in the knowledge that he had the ear of the [UK] Leader *and* the support of the party' (Strathclyde Commission, 1998: 5). The elected Deputy Chairman will sit on the UK party management board. Thus the report prioritises privileged access to the centre over a more distinctive form of Scottish leadership of the party.

One of the most striking aspects of the Strathclyde report (and one which seems slightly odd to a reader in 2013) is the status it accords the 'leader of the MSP group'. After the above detailed discussion about the exact constitutional status of the Chairman and Deputy Chairman, this position is mentioned for the first time on page 9. It lists the membership of the new Scottish Executive in the following order: Chairman, Deputy Chairman, Two Vice Chairmen, Members Elected at Conference, UK Parliament Representative, Member of the European Parliament, Leader of the MSPs. This position thus comes just after the MEP and just before the representative of Scottish Conservatives in Local Government and the Younger Members' Representative. In case the status of this position was not clear, the new constitution proposed by Strathclyde states at 9.2.16 that the MSPs' Leader is an *ex officio* member of the Scottish Executive.

The whole thrust of the Strathclyde Commission report is to maintain highly integrated party where holding power at the UK level remains the priority. For any UK Conservative in 1998, the idea that the leader of the UK Conservative Party would not be in the House of Commons as a potential candidate to be Prime Minister would be regarded as absurd. Yet this is not how the commissioners, or most of the 1998 Scottish Conservative Party, viewed the Scottish Parliament or the chance of holding power in it. It was emphatically not the intention of the Strathclyde Commission to create a markedly separate party in Scotland. Instead, it sought to streamline an unwieldy Scottish party structure and slot the Scottish Parliament into it. A representative from the Scottish Parliament in the form of the Leader of the MSP Group would therefore feed into discussions about wider UK issues. The report is so wary of the consequences of further autonomy that it dare not even entertain the possibility of appointing a Chairman who does not have the support of the UK party leader.

This is emphatically not a party that sees the Scottish Parliament as marking a shift in the UK's governing arrangements towards something more akin to decentralisation in Spain or Germany. The main levers that it wishes to control remain

at Westminster. It wants to be governed by a UK government through a Conservative territorial secretary of state. It does not want a strong or separate leadership structure in Scotland because every time the Strathclyde report mentions 'Leader', it refers implicitly to the UK party leader. The result is a curious hybrid structure that acknowledges the existence of the Scottish Parliament, but cannot quite come to terms with the implications for party organisation.

Figure 5.1 Organisational structure recommended by the Strathclyde Commission (1998)

UK Leader	
Scottish Executive	**Scottish Central Office**
Policy Forum	**Scottish Council**	**Area Forums**
	Scottish Conference	
Membership in Associations	**Agents**
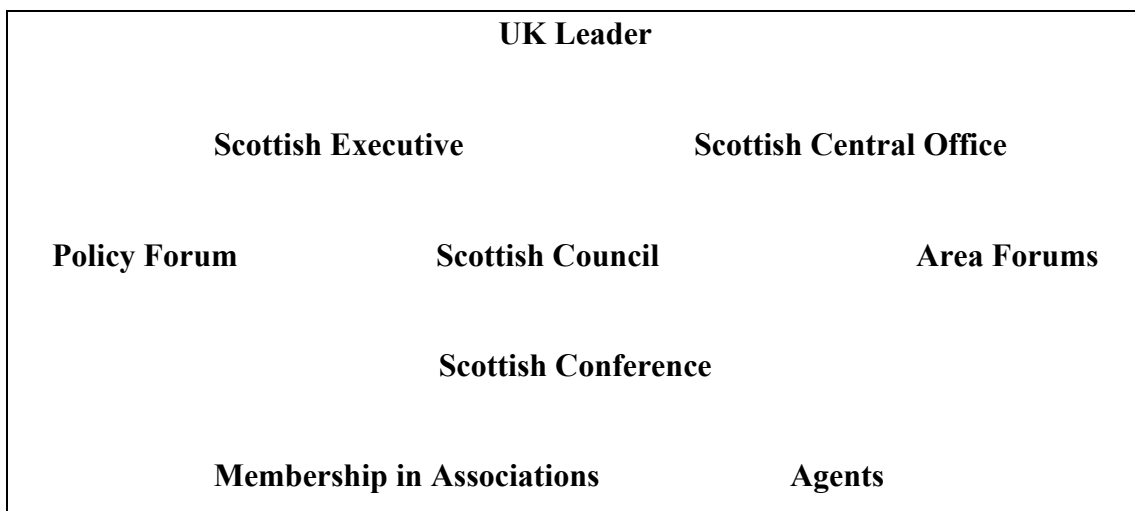
Source: Strathclyde Commission (1998:24)

The Strathclyde Commission report is an example of the interplay of forces that impact on party organisational change. The external shocks of devolution and electoral defeat clashed with deeply engrained instincts about the place of Scotland and the Scottish Conservative Party in the UK, as well as the 'institutional stickiness' (Pierson, 2004) of an old political party. From the perspective of the present, it is sometimes easy to forget that the Scottish Conservatives had just come out of *government*. They saw the route back to government through the prism of the UK, not the Scottish Parliament.

When the Strathclyde arrangements confronted the reality of the Scottish Parliament there occurred the blurring of accountability and the lack of clarity about who was in charge that it had specifically sought to avoid. The Strathclyde

organisational plan created two rival centres of power: the party in the Scottish Parliament and the party in Central Office. The assumption that the Leader of the MSP Group would be subordinate to the Party Chairman did not long survive the transition to the Scottish Parliament. Inevitably, the media assumed that the leader of the MSP group was the leader of the Scottish Conservative Party. The Scottish Parliament became the main focus for discussion of Scottish political issues and very quickly the MSP group had to deal with the media and with party lines and positions on debates. Aside from campaigning and fundraising issues, the party in Parliament became the main hub of political activity. At best, this caused tension and confusion with a Chairman located in Central Office at the other side of Edinburgh; at worst it was source of dysfunction and disagreement.

For one party official working in Parliament:

> You had Central Office who believed that the MSPs were useless, that the staff who worked for the MSPs were all poisonous. And to a certain degree both of those statements were true. And you had people at the Parliament, principally the staff at the Parliament, who thought that Central Office were failures, were over-promoted, and, you know, to a certain degree that was true as well (interview with Scottish official 3, 10 October 2011).

Ultimately, the officials working in Central Office did not answer to anyone working in the Parliament. This was 'a symptom of a party who doesn't know who is boss' (interview with Scottish official 3, 10 October 2011). Similarly, another official comments:

> You still had the problem of who was in charge... you had Peter [Duncan], Shadow Scottish Secretary, the only Scottish MP, big job, big name, and then you had David McLetchie, leader of the group. Who is in charge? And that at the end of the day is a problem (interview with Scottish official 1, 25 October 2011).

One former leader attaches less significance to this but still noted that the situation was unsatisfactory: 'In some respects I found that it was a problem in the sense that you had an authority that was very much limited by reference to the fact that you were leader in the parliament as opposed to leader elsewhere and it might therefore have been a better situation if I had been overall leader' (interview with MSP 8, 2 October 2012). For another former leader, however:

It was a problem. I mean, it wasn't a problem in the sense that I didn't get on with the people who had these responsibilities. I did get on with them. But it was a problem in the sense of, I felt at times, I had three horses, I was sitting in the driver's seat of the wagon, but I only had one set of reins in my hand. And while the other horses were roughly going in the same way, I really wanted at times to just take all the reins and say, we're going that way. And I couldn't do that (interview with MSP 9, 24 October 2012).

This confusion about responsibilities was compounded by the complicated arrangement of mandates for the different officials and politicians in charge. The Leader of the MSP Group was elected by an electoral college of 70 per cent MSPs and 30 per cent party members (Strathclyde Commission, 1998: 9); the Chairman was appointed by the Scottish Executive along with the UK party leader; and the Deputy Chairman was elected by party members (Strathclyde Commission, 1998: 8). As one party official explains, such an arrangement, 'clearly gave that Deputy Chairman a position that was, you could argue, more one in tune with the membership than the political leader of the party. I think that was one that came back to haunt the party later on and caused some of the difficulties that ensued.'

The Scottish Conservatives thus felt quite acutely the distinction identified by Katz and Mair (1994) between the different 'faces' of a political party: the *party in public office* was often in conflict with the *party in central office*. Although such tensions between Central Office and politicians are certainly not unprecedented in the Conservative Party (see, for example, Kavanagh, 2005: 226; Bale, 2012: 167), here they were written into the very constitution of the party.

Sanderson Commission (2010)

The Sanderson Commission was established by the Scottish Conservatives in response to their poor showing at the 2010 UK general election. Lord Sanderson of Bowden (a former party chairman and Scottish Office minister) chaired a panel drawn from all sections of the party (including councillors and Lord Forsyth) to: 'review the structures, function and operational activity of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party and to recommend any changes that would strengthen the Party as a modern, effective, political campaigning entity in Scotland.' It openly acknowledges from the outset that electoral results have been disappointing and that 'current confusion of

roles and responsibilities contributes significantly to what is seen widely to be a lack of clarity of leadership, accountability and decision-making' (Sanderson, 2010: 10). Thus, the main thrust of the Commission's recommendations was to streamline the structure of the Scottish Conservatives and place in charge a leader elected by the membership. It also recommended a rationalisation of the party's regional structures and more professional staff. Nevertheless, it is still possible to detect the tensions in the Conservative Party's unionist thought throughout the report. Whilst this is a clear example of party organisational change, the Sanderson Commission also reflects the split between 'devolutionists' and 'assimilationists' which would later emerge in the open during the 2011 leadership election.

The recommendation that there be a clear leader of the party elected by the membership tidied up one of the legacies of the Strathclyde Commission (Sanderson, 2010: 16). Yet still the Sanderson Commission felt the need to ensure that the leader need not be an MSP (Sanderson, 2010: 16). This again injects into the organisational structure of the Scottish Conservatives a lack of seriousness about holding power in the Scottish Parliament. Would a deputy first minister in a coalition Conservative administration be taken seriously if he or she was not the leader of the party but instead nominally answered to another party activist who might be an MP or a councillor? Again, any UK Conservative would be highly unlikely ever to contemplate such a structure.

The report is also concerned to protect the Scottish Conservatives' access to the UK centre. In rejecting the need for an entirely separate party in Scotland, it notes, firstly, that the 'Scottish Conservatives obtain numerous benefits from being part of the UK Party, including the opportunity to access resources, training and expertise and for members to vote for the UK leader' (Sanderson, 2010: 14). Secondly, it states that the UK party benefits from the input of the Scottish party on policy development. Such a structure, it argues, is entirely fitting with the Scottish Conservatives' desire to retain the Union. Thirdly, and most practically, it rejects a 'CDU/CSU' arrangement on the basis that the CSU is the dominant party in Bavarian politics and is therefore able to fund itself. Referring implicitly to the subsidy the Scottish Conservatives receive from the English party, it concludes: 'Scottish Conservatives have greater advantages to gain from being both autonomous and part of the UK Conservative Party' (Sanderson, 2010: 14).

The Commission also recommends a much simpler central management structure for the party. The Scottish Leader is unambiguously in charge and sits on a management board alongside the Chairman, three new regional convenors, the party treasurer and the party director. The three regional convenors (voluntary party members) are to work alongside three full-time regional campaign managers, employed centrally by the party.

Figure 5.2 Organisational structure recommended by the Sanderson Commission (2010: 23)

Scottish Leader
(elected one-member-one-vote)

Chairman
(appointed by the Scottish Leader after consultation with the UK Party Leader)

Director
(appointed by the Management Board)

Regional Campaign Managers x 3
(appointed by the Director and Regional Conveners)

Regional Conveners x 3
(voluntary officers elected by their Regional Councils)

Conference Convener
(appointed by the Party members
at the Party Conference)

Underneath the overarching Management Board sits a Fundraising and Finance Board, a Political Strategy Group (with representatives from the MEP group, Westminster and councillors), a Candidates Board, three Regional Councils and a Scottish Convention (the equivalent of the annual party conference).

Figure 5.3 Governance structure recommended by Sanderson Commission (2010: 23)
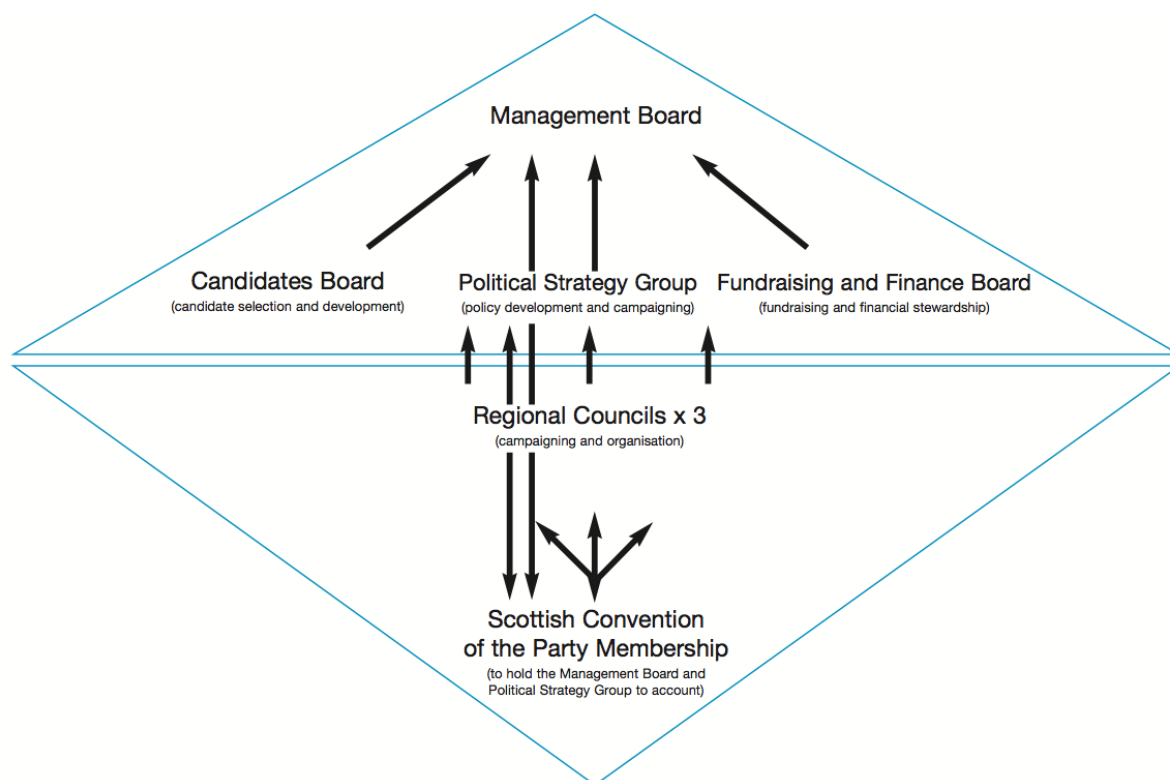
In addition to the new full-time regional campaign managers, the Sanderson Commission recommends the appointment of a Chief Policy Adviser (Sanderson Commission, 2010: 26). In this vein, it also laments the Scottish Conservatives' lack of engagement with think-tanks (particularly the centre-right Reform Scotland) and even with its own members about formulation of policy. There should be much more consultation with members, twice yearly 'policy conferences' and substantive motions to be debated at the party's annual conference.

The Sanderson recommendations were on the whole adopted at a special conference. There were some changes to procedures for selecting candidates (Convery, 2012). However, although this is a clear manifestation of internal party organisational change which attempts to deal with the reality of devolution, it does not guarantee wider acceptance of a Conservative vision for the Scottish Parliament. The *formal* organisation of a party may be different from its *enacted* organisation.

5.5.2 Territorial Organisational Autonomy

The Scottish Conservative Party is a territorial branch of the UK Conservative Party. It therefore faces all of the challenges associated with being a statewide party in a regional context. However, the prevailing attitudes of elites within the UK Conservative Party and the structure of the devolution arrangements resulted in the Scottish Conservatives having a high degree of autonomy (Convery, 2013). This section examines the autonomy of the Scottish Conservative Party over the central areas of leadership selection, candidate selection, policy-making and finance (Laffin *et al.*, 2007).

Leadership Selection

The post-devolution Conservatives have had only one leadership election. David McLetchie was elected in 1999 at a specially convened selection meeting of party grandees and candidates and Annabel Goldie was elected unopposed in 2005. The process for the leadership election in 2011 was devised in Scotland under the Sanderson Commission and whilst there were some rumours that David Cameron backed Ruth Davidson, the leadership election was free from central control. Even had the UK Conservative Party wanted to intervene, it could only have done so to a limited extent in terms of providing tacit endorsements or advice. The Sanderson (2010) rules mean that the leader is selected only by members of the Scottish party on a one-member-one-vote basis using the alternative vote electoral system.

Candidate Selection

The area of candidate selection still bears the legacy of the previously separate Scottish Conservative Party and the importance of constituency associations in the wider Conservative Party. Central Office in London did not generally interfere with candidate selection for Westminster. Before the first Scottish Parliament elections, a similarly separate system was put in place. Candidate selection is the sole responsibility of the Scottish Party. Unlike the Labour party, for example, there have been no high-profile examples of interference from London in selection of candidates for the devolved legislature.

However, in the case of by-elections for Westminster during Cameron's leadership, UK Central Office took a much greater interest. This has led to candidates being put in place from outside constituency associations. Yet it would be a mistake to view this as the UK Central Office trampling on an association's autonomy. In the

case of Glasgow East, for example, the local party was so moribund that it was merely pleased to have a candidate who was perceived to be of high calibre.

Thus the Cameron modernisation project has provided motivation for some interference. There was of course no danger of the Conservative Party winning by-elections in Scotland. UK Central Office's concern was almost purely presentational: that the candidate would not embarrass the party in the national media and would fit with the overall theme of modernisation. In Davena Rankin's case in Glasgow East in 2008, for instance, a single-mother trade unionist; in the case of Ruth Davidson in 2009, a modern and presentable figure with extensive television journalism experience.

Policy-making[9]

Like many European parties on the moderate centre-right, the Conservative Party is a highly centralised organisation when it comes to making policy. Bale (2012) examines frequent instances of initiatives to involve party members in the making of policy, but finds little evidence that policies adopted are marked by the influence of the various formal committees and structures put in place to gather the views of members. This is also the case in the Scottish Conservative Party where the party at large has little role in the final drafting of the manifesto. For instance, the party took a pick and mix approach to the recommendations of an arm's length policy group of party members and non-members set up before the 2007 Holyrood elections (Torrance, 2012: 104). For the 2007 manifesto, one MSP concluded that, 'ultimately, the policy was decided effectively by the leader and a small team who took the final decisions' (interview with MSP 1, 6 March 2012).

Elites at the centre of the Conservative Party were arguably more relaxed than in the Labour Party about territorial branches pursuing different policies (although this in part may be explained by the Party's electoral weakness in Scotland and Wales). The Conservatives at the centre gave their territorial branches considerable freedom in devolved areas, but maintained a clear split between the politics of the centre and the periphery. This strategy also suited the Scottish Conservative party which did not push for more autonomy during this period and in the main steered clear of commitments on high politics matters. Overall, Detterbeck's (2012: 204)

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[9] This section draws on Convery (2013).

detailed study of territorial party politics views the Scottish Conservatives as an 'autonomist-type' party which enjoys considerable freedom and can be considered more autonomous than the territorial branches of Spain's Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) or Partido Popular (PP).

It is interesting to note that the Scottish Conservatives have never been in a position of demanding autonomy that the centre is reluctant to grant. Indeed, when given the chance to separate entirely in 2011, they rejected it. This may in part reflect a belief, shared with UK party elites, that high politics matters should be decided by Conservatives at the centre in what might be termed 'a fifth nation' (Aughey, 2010: 271). It may also latterly reflect a desire to circumvent Conservative weakness in Scotland. Policy-making is much more likely to be on the centre-right if it is controlled by UK government departments. It is unlikely, for instance, that Iain Duncan Smith's welfare reforms would see the light of day in Scotland, were they not still controlled by the UK Department for Work and Pensions (for a highly critical Scottish Parliament committee report, see Welfare Reform Committee, 2012). This is the case even when departments are led by Labour ministers. Centre-right policies are more likely to be implemented by Westminster than by the Scottish Parliament where policy-making is dominated by professional interests (McGarvey and McConnell, 2012).

From the UK party's perspective, its attitude to the Scottish Conservatives since devolution might be characterised as one of benign neglect. The Scottish Tories have been for the most part left to their own devices. Unlike in the territorial Labour Party there have been no major arguments about territorial leadership selection (Hopkin, 2009: 186-187). Thus, perhaps somewhat surprisingly given its history of heavy centralisation and more recent uncompromising unionism, the Conservative Party's Scottish organisation has adapted reasonably well to the challenges of policy divergence. Not only has significant policy autonomy been given to the Scottish Conservatives; there is also a relaxed attitude at the centre towards the Scottish branch taking a different policy path within the limits of the devolution arrangements. For instance, when the Scottish Conservatives decided to support free personal care in Scotland in 2002, this did not cause any problems with the UK party. Moreover, the Scottish Conservatives, whether because of lack of interest or deference, have never strayed into bold thinking on constitutional or fiscal matters that have the potential to interfere with the autonomy of the centre.

All of the MSPs interviewed by the author confirmed that the Scottish Conservatives had almost complete policy autonomy on all of the areas under the Scottish Parliament's control. One senior MSP cannot recall any instances of clashes:

> I think the autonomy is actually pretty good. Throughout William Hague's period of leadership, IDS, Howard...I mean basically, they cut us a lot of slack and we could actually move on quite a number of these areas, so I think the autonomy aspect of it worked pretty well and we didn't have any major issues with that… I think probably the most sensitive area in that regard would be in relation to fishing, although we did sort of try and push the boat out in that regard. But otherwise actually I found with William and IDS and then Michael Howard, I mean I actually found quite a lot of slack there, to be honest (interview with MSP 8, 2 October 2012).

Similarly, asked if there were any 'no-go' areas in terms of devolved policy-making, another senior MSP comments:

> No. Absolutely not. And in fact, to be fair, and credit must be paid initially to William Hague because he said…at that time, look, you know, devolved Parliament, Scotland Act, you've got powers, you now deal with issues that have nothing to do with Westminster, you are absolutely in control over policy-making. And that was reaffirmed by Iain Duncan Smith, Michael Howard and David Cameron. And there were things where I did things slightly differently in devolved policy. Perhaps notably in our justice portfolio we took a slightly different approach to things. We also...we were interestingly in the vanguard with our drugs policy. I mean Iain Duncan Smith was very interested in what we were doing up here, and when we got that new drugs strategy delivered, which was a Conservative policy, you know, down south were very interested in that. So in a sense we kind of led in some areas, never mind diverged. So, no, I never felt constrained and I know Ruth doesn't either (Interview with MSP 9, 24 October 2012).

This attitude of benign neglect or pragmatism at the UK level fits with wider considerations of what might be the priorities of elites at the top of the Conservative Party (see, for instance, Bulpitt, 1983, 1986; Convery 2013). It also chimes with some of what is known about attitudes towards the Scottish Conservatives in the UK

Conservative Party. Writing about the 1950s Conservative Party, Bale (2012: 62) notes that the 'party north of the border continued to be a standing joke in London until well into the next century' (see also Bale, 2012: 77; 192-193).

Finance

During the early years of the Scottish Parliament, the Conservatives in Scotland were able to rely on donations from Lord Laidlaw. However, he ceased to donate to the party after the 2010 general election. In exchange for providing the money to support the implementation of the Sanderson reforms, the Scottish party agreed that all money raised in Scotland should go through Conservative Campaign Headquarters (CCHQ) in London. A proportion is then returned to Scotland to spend each year. However, one senior party official still insists that the Scottish Conservatives can raise enough money to cover their costs and that the new arrangement with the UK party simply gives financial security (interview with Scottish official 4, 30 November 2012). Whether the Scottish Conservatives would have enough money to survive if they broke away from the UK Conservative Party was a key debate during the 2011 leadership election (Convery, 2012).

5.5.3 Personnel

Theories of path dependency point out that decisions taken at the beginning of an organisation's development constrain and shape future choices (Pierson, 2004). The Scottish Conservatives still bear the mark of the initial candidate selection procedures and the candidates adopted to stand at the first Scottish Parliament elections in 1999. Elected members are the public face of a political party and drive its everyday campaigning and policy agenda. This is particularly the case in a political party like the Conservatives in which so much power (especially in opposition) is placed in the hands of a leadership drawn from its ranks of elected politicians. However, aside from the election in 2011 of the openly gay Ruth Davidson, there have been no major personnel changes that can be said to have represented significant party change.

Table 5.7 Conservative Members of the Scottish Parliament, 1999-2011

Constituency

	1999	*2003*	*2007*	*2011*
Ayr		John Scott	John Scott	John Scott
Edinburgh Pentlands		David McLetchie	David McLetchie	
Galloway and Upper Nithsdale		Alex Fergusson	Alex Fergusson	Alex Fergusson
Roxburgh and Berwickshire			John Lamont	John Lamont

Regional List

	1999	*2003*	*2007*	*2011*
Central Scotland	Lyndsay McIntosh	Margaret Mitchell	Margaret Mitchell	Margaret Mitchell
Glasgow	Bill Aitken	Bill Aitken	Bill Aitken	Ruth Davidson
Highlands and Islands	Jamie MacGrigor	Jamie MacGrigor	Jamie MacGrigor	Jamie MacGrigor
	Mary Scanlon	Mary Scanlon	Mary Scanlon	Mary Scanlon
Lothian	James Douglas-Hamilton	James Douglas-Hamilton	Gavin Brown	David McLetchie
	David McLetchie			Gavin Brown
Mid-Scotland and Fife	Keith Harding	Ted Brocklebank	Ted Brocklebank	Murdo Fraser
	Nick Johnstone			Elizabeth Smith
	Brian Monteith	Murdo Fraser	Murdo Fraser	
		Brian Monteith	Elizabeth Smith	
North East Scotland	David Davidson	David Davidson	Alex Johnstone	Alex Johnstone
	Alex Johnstone	Alex Johnstone	Nanette Milne	Nanette Milne
	Ben Wallace	Nanette Milne		
South Scotland	Alex Fergusson	Phil Gallie	Derek Brownlee	
	Phil Gallie	David Mundell		
	David Mundell			
	Murray Tosh			
West Scotland	Annabel Goldie	Annabel Goldie	Annabel Goldie	Annabel Goldie
	John Young	Murray Tosh	Jackson Carlaw	Jackson Carlaw

Source: Scottish Parliament (2013)

5.5.4 Policy

One of the most important ways in which a political party can demonstrate change is through its policy platform, particularly as outlined in a manifesto. Dropping once cherished but now unpopular policies in order to change a party's image, for instance,

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is a clear sign of party change. However, the policy process in political parties is subject to the same path dependent processes as its organisation. As Bale (2012: 149) points out, 'a policy is more likely to be included in a party's offer to the electorate if it is dreamt up earlier, rather than later in the process.' Similarly, in the absence of new ideas, parties may reach for ideas which have been tried before and which are known to fit with members' or (perceived) supporters' views or the party's sense of ideology. The Scottish Conservative Party lost its once formidable indigenous capacity for producing Tory policies specifically for Scotland. For most of the Conservative governments (1979-1997) the party concentrated instead on tailoring English policies for a Scottish context, a process one party official labels as 'tartanisation' (interview with Scottish official 2, 2 November 2011).

Similarly, in the post-devolution period, the party struggled both to adjust to the prevailing policy mood in Scotland and to come up with original ideas which addressed the central issues over which the Scottish Parliament has competence in a manner which did not appear out of date or extreme. Thus, the party's policy platform can only be said to have changed in quite limited ways since 1997. In particular, in the key Scottish Parliament areas of health and education, the party in 2011 (and in many respects in 2013) was essentially repackaging the type of reforms that it had pursued in government in Scotland (1979-1997).

This section considers firstly the policy-making of the Scottish Conservative Party in the pre-devolution era. It then examines the main post-1997 report on Scottish Conservative policy, *Scotland's Future*, written under the chairmanship of Sir Malcolm Rifkind. Finally, it considers the post-devolution policies of the Scottish Conservative Party. Devolution has had a limited impact on the party's policies.

The Making of Pre-Devolution Scottish Conservative Party Policy

There is a distinguished tradition of Conservative party policy that is made in Scotland for Scotland. The loss of this strand of thinking capacity was a major contributor to the decline of the Conservatives in Scotland (Stewart, 2009). Scottish Conservative MPs have also had a major influence on aspects of the philosophy of the UK Conservative Party (see, for instance, Torrance (2010) on Noel Skelton and the idea of a 'property-owning democracy'). Moreover, 'the Conservative Party more than any other in the 20th century contributed to the development of the distinct Scottish politics which was mobilised by supporters of a Scottish Parliament'

(Mitchell and Convery, 2012: 170). Not only did the Conservatives create the Scottish Office; they oversaw its expansion and development well into the 1990s. The preservation of the distinctiveness of Scottish political and economic institutions from the dangers of excessive centralisation and anglification was once a central part of its message. For instance, Scottish Unionists campaigned against the new organisations created by the Attlee government to run the new nationalised industries in Scotland, arguing that separate Scottish boards should be created (Mitchell, 1990: 27). The 1949 Scottish Unionists were the type of party that could produce a document entitled *Scottish Control of Scottish Affairs*, which recommended further strengthening the role of the Scottish Office and of Scottish oversight of nationalised industries (Scottish Unionist Party, 1949; Bale, 2012: 32).

It would be overstating matters to paint a picture of a golden age of Scottish Conservative policy-making. Nevertheless, it is clear that whatever post-war capacity existed gradually declined and increasingly the Scottish Conservatives looked to the centre to provide a lead. Particularly in the 1980s, the Scottish Conservatives sought to either refashion English Conservative policies for a Scottish context (Stewart, 2009: 45) or, even more reactively, adopt a strategy of being seen to protect Scotland from the harsher edges of UK Conservative policies (Torrance, 2009: 45; Mitchell, 1990: 98-99).

A Scottish Conservative official who worked for the party in the early 1990s summarises the thinking of the pre-devolution Scottish Conservatives like this:

> The strategy, I suppose, was to try and make Thatcherism work in Scotland. We were still trying to sell, sort of traditional, the safe message that we were selling across the UK, but at the same time we were trying to develop, I suppose, more of a Scottish identity...but the policies were by and large Scottish versions of what was happening across the UK. There wasn't that much deviation, despite the fact there was a Scottish Office.

Being in government meant that he Scottish Office remained central to the policy-making machinery for the party:

> I mean, I was a fairly junior researcher at the time. But yes a lot of our policy came from the special advisers at the Scottish Office. It would come down to us and we would relay it to the wider party…there was more policy because we were in government so we had to make policy

on everything pretty much. So, yes, it would have been set at a UK level absolutely. The short answer is that there wasn't a Scottish element to that. We were 'Scottifying' policies...

In such a context therefore:

…there wasn't seen to be a need for a Scottish identity in the party, and in policy in particular, and therefore it was just tartan versions of what was happening down south. You know, there was still a belief that we could sell a united, unionist message across the UK and you didn't have to have different policies in Scotland to those in the rest of the UK. And that was very much where we were coming from. We weren't really arguing for a sort of, any sort of decentralising perspective. That wasn't the way it worked. It was, you know, devolution, no, Thatcherism, yes. That was the slogan at the time. We didn't want devolution. What we wanted was a more Conservative, with a capital 'C', message...tooth and claw if you like. We would be blue (interview with Scottish official 2, 2 November 2011).

Such an analysis is supported by consideration of the 1992 Scottish Conservative manifesto. John Major's flagship public services policy, the *Citizen's Charter*, is revised for a Scottish context (Scottish Conservative Party, 1992: 14). In education, the parental choice agenda is central: schools should publish performance data so that parents can make decisions. The assisted places scheme (through which the state pays for poor children to go to private schools) is to be maintained (Scottish Conservative Party, 1992: 18). Apart from the inheritance of the distinctive Scottish curriculum and examinations system, these policies do not in any significant way deviate from the broad thrust of English Conservative education policy. Similarly, in the NHS, GP fundholding is to be extended in Scotland (Scottish Conservative Party, 1992: 30). At best, Scottish Conservatives did not so much lose the ability to think for themselves as decide that the best way forward for the country was for such thinking to be carried out at the UK level and adapted for Scotland.

The Rifkind Policy Commission

Alongside the Strathclyde organisational reforms, the Scottish Conservatives also asked Sir Malcolm Rifkind (who had just lost his Edinburgh Pentlands seat) to chair a policy commission to look at a post-devolution direction for the party. The resulting

Scotland's Future report is a document which serves as an eclectic menu of options, rather than a coherent way forward (Scottish Conservative Party, 1998). It covers everything from raising teachers' salaries (p.18) to the importance of having live arrivals information at bus stops for passengers' peace of mind (p.52). Nevertheless, there are flashes of ideas that might begin to move towards a new agenda. Interestingly, it proposes some quite radical constitutional innovations that were never subsequently taken up. It recommends that a Royal Commission on the House of Lords should consider whether the House should have a regional representative structure similar to the German Bundesrat (Scottish Conservative Party, 1998: 6). The Westminster Parliament should also give a 'binding commitment that devolution legislation could never be abrogated without the consent of the Scottish Parliament' (Scottish Conservative Party, 1998: 6). The report also suggests that Scotland deserves a 'premier' not a 'first minister' and a 'government' not an 'executive', a change introduced by the SNP government in 2007.

However, this report also marks the first point at which we can detect that the pre-1997 policy agenda will be difficult for the Conservatives to shake off. The Commission, as it insists, probably did not feel 'any need to ensure that our recommendations are consistent with Conservative policy in England and Wales' and doubtless intended to have 'clear differences in…approach with those south of the border' (Scottish Conservative Party, 1998: 5). Nevertheless, apart from something reasonably distinctive on fishing (p.43), the report stays in the main within the parameters set by the previous 18 years of Conservative policy towards Scotland.

Thus, once again, power is to be devolved directly to teachers from local authorities so that they are in total charge of their school (Scottish Conservative Party, 1998: 18; also proposed in Scottish Conservative Party, 1992: 18; Scottish Conservative Party, 1999: 10; Scottish Conservative Party, 2003: 16). Moreover, not content with the measure of parental choice they have already injected into the system, the Rifkind Commission proposes a longer-term investigation into a school voucher system (along the same lines as the parents' and patients' passports explored under Iain Duncan Smith – see Bale, 2010: 147) which could be used at state or private schools and topped up by parents (Scottish Conservative Party, 1998: 19). Considering the fact that only two of Scotland's 2500 schools took up the opportunity provided by the Conservatives to become 'grant-maintained' outside local authority control in the 1990s (McKenzie, 2001: 95), it seems odd that the Conservatives would

attempt to continue along this path. Taken to its logical conclusion, even if the Conservatives won a majority in the new Scottish Parliament and were in a position to introduce such a system, it is not at all clear that the Scottish educational establishment would co-operate in its implementation. Considerable political capital would have to be spent on battling opposition to what would be described as the further 'marketisation' and even 'privatisation' of the education system. Taking on professional vested interests may be considered a noble Conservative cause in a Scottish political system otherwise dominated by the centre-left, but here the Conservatives appear to have badly misread the extent of the 'zone of acquiescence' in education policy.[10]

Similarly, recommendations on the NHS show the limited extent of new thinking and also bear the mark of UK Conservative policies. GP fundholding and the NHS internal market should be maintained (Scottish Conservative Party, 1998: 14), in addition to the perennial favourite of bringing back matron (Scottish Conservative Party, 1998: 15).

Overall, it is perhaps being too harsh on the Scottish Conservatives to expect them within a year of the 1997 electoral disaster to come up with a fresh and exciting policy agenda. In the UK context, such new thinking was also absent (Bale, 2010), although there were stirrings about the extent to which the Conservatives would have to change in order to regain power.

Post-Devolution Scottish Conservative Party Policy-Making

The policy positions of the Scottish Conservative Party in 2013 show little evidence of significant party change. Indeed, it is arguable that the intellectual foundations for their policies are still those that informed the writing of the 1992 manifesto. Devolution has not provided a sufficient shock to its attitudes to engender a radical rethinking of policies for implementation in a Scottish context. This has at times prevented the Scottish Conservatives from engaging constructively in debates about the future of, for instance, Scottish public services.

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[10] However, it should be noted that (outside the limitations of Scottish political debate) school choice is not necessarily inimical to the progressive ends all of the Scottish political parties claim to support. See, for instance, Paterson (2007) or Le Grand (2007).

1999 Manifesto

The first manifesto for the 1999 Scottish Parliament elections explicitly acknowledges such a danger. David McLetchie's foreword concedes that people thought that 'our decisions and policies had London stamped all over them, with little relevance, or sympathy, for the needs of the Scottish people' (Scottish Conservative Party, 1999: 1). The manifesto also begins with a strong commitment to the success of the Scottish Parliament, suggesting that the civil service should be spread throughout Scotland (Scottish Conservative Party, 1999: 3). Nevertheless, the rest of the manifesto does not represent a significant step forward from previous policies. It has a firm commitment to a low tax economy (Scottish Conservative Party, 1999: 5) and to removing 'red tape' (Scottish Conservative Party, 1999: 7). It proposes giving parents 'vouchers' worth the equivalent of a full year's nursery education place for a four-year-old which they can spend wherever they want (Scottish Conservative Party, 1999: 10). Again, education is to be taken out of the hands of local authorities; instead it should be invested in 'school boards' bringing together groups of schools which each have greater freedom (Scottish Conservative Party, 1999: 10).

Similarly, in health the Scottish Conservatives propose taking powers away from health boards and returning to GP fundholding (Scottish Conservative Party, 1999: 14). In addition, its seven key pledges include lifting the beef-on-the-bone ban, abolishing university tuition fees and introducing 'modern matrons' into hospitals (Scottish Conservative Party, 1999: 2). Its positions are based around responses to statements about what Labour has done in government (increased taxes or regulation) and has photographs of voters asking questions like: 'Why wasn't I told about the new taxes?' (Scottish Conservative Party, 1999: 5).

2003 Manifesto

The 2003 manifesto marks something of a step backward in terms of presenting a positive image of devolution. On almost the opening page it has a big picture of a mock Hollywood sign which reads 'Follyrood' (Scottish Conservative Party, 2003: 3). It then goes on to propose cutting the number of MSPs to 108 by making constituency MSPs operate on the new smaller number of Westminster seats (Scottish Conservative Party, 2003: 5). In an early sign of unease about the powers of the Scottish Parliament, it proposes a Royal Commission to examine its future.

Zero-tolerance policing is again a key feature, alongside the conviction that 'prison works' (Scottish Conservative Party, 2003: 7-8). On the NHS, the Scottish Conservatives indicate once again that they are against the NHS public sector monopoly, although they pledge to stick to current NHS spending plans (Scottish Conservative Party, 2003: 11). Once again, GP fundholding is to be restored, alongside an internal market in which 'money follows the patient' (Scottish Conservative Party, 2003: 12). In education, parental choice remains central to the Conservatives' plans. More power should be devolved away from local authorities and towards head teachers. An early version of Michael Gove's free schools policy is also proposed (Scottish Conservative Party, 2003: 16).

2007 Manifesto

In 2007, as in 2003, we again see a theme of disappointment with devolution (Scottish Conservative Party, 2007: 2). There is also a quiet acknowledgement that the fiscal powers of the Scottish Parliament are problematic (Scottish Conservative Party, 2007: 17). In education, again more power is to be devolved to head teachers, but some role for local authorities is still envisaged (Scottish Conservative Party, 2007: 26). Free schools have gone, but the manifesto suggests a pilot of one city academy in Glasgow (Scottish Conservative Party, 2007: 28). The tuition fees pledge is dropped and instead a commission will examine the future funding of higher education (Scottish Conservative Party, 2007: 28).

2007-2011: Policy Relevance for the Scottish Conservatives

By supporting the budgets of the minority SNP Government (2007-2011), the Scottish Conservative Party was able to negotiate policy concessions. During this time, it claims to have achieved: 1000 extra police officers; a four-year council tax freeze; cuts in business rates; a new drugs strategy; a town centre regeneration fund; and a £26 million-pound investment in housing (Scottish Conservatives, 2011: 1). Thus, the Conservatives during this period were adept at being an opposition party in a multi-party parliament (interview with MSP 6, 8 May 2012). In particular, the party's finance spokesman, Derek Brownlee, developed a good working relationship with the SNP's Finance Secretary, John Swinney. Derek Brownlee also hoped that voting with the SNP would help detoxify the party's brand and bring it back into the mainstream

of Scottish politics (Torrance, 2012: 107). However, the co-operative working with the SNP had a limited impact on changing the Scottish Conservatives.

2011 Manifesto

The 2011 manifesto takes as its theme 'Common Sense for Scotland'. This has echoes of William Hague's leadership of the UK party (1997-2001) when he proposed a 'Common Sense Revolution' (Hayton, 2012: 49). Across the public services, the party proposes to abolish the SNP's concordat with Scottish councils; pilot social impact bonds; and follow the UK Conservative Party by requiring local authorities to public items of expenditure over £500 (Scottish Conservative Party, 2011: 9-10). In 2011, education policy draws on the Rifkind Commission to propose school vouchers equal to the value of a year's education in the state sector that can be spent with any provider (Scottish Conservative Party, 2011: 12). In higher education in 2011, the Scottish Conservatives were the only party to propose introducing a graduate contribution to university fees (Scottish Conservative Party, 2011: 14).

In health, the Scottish Conservatives propose to protect the NHS budget and establish a cancer drugs fund. The commitment to an NHS internal market is dropped and replaced with a proposal to review the structure of the Scottish NHS (Scottish Conservative Party, 2011: 16-17).

Table 5.8 The evolution of Scottish Conservative policy on key public services

	1999	*2003*	*2007*	*2011*
Education	More power to head teachers; parental choice	More power to head teachers; parental choice	More power to head teachers; parental choice; pilot of one city academy in Glasgow	Parental choice through school vouchers; free schools
Health	Return to GP fundholding	Return to GP fundholding	Money follows patient through the system (patients' decisions informed by GPs)	Review of the Scottish NHS structure

Source: Scottish Conservative Party (1999; 2003; 2007; 2011)

Overall, policy change in the post-devolution Scottish Conservative Party has been limited and incremental. It is to a large extent still informed by the party's experience in government in Scotland. In 2013, Ruth Davidson again proposed school vouchers in her speech to the Scottish Conservative Party conference.

5.6 Conclusion

For the Scottish Conservative Party, the introduction of devolution was a traumatic experience. Not only did it come after a crushing defeat for the party in 1997, it also struck at the heart of its conception of unionism. The Scottish Conservatives undoubtedly embraced devolution at a practical level, participating fully in the Parliament, providing one of their number to be presiding officer, and even during 2007-2011 becoming a significant and relevant opposition party. Pragmatic Conservatives could hardly do otherwise when faced with a new governing institution. However, this level of engagement was superficial. The Conservatives never managed to absorb the Scottish Parliament at a philosophical level.

In policy terms, they found it difficult to grasp that many of the polices they pursued in the 1980s and 1990s in Scotland would never have been considered, far less implemented, had it not been for the peculiar structure of the British state, under which the colour of territorial governments was decided by electoral politics at the UK level. There is an extent to which the Scottish Conservatives towards the end of the 20th century were artificially sustained in a set of policies and attitudes that went beyond their mandate. Acknowledging this, and then trying to place themselves and their policies on the centre-right of a *Scottish* (as opposed to British) political spectrum, was a step the Scottish Conservatives could never quite take. They became dependent on a stock of answers which served them well in the 1980s and 1990s, but which were viewed in post-devolution Scotland as at best old fashioned and at worst extreme or even English. Until the 2011 leadership election, the Scottish Conservatives never seriously considered breaking out of this inheritance. However, in that election, they opted for cosmetic rather than radical change by electing Ruth Davidson over Murdo Fraser.

The most significant changes in the post-devolution Scottish Conservative Party concerned organisation. The electoral defeats of 1997 and 2010 prompted the party to appoint commissions to consider the future. Although devolution was a factor in driving these changes, on balance it is fair to say that electoral defeat was a more

potent spur for change in a party that still set so much store by the priority of Westminster office.

The autonomy of the Scottish Conservatives did not change over the post-devolution period. The UK Conservative Party adopted a policy of benign neglect towards its territorial branches, leaving the Scottish Conservatives in particular with complete autonomy over policy and candidate and leadership selection. There were not substantial changes in party personnel over this period.

Broadly, two paths faced the Scottish Conservatives in 1999: embrace or tolerate devolution. In the end, they chose to follow neither. Instead, they sought a middle road which avoided party conflict, wholeheartedly embraced the Parliament at a procedural level, and left them after 2007 being compared unfavourably to their Welsh colleagues whose attitude and election results suggested they might be dealing rather better with the regional/national dilemma.

6. Devolution, Party Change and the Welsh Conservative Party

> There is no historical necessity for Wales; there is no historical necessity for a Welsh people or a Welsh nation. Wales will not exist unless the Welsh want it. It is not compulsory to want it. Plenty of people who are biologically Welsh choose not to be Welsh. That act of choice is beyond reason. One thing, however, is clear from our history. If we want Wales, we will have to make Wales.
>
> Gwyn Alf Williams, *The Welsh in Their History* (1982: 201)

> The only Conservatives in Wales are the English who moved in.
>
> Margaret Thatcher to Wyn Roberts (quoted in Roberts, 2006: 221)

> We have parked our tanks on the nationalists' lawns in a sense.
>
> Interview with Conservative AM 3, 1 March 2012

6.1 Introduction

This chapter applies the analytical framework outlined in chapter three to the Welsh Conservative Party. It finds that the Welsh Conservatives faced similar challenges to the Scottish Conservatives in adapting to devolution. It is arguable that initially the Scottish Conservatives adapted much better to the transition from the referendum to the new institutions. However, the election of Nick Bourne as leader of the party became a key driver for party change at the elite level in the Welsh Conservatives. In particular, he encouraged a new attitude towards the party's policies and image which was much more supportive of Welsh aspirations. This did not represent a wholesale conversion of the party to devolution (particularly at the level of the party membership), but it did ensure that at the elite level the party was able to manoeuvre itself into a position where it was on the cusp of coalition government in 2007 with

Plaid Cymru and the Liberal Democrats. Thus, whilst it is easy for some in the Scottish party to exaggerate the extent of the party change which occurred in the Welsh Conservatives, it is clear that there has been much more change than in Scotland.

Unlike the Scottish Conservative Party, the Welsh Conservative Party started out with less formal autonomy in 1997 and did not gain any more over the course of its separate existence. Instead, it pushed at the limits of its autonomy and found that the central party did not object (Convery, 2013). For the Welsh Conservatives, the lack of clearly defined party structures presented fewer powerful actors to consult and fewer forums for dissent from the leadership's strategy. The party was, in Panebianco's (1988: 261) terms, less institutionalised than in Scotland and this resulted in fewer obstacles to change. In short, the main driver of party change was a group of people who thought autonomously, rather than formal structures that granted autonomy. Such changes were also aided by a much more clearly defined intellectual project of renewal in Welsh Conservatism (akin to the movement which provided the foundations for the Cameron agenda), outlined by figures such as Jonathan Evans and David Melding, and enthusiastically (but subtly) adopted under Bourne's leadership.

This chapter begins by examining the history of the Welsh Conservative Party and in particular the party's attitudes towards Wales during the Conservative Governments (1979-1997). It then considers the evolution of devolution in Wales. The widely perceived inadequacies of the powers and structure of the Welsh Assembly provided a key opportunity for the Conservatives to engage with the devolution project. This chapter then examines the potential drivers of party change for the Welsh Conservatives and finds leadership change to be the most significant. Finally, this chapter analyses the manifestations of party change in Wales. Whilst there has been little organisational change, the policies and the image the party has tried to project have changed significantly.

6.2 History of the Welsh Conservative Party

Unlike the Scottish Conservative Party, the Welsh Conservatives have no history of a distinctly separate organisational or political identity. Similarly, the sense of Welsh political nationhood was much less developed than in Scotland in 1997. With some notable exceptions, especially on measures to protect and enhance the Welsh language, the Conservative Party dealt with Wales largely as it would have an English

local authority (Melding, 2009: 124). Such an inheritance was not at first glance the easiest start to post-devolution life. However, several elements of the Conservatives' poor standing in Wales in 1997 and the lack of a sharply defined Welsh nationalism may have contributed to the circumstances that made party change possible. Compared with Scotland, the Welsh Conservatives may have had less money, machinery and independent history, but this also meant they went into devolution with less baggage.

6.2.1 The Welsh Nation and Administrative Devolution

In Scotland in 1999, a Parliament was, in the words of Winifred Ewing at its opening, 'reconvened'. In Wales, the creation of the Assembly was always in part a political nation-building project. Campaigners for Welsh autonomy have throughout the history of administrative devolution (and even into the late life of the Assembly) used the example of Scotland to argue for similar arrangements in Wales (see, for example, Commission on Devolution in Wales, 2011). Parity with Scotland has been a constant theme of Welsh distinctiveness (see, for instance, Mitchell, 2009: 48, 50, 66; Roberts, 2008).

The Welsh Office and the post of Secretary of State for Wales were created in 1964. Although the Welsh Office was set up along the same lines as the Scottish Office, a senior civil servant confided to Morgan and Mungham (2000: 63-64) that it tended to be less self-confident than the Scottish Office and in the main went with the flow of Whitehall thinking. The Welsh Office habitually 'Welshified' policies and practices from across Whitehall for implementation in Wales, rather than pursuing the Welsh agenda in other parts of the machine (Rhodes, 1988: 149). In contrast to his own position as Secretary of State for Wales, Nicholas Edwards[11] notes 'the extraordinary effectiveness of the Scottish input into Cabinet decision-making' (Crickhowell, 1999: 60), particularly over the future of the Ravenscraig steel works and finance.[12]

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[11] Nicholas Edwards was created Lord Crickhowell in 1987.
[12] Nicholas Edwards is consistently impressed with the influence of the Scottish Office, particularly under George Younger, to shut down tricky debates in Cabinet and defend its position (Crickhowell, 1999: 53-61).

Table 6.1 Secretaries of State for Wales, 1964-2012

Dates	Name	Party	Constituency
October 1964 – April 1966	James Griffiths	Labour	Llanelli (Wales)
April 1966 – April 1968	Cledwyn Hughes	Labour	Anglesey (Wales)
April 1968 – June 1970	George Thomas	Labour	Cardiff West (Wales)
June 1970 – March 1974	Peter Thomas	Conservative	Hendon South (England)
March 1974 – May 1979	John Morris	Labour	Aberavon (Wales)
May 1979 – June 1987	Nicholas Edwards	Conservative	Pembrokeshire (Wales)
June 1987 – May 1990	Peter Walker	Conservative	Worcester (England)
May 1990 – May 1993	David Hunt	Conservative	Wirral West (England)
May 1993 – June 1995	John Redwood	Conservative	Wokingham (England)
June 1995 – July 1995	David Hunt	Conservative	Wirral West (England)
July 1995 – May 1997	William Hague	Conservative	Richmond (Yorks) (England)
May 1997 – October 1998	Ron Davies	Labour	Caerphilly (Wales)
October 1998 – July 1999	Alun Michael	Labour	Cardiff South and Penarth (Wales)
July 1999 – October 2002	Paul Murphy	Labour	Torfaen (Wales)
October 2002 – January 2008*	Peter Hain	Labour	Neath (Wales)
January 2008 – June 2009	Paul Murphy	Labour	Torfaen (Wales)
June 2009 – May 2010	Peter Hain	Labour	Neath (Wales)
May 2010 – September 2012	Cheryl Gillan	Conservative	Chesham and Amersham (England)
September 2012 –	David Jones	Conservative	Clywd West (Wales)

*Combined with: Leader of the House of Commons (2003 – 2005); Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (2005 – 2007); and Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (2007 – 2008).

The Welsh Office gradually built up functions over the course of its existence and became a key part of the model of administrative devolution through which the UK

government attempted to deal with territorial distinctiveness before 1999. For instance: powers of agriculture were given in 1979; a devolved budget system was established in 1980; and the Welsh councils for further and higher education were set up in 1993 (Richard Commission, 2004: 8). However, despite this growth, particularly under Nicholas Edwards and Sir Hywel Evans (Permanent Secretary, 1971-1980), it remained 'a minor office whose senior politicians and officials succeeded in avoiding controversy' (Mitchell, 2009: 62). Nevertheless, as Morgan (1999: 209) notes, 'the Welsh Office in the 18 years of Conservative rule, even if run by a sequence of Englishmen…quietly changed the terms in which Welsh issues were considered. Almost by stealth, the Welsh Office's extended role after 1979 reinforced the sense of the territorial identity of Wales.'

6.2.2 The Conservative Party and the Welsh Nation

Organisationally and politically, the Conservative Party did not in the main see Wales as a separate entity. There was some suggestion of a move towards a more distinctive attitude to Wales in the 1950s. *The Conservative Policy for Wales and Monmouthshire* published in March 1949 represented an opening for the Conservatives (Bale, 2012: 32). However, as so often with the Conservative Party and territorial statecraft, an opportunity to emerge ahead of the curve and shape events was missed. As Melding (2009: 179) recounts:

> It was in the 1950s that the Conservative Party came closest to reconstructing itself as an indigenous Welsh political party. Inspired by the *Policy for Wales* the Party's officers and several of its MPs believed that the Labour Party's hegemony could be broken by a popular Tory message that championed the cultural interests of Wales. Although London was not hostile to such a development, the UK Party failed to take the necessary measures to facilitate its outcome.

In particular, the failure to be the first to appoint a cabinet-level Secretary of State for Wales made the party look grudging in its acceptance of growing administrative devolution. The compromise of a proposal for a Minister of State for Welsh Affairs failed to recognise the inevitable move towards the deepening of administrative devolution. The Tories could have been seen to be the driving force behind this type of change, rather than the government who accepted the inevitable after the event.

The appointment of Secretaries of State for Wales representing English constituencies (and Shadow Secretaries of State during 1997-2010) also says something about the way Wales was treated at the centre of the Conservative Party. Such a situation would have been unthinkable in Scotland, even before 1979. For David Melding (2009: 93), the appointment of Peter Walker in 1987, was 'as if one of the later Holy Roman Emperors had forced the election of a Protestant as Pope.' Such a 'colonial practice', he argues, did lasting damage to the Welsh Conservatives and to unionist arguments.

Table 6.2 Conservative electoral performance in Wales at Westminster elections

Year	Votes	Percentage share	MPs
1966	396,795	27.9	3
1970	419,884	27.7	7
1974 (February)	412,535	25.9	8
1974 (October)	367,230	23.9	8
1979	526,254	32.2	11
1983	499,310	31	14
1987	501,316	29.5	8
1992	499,677	28.6	6
1997	317,145	19.6	0
2001	288,665	21	0
2005	297,830	21.4	3
2010	382,730	26.1	8

Source: Rallings and Thrasher (2009); BBC News (2010).

Nevertheless, with the notable exception of John Redwood (1992-1995), most Conservative Welsh Secretaries adopted a sensitive and consensual approach. Nicholas Edwards recalls that, although she never quite understood Wales, Margaret Thatcher gave him a free hand at the Welsh Office (Crickhowell, 1999: 52), with which he pursued an industrial policy to his own taste (Crickhowell, 1999: 34-42). Similarly, Peter Walker accepted the office on the specific understanding that he would be able to pursue a distinctive approach, involving working with unions and industry in a much more pro-active way than Thatcher would ever have contemplated (Bradbury, 1997: 88). He made it clear to Margaret Thatcher that he would be pursuing a more Heathite approach: 'I was allowed to do it my way with a range of interventionist policies and I always had her backing' (Walker, 1991: 203), including in the negotiation of a more generous public spending settlement for Wales in 1988.

However, although Walker undoubtedly pursued an agenda which suited better the political mood in Wales, it is less clear that he understood the idea of Wales as a nation, beyond supporting specific measures for the Welsh language. He knew 'what a lovely language Welsh was' (Walker, 1991: 204). He would also 'travel down to the Principality on the morning train from Paddington each week' (Walker, 1991: 205). Such a paternalistic attitude towards Wales was well meant but increasingly out of step with a growing sense of Welsh identity. Under David Hunt, another MP for an English constituency, this differentiation from English policy was continued. Overall, for Gamble (1993: 83), 'under Walker and Hunt the Welsh Office has practised not the disengagement favoured by Thatcherite ideology but an interventionist industrial policy.'

However, the appointment of John Redwood to the Welsh Office in 1992 signalled a likely departure from this approach. He was neither from the left of the Conservative Party, nor particularly noted for his accommodating approach. In reality, he was constrained by the inheritance of the policies set in train by his predecessors, but he did attempt to apply New Right ideas across all policy areas. He tried to promote small and medium sized enterprises and hived off more work from the Welsh Office to executive agencies. He also stopped proposals to strengthen the Welsh Grand Committee along the lines of its Scottish counterpart (Bradbury, 1997: 92). Overall, he was a Thatcherite minister who thought the best answer for Wales was a more assimilationist set of policies with England, but who did not understand Wales or Welsh sensitivities.

Hague's appointment to the Welsh Office in 1995 signalled another change of direction, but not wholly back to the approach adopted by Walker and Hunt. As Bradbury (1997: 93) notes, 'like Forsyth in Scotland, he balanced policy assimilationism with a more profoundly pro-Unionist rhetoric and respect for the union-state characteristics of Wales' governing arrangements.' He revisited several of John Redwood's most controversial policies: budget cuts for the Countryside Council for Wales were reversed; he commissioned an inquiry into child abuse in North Wales care homes; and strengthened the powers of the Welsh Grand Committee (Nadler, 2000: 160-161, 166-167). Nevertheless he remained implacably opposed to devolution, telling the House of Commons that an Assembly would be 'a waste of time, a waste of space and a waste of money. It would weaken not strengthen the position of Wales in the United Kingdom' (HC Hansard, 17 June 1996: col 507).

Increasingly, the manner in which the Conservatives governed Wales came to be seen as at best unsatisfactory and at worst illegitimate. Firstly, the quango state in Wales came to be perceived as a way for Conservatives to bypass their electoral weakness to appoint sympathetic people to key positions. A series of scandals contributed to an impression that this type of arm's length governance had gone too far in Wales and this was a very contentious issue after 1997 and in the Assembly's first term (Morgan and Mungham, 2000: 45; Melding, 2009: 172).

Secondly, the artificial way in which Conservative policies were able to be implemented in Wales without a Welsh majority led to some of them losing touch with the prevailing policy mood. In Jonathan Evans' view, for instance, had Conservative policy been made in Wales, then it is unlikely both that the nursery voucher scheme would have been implemented and that the restructuring of Welsh local government would have taken the controversial course adopted (Evans, 2001: 24). One of the first symbolic (and cathartic) acts of Ron Davies as Secretary of State for Wales in 1997 was to immediately scrap the nursery voucher scheme (Morgan and Mungham, 2000: 67-68).

Overall, it is difficult to disagree with Melding's (2009: 178) conclusion that the Conservative Party's record in Wales 'can be summarised as one of failure flecked with intimations of promise.' In the main, Conservative commitment to Welsh distinctiveness was shown through legislation to protect the Welsh language. The idea of Wales as a nation did not enter into Conservative thinking. The Conservative Party lost all of its Welsh MPs in 1997 and did not gain any back until 2005.

6.3 The Evolution of Devolution in Wales, 1997-2011

Political institutions rarely emerge purely from considerations of what arrangements might be optimal. Instead, they reflect the result of bargaining and negotiating, particularly in political parties (Hopkin, 2003). In the case of Welsh devolution in 1997, this resulted in 'a compromise with few real friends' (Mitchell, 2009: 160-161). Above all else, it reflected the deep unease in the Labour Party about devolution, in particular due to the scars the party still bore from its 1970 experience (Wyn Jones and Scully, 2012: 42). The tortuous history of Welsh devolution affected the

processes of change in the Conservative Party so it is briefly discussed here.[13] As in Scotland, the Welsh Conservatives interpreted the outcome of the 1979 devolution referendum as a rejection of devolution once and for all (Melding, 2009: 105, 118; Torrance, 2009: 31-32).

It became clear from an early stage that the devolution arrangements proposed by the Labour Party in 1997 were unsatisfactory. As Wyn Jones and Scully (2011: 42) point out, there began almost immediately in 1997 a cross-party process of trying to improve the Assembly and its powers. The executive devolution model arose out of an internal Labour Party compromise after a debate about the need for primary legislative powers (Davies, 2002). Initially, a local government style chamber was changed to accommodate a cabinet model (National Assembly for Wales, 2002; Laffin and Thomas, 2003). Convinced that further change would be required to strengthen Welsh devolution, the Liberal Democrats insisted on the establishment of a commission to report on future options in their coalition agreement with the Labour Party in 2000. The Commission on the Powers and Electoral Arrangements for the National Assembly for Wales was established under the chairmanship of Lord Richard (a Labour peer) in July 2004.

Table 6.3 Welsh Assembly Governments since 1999

Dates	Type of government
1999-2000	Labour minority
2000-2003	Labour and Liberal Democrat coalition
2003-2005	Labour majority
2005-2007	Labour minority
2007-2011	Labour and Plaid Cymru coalition
2011-	Labour majority

Lord Richard's report (2004) outlined a forensic and scathing critique of the way the Welsh Assembly was organised. At a public event to launch his report, Lord Richard summarised his view of the arrangements for Welsh devolution in 2004 as 'grotesque' (Wyn Jones and Scully, 2012: 43). His report recommended: that the Welsh Assembly should explicitly institute a parliamentary model of operation with a clear split between the executive and the rest of the chamber; that the Welsh Assembly should have primary law-making powers over the areas where it already had

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[13] The definitive treatment of the long and winding road to the Welsh Assembly in 2011 is Wyn Jones and Scully (2012), from which this section draws.

responsibility; and that the number of AMs should be increased to 80 and elected using the Single Transferable Vote System (Richard Commission, 2004).

The report went further in its recommendations than many observers had predicted. However, as has always been the case with devolution in Wales, implementation depended on how internal arguments within the Labour Party played out. In the event, the Government of Wales Act 2006 ignored the recommendations about STV and increasing the number of AMs, but did pass primary law-making powers to the Assembly, subject to a confirmative vote in a future referendum to be held when two thirds of the Assembly requested it and the UK Parliament and Secretary of State for Wales agreed (Part IV of the Act).

As Wyn Jones and Scully (2012: 49) have pointed out, the case for holding such a referendum, beyond placating anti-devolutionist opinion in the Labour Party, was not a strong one. In the interim, a series of Legislative Consent Orders (LCOs) would allow the Assembly to pass primary legislation on areas devolved to it by the UK Parliament on a case-by-case basis. Thus, in effect, the principle of the Assembly making primary law had already been conceded before the Welsh people had a chance to vote on it. However, the LCO system was widely regarded as cumbersome and ineffective (Miers, 2011: 9).

A condition of the coalition agreement between the Labour Party and Plaid Cymru in 2007 was that the Assembly should request that the UK government initiate the process for having a referendum on Part IV of the Government of Wales Act, 2006, and that such a referendum should be held 'as soon as practicable, at or before the end of the Assembly term' (Osmond, 2007: 98). The referendum was duly held on 3 March 2011 with major figures in all political parties (including the Conservatives) campaigning for a positive result (63.5 per cent yes; 36.5 per cent no).

This long evolution was significant because it created a series of opportunities for the Conservative Party to engage constructively with Welsh devolution. Whilst the powers of the Scottish Parliament were widely accepted by the unionist parties (at least up to 2007) as meaningful and appropriate, from the outset the structure and remit of the Welsh Assembly were contested.

6.4 Drivers of Party Change for the Welsh Conservatives
Having outlined the context of post-devolution Welsh politics and the Conservative Party's inheritance, this chapter now turns to examine the potential drivers of change

for the Welsh Conservatives described in chapter three. In the end, the greatest driver of party change for the Welsh Conservatives was a change of leadership. As for the Scottish Conservatives, devolution prompted practical organisation change. However, it also had a wider impact in forcing the Welsh Conservative Party to think seriously for the first time about being a separate entity.

6.4.1 Devolution as an External Shock

Devolution acted as an external shock for the Welsh Conservatives both because they were forced to adapt organisationally and because they were forced to consider themselves for the first time as a more explicitly separate party. This was significant insofar as it caused those in the party who had campaigned against devolution to reassess the Conservative Governments (1979-1997) and their own idea about Wales as a nation (see, for instance: Evans, 2001; Bourne, 2005; Melding, 2009).

6.4.2 Change in Dominant Faction or Leadership

Unlike in the Scottish Conservative Party, one leadership election in the Welsh Conservative Party can be said to have been decisive in driving party change. However, such change was not immediate and it was not announced with fanfare. Rather, the election of Nick Bourne as leader of the Welsh Conservatives set in train a series of changes that culminated in the party being on the cusp of entering coalition government with Plaid Cymru and the Liberal Democrats in 2007.

Pre-1997 factions in the Welsh Conservative Party

Factionalism in the Welsh Conservative Party tended, as in Scotland, to be played out on a UK level. As we have noted, most Conservative Secretaries of State for Wales generally steered clear of controversy and found a way to govern Wales which was, albeit on a certain set of terms, sensitive and consensual. The main factional arguments in the UK Conservative Party therefore played themselves out in Wales only insofar as it became under David Hunt and Peter Walker an example of how a non-Thatcherite alternative might be implemented. There did not before 1997 exist a faction in the Welsh Conservative Party arguing forcefully for a more Wales-centred approach that may have gone so far as to suggest that the party support devolution.

Beyond the constitutional arguments and the Conservatives' commitment to the Union the model proposed for devolution in 1997 was deeply unsatisfactory,

perhaps even counter-productive. Thus, even the most ardent Conservative federalist draped in the red dragon might have found it extremely difficult to support such an arrangement, particularly considering the implications for finance and accountability. It was specifically William Hague's pitch to the Welsh electorate during the 1997 referendum campaign that what they were being offered should be rejected not only on its merits, but also because it was not the same form of devolution which was being offered to Scotland:

> Why do they want to give the Edinburgh Parliament the powers to legislate but not the Cardiff Assembly? Why do they trust Scots to decide whether they want tax-raising powers, but not the Welsh? A Welsh Assembly would represent the worst of both words. Wales would be deprived of its influence in the UK without gaining a direct say over its own affairs (Hague, 1997).

Moreover, in contrast to Scotland where every single Scottish MP with one exception (see Dalyell, 2011) signed the Claim of Right, the Welsh Labour Party was, and remains in some quarters, deeply ambivalent about devolution. The Welsh Conservatives did not find themselves on the wrong side of the 'settled will of the Welsh people'. Rather, in campaigning for a No vote, their position was much more mainstream than opposition to devolution could be portrayed in Scotland.

Transition from Richards to Bourne

Initially, in the absence of any Welsh MPs, William Hague appointed Jonathan Evans as the Conservative Party's chief spokesman on Wales. However, after he left to seek election to the European Parliament, Nick Bourne was appointed to the position. A subsequent election among party members was held for what was in effect the leadership of the emerging Welsh Conservative Party: the National Assembly Campaign Leader. In this election, Rod Richards beat the more 'establishment' candidate, Nick Bourne (Jones, 2001: 115-116). Richards was known to be more anti-devolution than Bourne and had a more combative political style[14]. For Melding (2012: 176), the absence of Jonathan Evans represented another missed opportunity for the party: 'It is unlikely that Jonathan Evans would have faced a serious challenge for the leadership and the Party would have adopted a centrist approach and set itself

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[14] Mr Richards decided in 2013 to join the United Kingdom Independence Party (BBC News, 2013).

the challenge of locating the optimum centre-right position on the *Welsh* political spectrum.'

However, in September, Richards was accused of causing grievous bodily harm to a young woman (BBC News, 1999). Although he was subsequently cleared, at the time he resigned the leadership of the Welsh Conservative Party after Conservative AMs failed to back his choice of David Davies as deputy leader. Nick Bourne was appointed as an interim leader and then attained this position permanently when no other candidates were nominated to strand against him in a leadership election. At this time there were few hints about the direction in which he proposed to take the Welsh Conservatives, although it was clear that he took an altogether more accommodating view of devolution than Richards. This strategy may be contrasted with Murdo Fraser's leadership campaign in 2011 in which he laid all of his cards on the table. It is in this sense more similar to David Cameron's leadership campaign in 2005 that hinted at the direction of travel in extremely broad strokes (Denham and Dorey, 2005).[15]

For Tim Bale, at a UK level, 'a change of leadership in the Conservative Party is, in effect, regime change' (Bale, 2010: 17). The outcome of this episode was that a more moderate faction of the Welsh Conservative Party took control (including other AMs such as David Melding and Jonathan Morgan). However, even under the more pro-devolution leadership of Nick Bourne, change was slow and incremental. In 2000, the Conservative Assembly group remained deeply divided about devolution and at this stage the Scottish Conservatives had made more progress in moving on from opposition to devolution (Bradbury, 2006: 232-233). Even in 2004, Bourne was (publicly) sceptical about the Richard Commission's recommendations. He said that the Conservatives 'oppose any suggestion that the Assembly should be given law-making and tax-raising powers' and that any more powers for the Assembly would require a referendum (BBC News, 2004; Shipton, 2011: 133). It was not until much further down the path from the initial critical juncture of the transition to Bourne's leadership that its potential to drive change becomes evident. If Richards had remained as leader, it is unlikely that such a strategy would have been adopted.

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[15] Two Conservative MSPs (interviews with Conservative MSPs 4 and 8), including one leadership election candidate, told the author that they were certain that Murdo Fraser could have won the 2011 leadership election if he had adopted a similar strategy. In 2001, it could also be argued that Portillo sought a mandate for radical change by being very clear about his intentions in a party that was probably not ready for it (Snowdon, 2010: 82).

Although we must bear in mind that *post hoc* explanations for party change may in part reflect a desire to construct a neat or positive narrative, it is certainly the case that Conservative elites view the replacement of Richards with Bourne as leader as a key turning point in the post-devolution history of the party. For one AM:

> David Cameron has done to the Conservative Party what Nick Bourne and his colleagues did to the Welsh Conservative Party here in Wales over the last 10 years. Again, changed people's perceptions of the Welsh Conservative Party and again detoxified the brand (interview with Conservative AM 3, 1 March 2012).

Similarly, for another:

> Well, you have to give credit to Nick, he was the leader. And I think I could say personally he was probably in favour of it [a more 'Welsh' agenda], there was little doubt about that and was quite able then to facilitate discussion and agreement. I was a little bit sceptical myself, but when you see the facts, as it were, and let's say there was contention about where our votes would come from, when they were actually replicated in elections, both at local authority level, our parliamentary vote as well, I mean they are all part of it, just showed it was the right strategy for us to adopt and it worked in terms of our increasing numbers (interview with Conservative AM 2, 28 February 2012).

Thus, although the election of Nick Bourne was not the only driver of party change, and certainly was not alone in his view about the necessary future direction of the party, he did create the support at the top required to change the party's attitude to devolution and to how Welsh it should appear.

6.4.3 Electoral Defeat

The resounding electoral defeat of the Conservative Party in 1997 prompted some in the party to fundamentally reconsider their positions. However, beyond moving slowly towards a slightly more accommodative approach under Nick Bourne and accepting the modest organisational changes to create a Welsh Conservative Party, this did not have much impact (Bradbury, 2006: 232).

In Clywd West, for instance, a seat which the Conservatives might have been expected to win back, the candidate selection before the 2001 general election may

have damaged their chances. Instead of opting for their Welsh-speaking economics spokesman in the Assembly, local party members chose instead a retired army major from Northamptonshire who did not live in the constituency (Shipton, 2011: 70). The impression that the Conservatives may not fully have grasped the realities of devolution was compounded when they appointed Nigel Evans MP (Ribble Valley) to be the election co-ordinator in 2001 (Shipton, 2011: 72). William Hague had previously appointed a constitutional affairs spokesperson with a junior spokesperson for Wales rather than a Shadow Secretary of State for Wales. He then also appointed Nigel Evans as a Vice Chairman of the Party in charge of Wales, a move that Jonathan Evans was 'at a loss in trying to understand' (Evans, 2002: 26-27).

After the second general election in a row where the Conservative Party returned not a single Welsh MP to Westminster, Welsh AM David Melding tried to spark a debate on the necessary changes for recovery. In a speech to party members, he called for the party to move towards greater autonomy and perhaps copy the more devolved structure of the Scottish Conservative Party (Melding, 2001). However, although a review led by Wyn Roberts was commissioned and reported in 2002, it found no consensus on the need for change and party structures remained the same (Bradbury, 2006: 232; Roberts, 2008).

Electoral success, however, served to cement a narrative among party elites (and in newspapers and political commentary more generally, especially in Scottish Conservative circles) that the strategy pursued by Nick Bourne was the correct one. In particular, results from the 2007 Welsh Assembly election and the 2009 European Parliament elections were viewed as vindication for Bourne's leadership and his pursuit of a more 'Welsh' identity for the party. This in turn gave Bourne after 2007 even more licence to make changes to the party's image and policies.

Table 6.4 Welsh Conservative performance at National Assembly elections

Constituency

Year	Votes	Percentage Share	Number of AMs
1999	162,133	15.8	1
2003	169,832	19.9	1

Year	Votes	Percentage Share	Number of AMs
2007	218, 730	22.4	5
2011	237,389	25	6

Regional List

Year	Votes	Percentage Share	Number of AMs
1999	168,206	16.5	8
2003	162,725	19.2	10
2007	209,153	21.4	7
2011	213,773	22.6	8

Source: Rallings and Thrasher (2009); National Assembly for Wales (2011)

However, in discussing elections, it is important also to be mindful of the electoral context and party system in which parties operate. There was a sense in which this made change come more naturally to the Welsh Conservatives. Firstly, the nationalist threat was not as strong in Wales as it was in Scotland (Melding, 2012: 130). According to one party official, this meant that nationalist voters were seen as less of a threat and more of an opportunity:

> Now, the difference I think in Wales is that you've got a much weaker nationalist voice than you do with the SNP. It's very much divided between the centre-right heritage voters and the socialist voters. And they are both quite vocal, which isn't the SNP. I mean obviously the SNP seems to show a much more united front. The other issue is that the softer nationalist vote in Plaid Cymru is amenable to voting Conservative on its regional vote, perhaps not in the constituency, so that has enabled us to gain more seats than perhaps we might have done (interview with Welsh party official 1, 26 March 2013).

Secondly, supporting an improved or more powerful Welsh Assembly involved fewer compromises with an established view of unionism than it did in Scotland. It was not as controversial to be on board with changes to an institution that was widely seen as unsatisfactory. As David Melding explains:

> Now, I think what the key thing here is that it created a gap really for the Welsh Conservative Party… to suddenly get on board with part of the devolution project because it was so incomplete that it still had to be won, and this in the end led to a position where nearly all the group campaigned for a Yes vote in 2011. The party, despite the reservations of some senior members in the voluntary party and perhaps at a UK

level, certainly amongst our membership, accepted that we had neutrality, which I think was a big shift from where we were culturally before. But neutrality in effect meant that all the prominent Welsh Conservatives who were in the campaign were on the yes side, so these were big, big opportunities for us to get on board the devolution project, which forever history will record that this pretty robust choice was presented for Scotland in 1997, the Scottish Conservative Party said no, and we said no to a much weaker model and then said yes to strengthening it and having a proper balanced robust institution so again I think amongst elites, certainly the journalists, how far this penetrates to your average voter is another issue, but I think it has been a big factor in the success we have had at rebranding (interview, 2 March 2012; see also Melding, 2012).

Overall, electoral defeat was less important than changes in leadership and dominant faction for party change in the Welsh Conservatives. However, crucially, the new dominant faction found the circumstances easier than those in Scotland.

6.4.4 Political Opportunity Structure

Unlike in Scotland, there was a very clear path for the Conservatives to be in government in Wales. The smaller Welsh Assembly and the Welsh party system meant that any coalition arrangement that did not involve the Labour Party had to involve the Conservatives. Thus, if the other parties wanted the Labour Party to be out of office, they had no choice but to consider how they could work with the Welsh Conservatives.

This placed a responsibility not only on the other parties, but also on the Welsh Conservative Party itself. If it wanted to see a change of government in Wales, then it had to be prepared to be a part of it. Thus, if there were no change of government in Wales, then it would in part be the fault of the Conservative Party for failing to form one. In order to do so, it would have to make itself a viable coalition partner for two parties of the centre-left. This was clearly a difficult proposition for the Welsh Conservatives. However, crucially, it was one that held out the realistic possibility of office. Unlike in Scotland, the other parties could not afford to ignore the Conservative Party if they wanted to form a government without Labour. They, too, therefore had an incentive to reconsider their previous hostility towards the

Conservatives. The political opportunity structure for both the Conservatives and other parties was completely different in Scotland.

6.6 Manifestations of Party Change

Having entered the Welsh Assembly with a stance which was arguably even more reluctant than the Scottish Conservatives in 1999, the Welsh Conservatives began a much more far-reaching process of party change under the leadership of Nick Bourne. Initial fears in 1999 that the Conservatives were 'in danger of becoming the most destructive force in the Assembly' (Morgan and Mungham, 2000: 212) were forgotten when the Conservatives managed to move themselves into a position where they were on the cusp of being in government in Wales. This section explains how they managed to do so. Although the extent of party change in Wales can be exaggerated (and has arguably been done so by some in the Scottish party) the evidence points to significant differences between the Welsh Conservatives in 1999 and in 2011. These are most acute in policy and presentation, but considerably less so in terms of party organisation. This section therefore also seeks to explore how a party with less formal autonomy and virtually no separate history managed to more wholeheartedly embrace a more 'nationalist' and pro-devolution agenda.

6.6.1 Party Organisation

The Welsh Conservatives were formed through territorial penetration, rather than territorial consolidation (Eliassen and Svaasand 1975: 16; Panebianco, 1988: 51). It is much more difficult to talk of an indigenous Welsh Conservatism (Bradbury, 2006). While Seldon and Ball's (1994) overview of the *Conservative Century* devotes one chapter to Scotland, Wales does not merit separate consideration. Similarly, in John Major's (1999) autobiography, Wales is hardly mentioned, but Scotland and the Union receives a full chapter of consideration. It was only after devolution that a somewhat separate Welsh party began to emerge. However, the extent of separation from the English Conservative Party was, on paper, very limited. Instead, the Welsh Conservatives have exploited the *de facto* policy autonomy they were given in order to pursue a different path (Convery, 2013).

The Creation of a Welsh Conservative Party?

Although the Conservative Party produced separate manifestos for Wales at Westminster elections, the party remained very much integrated with the English Conservative Party. For Melding, 'the Conservative Party in Wales became an utterly derivative entity without even the modest autonomy usually given to a branch franchise' (Melding, 2009: 170). After the successful devolution referendum in 1997, the Conservative Party reorganised itself in Wales and Scotland. However, Wales did not receive anything like the same autonomy as Scotland. It is created by one line in the constitution of the UK Conservative Party: 'There shall be established and maintained in Wales The Welsh Conservative Party which shall be managed by a Board (known as 'the Board for Wales')' (Conservative Party, 2009: 69).

Figure 6.1 Structure of the Welsh Conservative Party

Board of the Welsh Conservative Party
Party Chairman
Political Deputy Chairman   Membership Deputy Chairman
Area Chairmen
Conservative Leader in the Welsh Assembly
Chairman of Welsh Local Government Committee
Director for Wales (non-voting)
(Shadow) Secretary of State for Wales
Member of the European Parliament

Source: Conservative Party (2009: 69-70).

Beyond the creation of this board, it is difficult to say that a separate Welsh organisation exists. However, even this board is viewed as limited in scope. Jonathan Evans suggested in 2002 that it should be 'fully under the control and remit of the Welsh Conservative Party' (Evans, 2002: 29). When asked whether the Welsh board was the equivalent of a Welsh central office one AM was happy to say that 'decisions are made in Wales' (interview with Conservative AM 3, 1 March 2012). Others were much more circumspect:

> Yes, it is. It is and it isn't. It's the voluntary party and it is made up of representatives from each of the areas. The councillors, I forget all the others now, but that's how it is drawn together. And one of our

problems, if you research it, is you will see the same people have had office for the last 12 years in varying positions. That, to my mind, is very unhealthy, in any organisation (interview with Conservative AM 1, 27 February 2012).

Similarly, for David Melding:

I think that board has been disappointing because it's not been able to really make a theoretical measure of autonomy work functionally and really the board takes its directions pretty much from London. The secretariat, they are line managed in effect from London, there isn't enough independence in our structure and that gets tested at certain times. It's not usually a problem in the day-to-day workings of a party, it's a fairly bureaucratic organisation (interview, 2 March 2012).

One of the most egregious indications of the lack of a separate party structure in Wales occurred in 2012 when the Welsh Party board abruptly decided to cancel the Welsh Conservative Party conference with two weeks' notice. The party said it was for reasons of cost and the conference was instead replaced with a one-day 'rally' (BBC News, 2012).

Moreover, despite having had a leadership election that was widely referred to as the contest for the 'leadership of the Welsh Conservative Party', technically David Cameron is the leader of the Welsh Conservative Party. When the author put it to David Melding that this was a 'Cardiff Bay bubble' issue with little relevance to voters or day-to-day politics, he pointed to the wider symbolism of the anomaly: 'I put this to you: if there was genuine organisational independence or autonomy, a federal body, let's put it that way for ease, would the party have cancelled its annual conference in Wales? I mean what political parties cancel their own conferences?' (interview, 2 March 2012). This situation is more widely perceived as unsatisfactory:

It makes sense to me that if we have got a Scottish leader in Scotland. I understand that we will have a Northern Ireland leader, then it makes sense that we should have a Welsh leader as well. And I think probably over the last 10 years people, have up until last year, Nick was our group leader and I think most people in Wales saw him as the Welsh Conservative leader, but of course he wasn't leader of the Welsh Conservatives, but I want to see that happening. I think that will happen because I think that is inevitable. So in my opinion I think

> Andrew who has actually been elected by the members of the Welsh Conservative Party should in my opinion be leader of the Welsh Conservative Party because that makes sense (interview with Conservative AM 3, 1 March 2012).

Similarly but less emphatically:

> There is the leadership of the party, the leader of the party in Wales at the moment is currently David Cameron and I am very happy with that, but if there was a discussion at some point in the future about changing that, then that would be a good discussion to have (interview with Conservative AM 2, 29 February 2012).

Andrew RT Davies, the leader of the Welsh Conservative group in the Assembly, has also called for this change (Wales Online, 2012). It is still therefore difficult to say that an entirely separate Welsh organisation exists. However, as we observed with the Scottish Conservatives, it is essential in the study of political parties to delve deeper than the formal organisation and into the *enacted* organisation. In practice, the Welsh Conservatives have had almost complete policy autonomy and have used this to project a distinct image despite their lack of a separate party organisation.

6.6.2 Territorial Organisational Autonomy

Although the Welsh Conservatives may on paper appear to have less autonomy than the Scottish Conservatives, in reality they have been given the same level of freedom as their Scottish colleagues on most areas.

Leadership selection

In contrast with the Welsh Labour Party (see Hopkin, 2009: 186-187), there have been no instances where the central UK Conservative Party has attempted to interfere with Welsh Conservative leadership selection. Rod Richards won the first election in 1998; Nick Bourne was elected unopposed; and Andrew RT Davies won the 2011 contest. There is no evidence that the central party acted to endorse a preferred candidate.

Candidate selection

In 1999, the Welsh Conservatives devised their own procedures for selecting candidates for the new Welsh Assembly and for ranking them in order for the party

list element of the electoral system (Bradbury, *et al.*, 2000: 67-68). There were some differences between Wales and Scotland in this regard. However, as Bradbury *et al.* (2000: 69) note: 'those differences arose from the accumulated autonomy of the Scottish and Welsh offices of the party, rather than from any dynamic process of decentralisation to accompany devolution.' Almost by default therefore initial candidate selection was carried out in Wales. Unlike in the Labour Party, there were no arguments about gender balance or central interference. Procedures in 2003 were much the same, with only one de-selection carried out by the Welsh party (Mitchell and Bradbury, 2003).

However, the Welsh Conservative Party is not fully in charge of candidate selection for Westminster seats. Like in England and Northern Ireland (but in contrast to Scotland), Welsh constituency associations must select from the UK approved list of candidates (Conservative Party, 2009: 29).

Policy-Making Autonomy

Before 1997, if the Welsh Conservative Party lacked a separate organisational identity before devolution, then its lack of policy differentiation was even more marked. Policies were in general made at a UK level and then translated to Wales. There existed the legal and political entity of 'England and Wales'.

However, there is evidence that the Welsh Office had leeway when it came to policies which affected Wales only or which had of necessity to be given a specific Welsh character. For instance, during the negotiations about the new national curriculum in 1988, Wyn Roberts led the process for the Welsh Office and was able to ensure that the Welsh language was given a statutory place in schools for the first time (Roberts, 2006: 221-222). In the main policy differentiation was shown through commitment to the Welsh language (Melding, 2009: 125).

However, in the post-devolution period, this is the area where the Welsh Conservatives have the most freedom. In general, the UK Conservative Party has allowed them a free hand with policy-making for domestic Welsh issues. Whilst noting disagreements, one AM concludes that the Welsh Party has almost complete independence in this area:

> I don't believe that they have a veto over policies we want to develop here. Yes, there are sometimes difficulties and disagreements and of course you'd expect that but that's devolution and I think we need to be

relaxed about that. As I say to my colleagues: we need to chill. Because at the end of the day, yes, we will do things differently here in Wales because things will be done differently in England. We've got to recognise that and we've got to accept that and be relaxed about that and I think our colleagues at a London level realise that as well (interview with Conservative AM 3, 1 March 2013).

However, it is clear that some aspects of the Welsh Conservative Party's programme are subject to negotiation with the UK Party:

As you can imagine, the group here put together the policies for the National Assembly in terms of those matters which are devolved and then it is negotiated, shall we say…Things that they didn't like, we had to vigorously defend and it was a reasonable compromise in the end. I suppose I would say that I wasn't aware of any major disagreements. There was a recognition that the evidence we put forward for those things that differed perhaps from national policy were well intentioned and were practical and capable of implementation (interview with Conservative AM 1, 27 February 2012).

Similarly, when asked explicitly if the Welsh party always prevailed in a disagreement with the UK party, David Melding agreed, but added:

I think that there is genuine policy autonomy, but that was expressed within still a very coherent UK Conservative Party and frequent discussions between the Shadow Secretary of State, now the Secretary of State, leader of the opposition, now the Prime Minister, Conservative Research Department, and whatever they are called now. All these things happen. So it would be wrong to project the policy personality we now have as somehow completely distinct from the party at a UK level, but the big decisions have gone our way and I think that's been good for us and good for the party on a UK basis as well. But some of those decisions have had to be quite hardly fought internally (interview, 2 March 2012).

For instance, on the issue of whether a future Conservative government should support a referendum to unlock Part IV of the Government of Wales Act 2006, the UK Party was initially reluctant to make any commitments. Indeed, it might even be tempted to say that it would not hold a referendum in the lifetime of the first

Parliament of a Conservative Government. However, when the Welsh party pointed out that a referendum would be triggered by a two-thirds majority in the Welsh Assembly and that it might not be politically wise to oppose such a request, the UK party speedily changed its mind (interview with David Melding, 2 March 2012).

No AM noticed any particular difference under successive Conservative leaders since 1997. There was a curious incident when it appeared that Michael Howard might attempt to impose Foundation Hospitals on Wales, but nothing subsequently came of this, apart from embarrassment and a sense that the UK Party under his leadership had not yet fully come to terms with the reality of Welsh devolution (Shipton, 2011: 158-159). In 2013, one party official commented that relations with the UK party were much better: 'There is a real relaxation whenever we speak to colleagues in Downing Street or other government departments that, you know, we are the ones who are at the coal face, so we are the ones who make the decisions' (interview with Welsh official, 26 March 2013).

The party's Director of Policy, David Melding, controlled policy-making until he left this post in 2011. As Elias (2013: 21) notes, the policy-making process for the Welsh Conservatives mirrors the UK level in that is highly centralised and tightly controlled by party elites:

> This involves formulating policy documents in the key areas of Assembly competence, and putting these out to extensive consultation among party members as well as external civil society groups. Two policy conferences a year provide further opportunities to discuss these ideas, although few final policy decisions are taken here. Final manifesto approval is provided by a Welsh Management Board composed of representatives of the party's voluntary, elected and professional wings. Just as with Welsh Labour, the Welsh Conservatives' Annual Conference has no formal role in approving party policy.

This centralisation of policy-making capacity around the AM group is also a result of the fact that the Welsh Conservatives' Central Office does not have any policy research staff. As one party official observes:

> Policy development happens in this [Welsh Assembly] building because there is a greater competency now in the Assembly with the primary law making powers and possibly even fiscal power. So the

structure has adapted, but not on the surface if that makes sense (interview with Welsh party official 1, 26 March 2013).

Thus, the formal organisational structures of the Welsh Conservative Party do not reflect the enacted organisation when it comes to making policy.

Finance

The Welsh Conservative Party is not financially self-sufficient and relies on funding from the UK Party. This acts as a brake on ideas to separate the party from the UK Conservative Party. Although its finances are not constituted separately, one AM was very clear that further separation was not an option until the financial issue was resolved:

> There is no way in which we could ever come anywhere near the funding that comes to us from Westminster. Our membership is too small and we have no, to take the Scottish example, no major donor, never have had, not saying we won't do in the future. I mean, I'm not aware of anybody who would have the same influence as Lord Laidlaw as he is now, in that way. So though the aspiration is there, the other side of it, not just the finance side of it: the leadership side of it (interview with Conservative AM 1, 27 February 2012).

However, although he did not disagree about the nature of the funding situation, David Melding argued for a bolder approach:

> Well, if the Liberals can run a Welsh Liberal party. I mean, why be afraid of a little bit of genteel political poverty? You know, you'd have to adapt your structures a bit, but, you know, we'd still have the same members, we'd still have the same elections to fight. We might have to have a slightly more modest office, I don't know. But, good God, we're a party that doesn't believe in dependency cultures and here we are with the mother of all political dependency cultures (interview, 2 March 2012).

Thus, financial considerations act as a brake on party change. However, it should be noted that other parties in Wales face similar financial predicaments.

Personnel

The weakness of the Welsh Party Board means that leadership in the Assembly became more important for the Welsh Conservatives. The main strategic and policy decisions are taken at the Assembly in Cardiff Bay, rather than in Welsh Conservative Central Office. There have been no major changes in personnel which have particularly caused party change over the period 1999-2011. However, it must be noted that the initial election in 1999 of AMs with an agenda for change is crucial in explaining party change for the Welsh Conservatives. Had AMs like David Melding and Nick Bourne not won election in 1999, then the history of the Welsh Conservatives might have been different. The weakness of the Welsh Conservative Party's extra-parliamentary structures means that the composition of the AM group is central to the direction of the party.

Table 6.5 Conservative Members of the Welsh Assembly, 1999-2011

Constituency

	1999	*2003*	*2007*	*2011*
Monmouth	David Davies	David Davies	Nick Ramsey	Nick Ramsey
Cardiff North			Jonathan Morgan	
Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire			Angela Burns	Angela Burns
Clywd West			Darren Millar	Darren Millar
Preseli Pembrokeshire			Paul Davies	Paul Davies
Aberconwy				Janet Finch-Saunders
Montgomeryshire				Russell George

Region

	1999	*2003*	*2007*	*2011*
Mid and West Wales	Nick Bourne Glyn Davies	Nick Bourne Glyn Davies	Nick Bourne	
North Wales	Rod Richards* Peter Rogers	Mark Isherwood Brynie Williams	Mark Isherwood Brynie Williams	Mark Isherwood Antoinette Sandbach
South Wales Central	David Melding Jonathan Morgan	David Melding Jonathan Morgan	David Melding Andrew RT Davies	David Melding Andrew RT Davies
South Wales East	William Graham	William Graham Laura Anne Jones	William Graham Mohammed	William Graham Mohammed

			Asghar	Asghar
South Wales West	Alun Cairns	Alun Cairns	Alun Cairns	Bryon Davies Suzy Davies

*Rod Richards became an Independent Conservative in 2000 and resigned from the Assembly in 2002. He was replaced from 2002-2003 by David Jones.

Source: National Assembly for Wales (2013)

The ban on dual candidacy has resulted in unexpected changes in personnel. For instance, in 2011, Nick Bourne lost his seat because the party did so well at a constituency level in the Mid- and West Wales region. However, there have been no major changes in personnel akin to the new intake of Conservative MPs in 2010.

6.7 Policy

The most profound sense in which the Welsh Conservative Party has changed is in its policy platform and in its process of what one AM calls 'Welshification' (interview with Conservative AM 3, 1 March 2012). The extent to which it was willing to compromise in the coalition negotiations of 2007 demonstrated that the party had moved on significantly from its opposition to devolution in 1997. The Welsh Conservative Party moved from Rod Richards' leadership into a position where it was not considered impossible for it to be in coalition with Plaid Cymru.

This section analyses post-devolution Welsh policy through analysis of manifestos and statements. Finally, the idea of 'Welshification' is examined in detail, revealing it to be a conscious strategy (Melding, 2012: 130), but also one that was incremental and subject to the ebb and flow of everyday political concerns. Overall, party change in terms of policy in the Welsh Conservative Party is less qualified by the roots of British Conservatism (Hayton, 2012) than the UK or Scottish Conservative Parties.

1999 Manifesto

The 1999 Welsh Conservative Party manifesto is a brief document. It gives the overall impression of a manifesto written in a hurry without much thought or enthusiasm. Rod Richards makes the rather original point in his foreword that:

> Neither must devolution become a process that facilitates the creation of political union with Europe. The transfer of power from Westminster to Brussels would destroy our British identity and our

British values. The transfer of further powers from Westminster to the Assembly would lead to the fragmentation of Britain, making European federalism easier for the government to achieve (Welsh Conservative Party, 1999).

Policies are then outlined under the theme of 'fair play'. For instance, fair play in business means the rather under specified priority of: 'We will actively support small firms in all regions of Wales' (Welsh Conservative Party, 1999). In education, parental choice is central and it is also suggested that private companies should be allowed to take over failing schools, provided education remains free. In health: 'We believe in local community hospitals. They are what the people want – care close to home' (Welsh Conservative Party, 1999).

The 1999 manifesto is not a serious attempt to engage with the new institutions and it certainly does not buy into the spirit of a better Wales being created by the Assembly (such optimism is to be discouraged: 'Promises of a Welsh Utopia are as cruel as they are unfair'). Instead, it is a vague statement of Conservative principles which at best adopts a 'wait and see' approach to how the powers of the Assembly will unfold. The contrast with the moderate and open tone of the 1999 Scottish Conservative manifesto is stark.

2003 Manifesto

The 2003 manifesto is, firstly, a more professional exercise. However, secondly, it also contains flashes of a much more distinctive approach for the party. Nick Bourne's foreword emphasises the key themes: 'the need to invest in our public services, to provide help to create Welsh jobs, to support rural Wales, to halt wasteful projects like the new Assembly building proposal, and invest the savings in public services' (Welsh Conservative Party, 2003: 1). This is a radically different agenda from that proposed in 1999. The 2003 manifesto is a detailed document with clear spending commitments and policies.

In health, patients are to be allowed to seek treatment privately if they are forced to wait too long, but the manifesto also emphasises strongly the need to invest in new staff and treatment centres. Targets will be toughened and Foundation Hospitals will be created in Wales. There is also perhaps a harbinger of Andrew Lansley's attempt to depoliticise the NHS in the Health and Social Care Act in the

proposal to set up NHS Cymru as an independent delivery organisation for which the Assembly should set broad strategic objectives (Welsh Conservative Party, 2003: 5-6).

In education, there is an over-arching theme of promoting choice and diversity through school specialisms and through a vague promise that parents should decide where to send their children. However, this is matched with detailed commitments in other areas. School budgets are to be ring-fenced and based on a three-year cycle (Welsh Conservative Party, 2003: 15). National testing is to be retained, but there will be a review of how to provide contextualised performance data (Welsh Conservative Party, 2003: 18). In particular, in higher education, the manifesto commits the Welsh Conservatives to asking the UK Government to devolve power over university tuition fees to Wales so that it can abolish tuition fees for Welsh students (Conservative Party, 2003: 20).

Social, children's and elderly care is given eight pages of attention, with detailed policies on helping carers and improving the system for looking after children (Welsh Conservative Party, 2003: 24-31). In particular, the party commits itself to publishing a strategy to tackle child poverty (Welsh Conservative Party, 2003: 26) and a pilot of a 'unified care trust' to break down the barriers between health and social care (Welsh Conservative Party, 2003: 28).

The party now 'celebrates the fact that in today's Wales other sources of discrimination are now more readily acknowledged, including those based on age, religious beliefs and sexual orientation' (Welsh Conservative Party, 2003: 34). In this vein, it commits itself to ensuring that the UK government recognises the importance of all the equality strands before proceeding to reform the UK's equality commissions (Welsh Conservative Party, 2003: 34).

In the section entitled 'An Enterprising Wales', the party outlines a moderate and coherent economic strategy: 'taxes limited; road and rail infrastructure improved; an excellent skills base; and a first-class telecommunications network' (Welsh Conservative Party, 2003: 38). This includes specific policies on Cardiff Airport and on the installation of broadband and goes beyond an agenda of tax cuts and deregulation. There are also to be tax credits for research and development investment in Wales (Welsh Conservative Party, 2003: 42).

On the constitution, the Welsh Conservatives outline an imaginative (if slightly convoluted) compromise. Instead of simply having an Assembly with law-making powers, the party proposes that a concordat be established with the Secretary

of State for Wales which would: contain an agreement that matters substantially affecting Wales should only be put forward as Wales-only bills; that the relevant subject committee of the Assembly meets in joint session with the Welsh Grand Committee to discuss the second reading of Wales-only bills; and that Westminster should pass small matters of primary law which the Assembly requests in a Genreal Provisions Bill (Welsh Conservative Party, 2003: 77). Such proposals are in some ways reminiscent of John Major's attempts to strengthen the Union under Ian Lang as Secretary of State for Scotland: they go as far as possible within existing arrangements without major constitutional change.

Throughout the document, the Conservatives explore ways to try to increase Wales' influence in the UK. For instance: ensuring that Wales is represented on the new contents board of Ofcom (p.70); establishing a national public records office for Wales (p.69); and providing strong Welsh input into decisions about tagging of sheep (p.48).

In particular, 2003 was an election in which the Conservatives appeared to benefit from playing to those in Wales who saw themselves as primarily British (Wyn Jones and Scully, 2004). Thus it would be wrong at this point to portray the Welshification of the Conservative Party as fully underway. As we have noted, Bourne gave an initially cool reception to the report of the Richard Commission and the manifesto specifically says that the Welsh Conservatives will not support more law-making powers: 'Parliament should remain the single law-making authority for Wales' (Welsh Conservative Party, 2003: 77, 79).

The 2007 Manifesto: Towards Coalition

The 2007 Welsh Conservative manifesto marks an even more explicit claim to the centre ground of Welsh politics. However, some pre-1997 commitments remain and the document still reflects divides on the constitutional question. Indeed, the manifesto struck so moderate a tone that David Fouweather, a Conservative councillor in Newport, complained publicly that: 'I can't get a good number of people out working on the campaign. This is a wet, liberal manifesto that they don't want to sell on the doorstep' (Wales Online, 2007).

The manifesto begins by talking about the NHS: 'We are committed to improving the NHS for everyone, rather than helping the few to opt out' (Welsh Conservative Party, 2007: 7). The party commits itself to new spending on a cancer

drugs fund and on a palliative care strategy. Highlighted sections draw attention to commitments on 'local GP services available when you need them' and 'an Order in Council from Westminster to allow the Assembly to pass a Mental Health Reform Measure' (Welsh Conservative Party, 2007: 7). On organisational issues, the Welsh Conservatives suggest a cross-party commission to chart a way forward for the Welsh NHS. However, they retain a commitment to GP practices playing 'direct role in the commissioning of secondary services' (Welsh Conservative Party, 2007: 8).

On the economy, the manifesto aims to make Wales the 'most business friendly location in Europe'. Alongside an expanded business rate relief scheme financed through an investment fund, small and medium sized businesses would be rewarded for: 'meeting energy conservation targets; reducing use of motor vehicles' allowing flexible working, e.g. for people with caring responsibilities; and providing childcare' (Welsh Conservative Party, 2007: 11). This section also concentrates on cohesion funding for West Wales and the Valleys, social enterprise and 'The Welsh Coastline – A Maritime Marvel' (Welsh Conservative Party, 2007: 12-13).

The section on a 'sustainable way of life' includes strong environmental commitments (Welsh Conservative Party, 2007: 15-17). On education ('Learning: The Key to Success'), schools should receive their core funding directly from Cardiff, rather than from local education authorities on a three-year budgetary cycle (Welsh Conservative Party, 2007: 19). Apart from stating that 'a Welsh Conservative government would introduce a range of policies to encourage versatility, choice, and higher standards', the manifesto does not mention parental choice or different types of school (Welsh Conservative Party, 2007: 19). Instead it talks about closing the gap between per pupil spending in England and Wales and maintaining the requirement for schools to have school councils (Welsh Conservative Party, 2007: 20-21). Social justice again features heavily in commitments to 'housing for all' and 'an end to poverty' (Welsh Conservative Party, 2007: 24-25).

However, again the question of the future of the Assembly and devolution is fudged. The manifesto criticises the Labour Party's record, but suggests only a cross-party commission to look at the future of the devolved settlement.

The Rainbow Coalition and the All-Wales Accord
The 2007 Welsh Assembly elections were disastrous for the Labour Party. It suffered its worst result in Wales since 1918. Its safest seats were under threat from both Plaid

Cymru and the Conservative Party. They fell one seat short of being able to govern again as a minority administration. The Conservatives won the constituency seats of Preseli Pembrokeshire, Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire, Clywd West and Cardiff North. However, it took two months before a coalition government was formed.

In particular, the Labour Party's attitude towards Plaid Cymru was critical in Plaid's decision to suspend coalition talks with them in order to pursue a 'Rainbow Coalition' with the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats. This was a quite unexpected configuration. John Osmond observes of the Conservatives that:

> they determined, in a way perhaps typical of a party that naturally aspires to government, that they must change or die. And change they did, almost effortlessly it seemed, embracing a Welsh patriotic agenda that went far beyond their well-established positive attitude to the language and culture to connect with a recognition of the Welsh political nation and the new relationships it would have to forge within the United Kingdom Union (rather than Unitary) State (Osmond, 2007: 11).

After detailed negotiations, the three parties produced the *One-Wales Accord*. Much like the coalition negotiations after the 2010 general election, the three parties in fact found that there was much common ground and, crucially, that the Conservatives were willing to compromise significantly. For instance, both the Plaid Cymru and Liberal Democrat negotiators were surprised at how relaxed the Conservatives were about the nation-building aspects of the agreement (Osmond, 2007: 23).

On a referendum on transferring Part IV of the Government of Wales Act 2006, for example, the Conservatives were also able to compromise. As David Melding recalls,

> We could not officially endorse this in the sense that we could direct the membership to campaign in favour. However, we undertook that Cabinet Ministers would abide by collective responsibility and would, of course, campaign in favour (quoted in Osmond, 2007: 24).

On justice, although the Conservatives were unable to acquiesce to the full devolution of police and criminal justice, they offered instead youth justice (Osmond, 2007: 25). The other parties were also surprised about the extent to which policies on social justice converged. However, although the Conservatives received endorsement from

their AM group, the Welsh Party Board and from the UK shadow cabinet to proceed, in the end the Liberal Democrats' Welsh Executive Committee was tied on the Rainbow Coalition and thus unable, despite a later vote in favour by the party's membership, to proceed. Plaid, who had also agreed the deal through their internal processes, then left to restart negotiations with the Labour Party.

One Conservative AM was quite clear that the Rainbow Coalition would have been workable:

> We could have done it, there is little doubt of that. There would have been difficulties with some of the aspects of Plaid. The Lib Dems, I think, you know what I mean, would eventually have come in to the thing, embraced it shall we say. The realities of government are very coalescing. It isn't just, how do I put it, the use of the ministerial limousine. It's far more with the effective use of power and that is all the Conservative Party is about (interview with Conservative AM 1, 27 February 2012).

Osmond (2007: 45) perhaps overstates his case about the change the coalition negotiations have wrought to say that: 'With the Welsh Conservatives Plaid Cymru now has a serious challenger in terms of identity politics.' Nevertheless, from the Conservatives' electoral nadir in 1997 and the 1999 manifesto, it is clear that the party had changed significantly in terms of its policies and tone. Melding (2012: 130) also reports that confidence-building measures between the Conservatives and the main opposition parties had taken place throughout the 2003-2007 Assembly term. There was thus a clear strategy to manoeuvre the Conservatives into a position where they could be considered a viable coalition partner (Harmel and Janda, 1994: 270).

2011 and future policy-making

The 2011 manifesto is a restatement of the type of policies and tone that the Conservatives adopted in 2007. Its main points are summarised at the beginning under the title *A New Voice for Wales*:

- Protect the NHS budget for the next 4 years.
- Invest in education to give teachers, parents and governors a greater say.
- Introduce an Armed Forces' Card to give benefits such as free bus travel and NHS priority care.

- Eliminate child poverty by 2020
- Scrap business rates for all small businesses.
- Protect free bus passes and free prescriptions for older people.
- Protect flood plains with new 'Blue Belts' to prevent irresponsible development.
- Promote the Welsh language with a new Charter Mark for businesses that encourage its use (Welsh Conservative Party, 2011: 4).

Again, on the economy, beyond tax cuts the party also proposes 'a Welsh hub in London'; looking into the possibility of devolving Network Rail; at least four enterprise zones; and the establishment of a micro-credit scheme in disadvantaged areas (Welsh Conservative Party, 2011: 6-7).

In health, the party commits itself (following the UK party) to protect health spending and introduce a cancer drugs fund (Welsh Conservative Party, 2011: 8). In particular, ambulance services and stroke services are to be better funded. The party also proposes to appoint a Deputy Minister for Public Health (Welsh Conservative Party, 2011: 9). The internal market and the possibilities for greater private sector involvement are not mentioned.

In education, the manifesto slightly downplays its radicalism: the one line devoted to 'Fund schools directly from WAG [Welsh Assembly Government] to give headteachers the power to boost attainment' leaves open a lot of questions about removing Local Education Authorities completely from this process (Welsh Conservative Party, 2011: 11). Alongside this, the Welsh Conservatives would introduce a Welsh version of Teach First, retain the England and Wales pay structure for teachers, and introduce a 'pupil premium' to target money at schools with large numbers of disadvantaged children (Welsh Conservative Party, 2011: 11-12). Elsewhere, the manifesto lambasts what it terms Labour's failure on child poverty and commits the party to eliminate child poverty by 2020 and publish a strategy on how to improve the attainment of looked-after children (Welsh Conservative Party, 2011: 13-14).

In a special section on climate change, the party commits itself to a 3% reduction in Welsh-sourced greenhouse gas emissions for devolved areas and to the promotion of renewable energy (Welsh Conservative Party, 2011: 15-16). In addition, a whole section is devoted to the theme of 'social justice', including proposals to

support carers and reduce fuel poverty. In a section which very much echoes the Big Society themes of the UK party (see Conservative Party, 2010), the Welsh Conservatives propose to reduce ring-fenced grants to local authorities and hold referendums on directly-elected mayors for certain towns. The manifesto proposes to support the Welsh language by creating a Charter Mark for businesses that promote Welsh language services (Welsh Conservative Party, 2011: 26).

However, the 2011 manifesto also hints at the limits of party change for the Welsh Conservatives, particularly on the constitution. Although the manifesto proposes publishing a white paper to make the legal jurisdiction for Wales clearer and supports reform of the Barnett formula, it is silent on support for further powers for the Welsh Assembly. The Welsh Conservative Party has never adopted an official policy in favour of full legislative powers for the Assembly (Melding, 2012: 129). However, in the Welsh context, this ambivalence is certainly not confined to the Conservatives, with residual elements (essentially a number of MPs) in the Welsh Labour Party also sceptical about further devolution in the Government of Wales Act (Wyn Jones and Scully, 2011).

Welshification and the Nationalist Card

The Welsh Conservative Party chose under the leadership of Nick Bourne to pursue a strategy of detoxifying the party's brand. However, unlike the UK Conservative Party under Cameron, this strategy related much more to issues of national identity. In a speech in 2005, Nick Bourne explicitly acknowledged his interpretation of this problem: 'Despite our pride in Welsh culture and heritage, and our Unionist credentials, Welsh Conservatives have been hindered by the notion that we are in some way an 'English party'. The idea that Conservatism is something imposed on Wales, not truly Welsh, has lingered for some time' (Bourne, 2005). Bourne also stresses the importance of the opposition parties working together in order to provide an alternative government for Wales that did not involve the Labour Party. It was therefore the explicit strategy of the Welsh Conservative Party to be in a realistic position to be in a coalition government in Wales (interview with Nick Bourne, 2 March 2012).

As Melding (2012: 130) notes: 'Well before the 2007 election Nick Bourne launched a campaign to detoxify the party and make it a potential coalition partner with the Liberal Democrats and Plaid Cymru.' This manifested itself in the moderate

tone of the party's manifestos and in the dropping of policies that the party had pursued under the Conservative Governments in Wales (1979-1997). The Mid- and West Wales Conservative AM Glyn Davies was absolutely clear in 2007 about the direction the party needed to take:

> I think it's absolutely essential that we as a Conservative Party are in the frame to be a part of a coalition. We've got to say to the people of Wales that we're a Welsh party; we want to be involved in the government of Wales…For anything other than a Labour-dominated government, it has to be a coalition between Plaid, the Conservatives and probably the Liberal Democrats as well. It doesn't work in any other way – and maybe it doesn't work at all…The challenge is for the Conservatives. At the moment there are a lot of people in Wales who think of the Conservatives as being an English party…and we've got to change that perception…There are a lot of people in Plaid Cymru who see the Tories as being beyond the pale. But there are a lot of people in Plaid for whom the Tories are very much the second choice as well (quoted in Shipton, 2011: 187-188).

Thus, the party in Wales rediscovered something of an office-seeking edge. Similarly, for one AM, the perceived existence of a soft Plaid Cymru vote made rebranding along nationalist lines essential:

> I think we have certainly Welshified our brand, and I hate that term, but I think it's true that we have embraced devolution. We have parked our tanks on the nationalists' lawn in a sense, I think. And that's why I think we have been successful in attracting some people, soft Plaid voters over the years. I don't think that we have lurched to the left, I think that we've had sensible reasonable, rational policies here which are appropriate for Wales, but we are a centre-right party, we have always made that absolutely clear, and we will continue to be a centre-right party, but there are a lot of people out there who vote for Plaid Cymru who are centre-right and it's those people we need to attract and that's why I think it's important that we continue on this road of being proud to be Welsh Conservatives (interview with Conservative AM 3, 1 March 2012).

For Nick Bourne also, this did not involve a specific move to the left. However, it did involve a process of what he describes as adjusting to specific Welsh needs (interview with Nick Bourne, 2 March 2012).

However, this strategy is manifestly elite-driven and involved if not bypassing the membership of the party, then certainly pushing them along a path that they would not otherwise have chosen. For David Melding,

> there wasn't systematic resistance to the leadership, apart from, you know, a few members felt perhaps it was diluting our Britishness, but they were very much minority voices. But I don't think you could portray it as the grassroots demanding for reforms in this way and wanting to establish a much more explicitly Welsh identity. But obviously the leadership strongly sense that that is the direction we have to travel in. And I think when you get a strong lead from the leadership, then most members feel comfortable with that (interview with David Melding, 2 March 2012).

Similarly, Nick Bourne concedes that the leadership of the party was a step ahead of the membership on issues of national identity (interview with Nick Bourne, 2 March 2012). However, it is difficult to identify a vocal minority of members who acted as a break on change in this area.

6.8 Conclusion

In 1997, the Welsh Conservative Party had a difficult inheritance. As in Scotland, it lost all of its MPs and campaigned against devolution. However, by 2011 the party had changed its policies and strategy significantly in order to try to appear like it wholeheartedly embraced devolution and could be a potential partner in the government of Wales. The party gradually ditched policies from before 1997 and determined to shed its English image. Nevertheless, whilst it is important to acknowledge this change, it is equally important not to overstate it.

The formal autonomy of the Welsh Conservative Party is weak. The Welsh Party Board is not a powerful institution and David Cameron remains technically the leader of the Welsh Conservative Party. Moreover, the party in Wales relies on the UK party for funding and is much more fully integrated into the UK party than the Scottish Conservatives. The Welsh Conservatives did not gain any further formal autonomy after the initial reforms in 1998 that created the Welsh Board.

However, in this context a change of leadership became a key driver of change for the Welsh Conservatives. The transition from Rod Richards to Nick Bourne precipitated a gradual change in the party's strategy and policy positions. Nick Bourne drew on the work of colleagues like David Melding to reposition the Welsh Conservatives as a more authentically Welsh political party, despite its continuing organisational ties to the UK party. In this, the party leadership was aided by the considerable leeway given to it over devolved policy matters by the UK party (Convery, 2013). It is important in this context to study the enacted as well as the formal organisation of sub-state political parties. Party constitutions do not tell the whole story (Van Houten, 2009).

Somewhat counter-intuitively at first glance, the lack of formal organisational autonomy in fact aided the elite-driven strategy of 'Welshification'. Weak extra-parliamentary structures and the same centralised policy-making apparatus as the UK party meant that control over strategy and the manifesto was concentrated in a small group around the leader in the Welsh Assembly. The weak institutionalisation of the Welsh Conservative Party at the sub-state level meant that greater party change was possible (Panebianco, 1988: 261).

Another key driver of change was the prospect of being in government in Wales. The Welsh Conservative Party went some way to rediscovering the Conservatives' natural office-seeking instincts. Several crucial consequences flow from an explicit decision to do what it takes to be in a coalition government in the Welsh Assembly. It meant changing the party's policies and image so that it could be considered a viable partner for parties on the left (the Liberal Democrats) and on the nationalist left (Plaid Cymru).

However, whilst there has been a great deal of change on policy towards key public services under the Assembly's control, like health and education, there has been somewhat less overt change on the party's attitude towards the constitution. The party has never been formally in favour of legislative powers for the Welsh Assembly. During the 2011 referendum, the party could only agree to a neutral stance, although the majority of AMs campaigned for more powers and no AM explicitly campaigned against (Melding, 2012: 130).

7. Comparing Party Change in Scotland and Wales

> I mean, the Welsh party has no autonomy at all. They have a bunch of volunteers who sit down called the Welsh Board who have no power at all; everything is decided in London. However, what they have been able to do through very good communication is create a strategy and develop a theme of Welsh autonomy and Welsh decision-making and that is the key thing we have needed to learn.
>
> Interview with Scottish official 4 (30 November 2012)

> We used to have quite a bit initially [contact with Scottish Conservatives]. And it was interesting how different many of their things were. I think we were always rather jealous of the fact that at that time they had, I will say a dozen, certainly something like that, working in Scottish Central Office, whereas we had four and one of those was part time. We were doing jolly well!
>
> Interview with Conservative AM 1 (27 February 2012)

7.1 Introduction

Having examined party change in the cases of the Scottish and Welsh Conservative Parties in detail, this chapter outlines a more focused comparison, drawing together the literature on sub-state parties and party change. The central conclusion is that the more substantial changes in the Welsh Conservative Party are explained broadly by the vision of the people in charge. People mattered a great deal more than party structures. Much like the UK Conservative Party, the Welsh and Scottish Conservative parties were vehicles that could be led.

This chapter begins by considering devolution and organisational change. The Scottish Conservative Party's structure was streamlined and expanded to accommodate the Scottish Parliament. More significantly, a Welsh Conservative Party was created for the first time. This chapter then compares the autonomy of the

Welsh and Scottish Conservative Parties. Both parties enjoyed a similarly strong measure of *de facto* autonomy from the UK Conservatives. This chapter then finds that leadership change had the potential to be significant for the Scottish Conservatives, but they decided not to seize the opportunity of the potential critical juncture of the 2011 leadership election. In contrast, the slow-burning effects of the transition from Rod Richards to Nick Bourne were crucial in its adaptation to devolution.

This chapter then outlines an explanation for the differences in approach of the two parties through the prism of institutions, ideas and people. Finally, it considers the implications for the study of sub-state parties and concludes by discussing the idea of the definition of problems.

7.2 Devolution and Party Organisational Change

A significant alteration of a party's institutional environment, like significant decentralisation within a state or the introduction of a new electoral system, may force a party to adapt if it wishes to remain relevant. However, whilst it is highly likely that this will result in change to a party's organisation, it is not at all guaranteed to make it change in any other way. Instead, for the Scottish and Welsh Conservatives, significant party change in other areas depended on those who had their hands on the levers of power.

Having been against devolution for so long, the external shock of the arrangements for the new Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly prompted some soul-searching for the sub-state Conservative Party. However, most obviously, it prompted organisational change in Scotland and Wales. This resulted in two highly autonomous branches of the statewide Conservative Party. In Scotland, a previously more separate structure was confirmed and put on a sounder institutional footing. In Wales, the beginnings of a separate party were created for the first time.

Changes in a party's institutional context drive change here in a manner we might expect. If a regional list element is added to the electoral system or a new regional legislature is created, then party organisational change is likely to occur (unless a party plans a principled boycott). Such processes took place in all of the UK's political parties after devolution (Fabre, 2008; Bratberg, 2009). Thus, the driver for such changes is not linked to a party's primary goal. It is an 'external stimulus' (Harmel and Janda, 1994: 267).

However, beyond creating new structures to 'fit' with the new institutions and proportional electoral systems, organisational change was not accompanied by change in other areas. In Scotland, this encumbered the party for the next decade with an organisational structure that was deliberately designed not to make the Scottish Parliament a priority. In Wales, the weak institutional structures accentuated the power of the party's leadership in the Welsh Assembly. Moreover, although these environmental changes were accompanied by leadership change (to the extent that new leadership positions were created), this did not initially have much impact. These changes took much longer to feed through the system, particularly in Wales. This is similar to the effect of Angela Merkel's leadership on the German CDU, where party change took a long time to be realised (Clemens, 2009: 135).

7.3 Devolution and Sub-state Party Autonomy

The UK Conservative Party is, perhaps surprisingly, very accommodating of sub-state difference, provided it does not interfere with the party's priority of being in power at a UK level (Convery, 2013). Thus, in Scotland and Wales, both parties had almost complete *de facto* autonomy over policy, leadership and candidate selection. However, both parties relied to a greater or lesser degree on funding from the statewide Conservative Party. Over the period of devolution, none of these indicators of autonomy changed significantly for either party.

Leadership Selection

In terms of leadership selection, both parties held contests without overt interference from the central party in the post-devolution period. Annabel Goldie was elected leader of the Scottish Conservatives without a contest and Ruth Davidson became leader in 2011 without any suggestion of UK party interference in the process. In 2011, no senior politician at the centre of the UK party questioned the Scottish Conservatives' right to break away entirely, and indeed Francis Maude, a former party chairman, had previously suggested such a plan.

Similarly, in Wales it is also difficult to detect any central party involvement in leadership selection. The UK party left the party to its own devices during the elections of Rod Richards, Nick Bourne and most recently in 2011 Andrew RT Davies. The same cannot be said for the Labour Party in Wales.

Under the reforms of the Sanderson Commission, the Scottish Conservative Party's leadership selection procedures became more democratic during the post-devolution period. This links with a general trend towards democratising leadership selection in political parties (LeDuc, 2001; Cross and Blais, 2012).

Candidate Selection

Both parties also selected their candidates without overt interference from the central Conservative Party. The main difference is that whilst the Welsh party has to use the UK central candidates list for Westminster selections, Scotland has its own approved list. During some Scottish by-elections, particularly under Cameron's leadership, the UK party played a more prominent role, but this was in the main welcomed by the Scottish party.

Policy Autonomy

The policy autonomy of the Welsh and Scottish Conservative parties over areas covered by the devolved administrations was almost absolute. No interviewee could point to any time where the central party vetoed a policy; nor did any admit to self-censorship in Scotland and Wales about policies they knew were implicitly off-limits. In the case of Wales, this has led to some significant policy divergence.

Finance

Both the Welsh and Scottish Conservative parties now rely on the statewide party for financial security. Both David Melding (interview, 2 March 2012) and Conservative AM 1 (interview, 27 February 2012) were clear that separation for the Welsh Conservative Party would mean a significant drop in funding. Conservative AM 1 doubted the party could survive without support from the UK party. It does not exist as a separate entity and its fundraising capacity is limited.

In contrast, in Scotland, the financial situation pre-devolution and at the beginning of the Scottish Parliament was much healthier. In particular, donations from Lord Laidlaw allowed the party to spend a considerable amount on the 1999 Scottish Parliament elections.

Table 7.1 Indicators of autonomy for the Welsh and Scottish Conservatives

| | Scotland | | Wales | |
	1999	2011	1999	2011
Leadership selection	Decentralised	Decentralised	Decentralised	Decentralised
Candidate selection	Decentralised	Decentralised	Decentralised*	Decentralised*
Policy-making	Decentralised	Decentralised	Decentralised but negotiated for some issues	Decentralised but negotiated for some issues
Finance	Considerable own resources	Raises money but controlled by UK party**	Reliant on UK party	Reliant on UK party

*Westminster candidates must be chosen from the UK approved list.
**Under the terms of the Sanderson reforms in 2010, the party raises money in Scotland and remits it to the UK party. The UK party then gives a share back to Scotland. A senior party official said that this gave the Scottish party financial security and that the Scottish party still met its own costs (interview with Scottish official 4, 30 November 2012).

Thus, the significance of the difference between what we might call a party's *formal* and *enacted* organisation is apparent. The constitution of the Welsh Conservative Party suggests only the most modest commitment to the creation of a separate territorial party. One Scottish party official is quite clear that, theoretically, 'the Welsh party has no autonomy at all. They have a bunch of volunteers who sit down called the Welsh Board who have no power at all; everything is decided in London' (interview with Scottish official 4, 30 November 2012). Instead, when we triangulate findings with party manifestos, speeches and in-depth interviews, we find that on all measures apart from finance, the Welsh Conservative Party enjoyed the same level of freedom as the Scottish Conservatives. Indeed, further, we find that while the Welsh Conservatives have pushed at the limits of their extremely limited party organisation, the Scottish party behaved as though it was not constitutionally separate at all. For Melding (2013: 43), the Scottish Conservative Party's 'culture has remained unitary, even ultra-unionist.' Thus, the behaviour of these parties was only dictated by party organisation to a very limited extent: instead, in the flexible Conservative Party, the limits on Wales and Scotland's room for manoeuvre were in the hands of a UK leadership whose attention was mainly elsewhere (see, for instance, Bale, 2010).

However, it is by no means inevitable that statewide parties grant such strong autonomy to sub-state branches. The contrast with the Spanish statewide parties, for

instance, is quite stark. Detterbeck (2012) notes that the branches of the Spanish PSOE and PP do not possess the same autonomy as the Welsh and Scottish Conservatives.

7.4 Leadership and Faction Change

As Bale (2010: 17) points out: 'A change of leadership in the Conservative Party is, in effect, regime change.' This is also the case in the territorial branches of the Conservative Party. Power lies in the party leadership, rather than at conferences or at a constituency level. Moreover, at root the political culture of the Conservative Party is one that wants to be led. For one Scottish party official: 'I think loyalty is a big, big thing within the Conservative Party' (interview with Scottish official 1, 25 October 2011). Another commented on how far Conservative members could be pushed in terms of supporting further fiscal devolution to Scotland:

> I mean, what I would say is, in terms of the feeling of the Party…Conservatives are quite hierarchical, very hierarchical, and they are loyal and they will take quite a lot. I mean that's what David Cameron found, as long as they believe they are going to win, that's what they want at the end of the day, so you have to really push them to get them to move against the leadership, so as in most policy areas, I think that would have been, I think anything would have been acceptable (interview with Scottish official 4, 30 November 2012).

Similarly, Hayton (2012) concludes that David Cameron has been able to lead the Conservative Party away from its default tendencies and towards a more electable image and policy platform. Thus, leadership change in any part of the Conservative Party offers substantial scope for party change because internal democracy is weak (Harmel *et al.*, 1995: 7) and because of a desire to win which temporarily suppresses other considerations (Ramsden, 1998; Ball, 2005).

However, although these very powerful levers were available to successive leaders of the Conservative Party in Scotland, none elected to use them. In the case of David McLetchie, the existence of a section of the party (particularly in the membership) that remained at best uneasy and at worst hostile to devolution meant that he felt unable to move the party forward on this issue. Instead, the Scottish Conservative Party became under his leadership a competent opposition party in a multi-party parliament. To the extent that none of the MSPs were actively hostile to

devolution and threw themselves into the work of the parliament and its committees, the Scottish Conservative Party had come to terms with devolution (see, for instance, Douglas-Hamilton, 2009, chapter 13). However, no substantial new initiatives were taken regarding policies, national identity or dealing with what might be wrong with the party's brand in Scotland. McLetchie did not consider these to be the main problem.

Similarly, under the leadership of Annabel Goldie, the priority was not to deal with issues of national identity, brand or a major policy rethink. Instead, she prioritised the selling of the idea that the Scottish Conservatives were relevant and that they could deliver. This led indirectly to the Conservatives being able to work very well with the SNP minority administration in passing three out of its four budgets.

Both leaders had more autonomy from the central party than they needed or wanted to be able to achieve these goals. Instead, the lack of change in the Scottish Conservative Party is best explained by a lack of desire to change. The rejection of Murdo Fraser during the 2011 leadership election also reflected the lack of appetite within the party membership for a radical overhaul. They instead found comfort in the implementation of the previously agreed organisational reforms recommended by Lord Sanderson's commission. Their interpretation of the Scottish Conservative Party's problem was, therefore, not the message or the brand, but its ineffective communication.

In contrast, in Wales, the transition from the leadership of Rod Richards to Nick Bourne marked a decisive shift in the party's strategy in the medium and long term. He had a fundamentally different conception of the 'problems' of the Welsh Conservative Party. The greatest barrier to their full integration into the Welsh political system was both their policy positions and their national identity. Thus, under his leadership, the Conservatives significantly changed their policy stance and concentrated on appearing as champions for Wales. The difference between the 1999 manifesto and those of 2003, 2007 and 2011 is stark.

Bourne's programme of change was helped by a significant faction within the Welsh Conservative Party that shared his vision for the future. In particular, David Melding provided the intellectual basis for such a shift in strategy and was in charge of the drafting of the party's manifestos. Both Bourne and Melding concede that their strategy was an elite-driven project that, according to Bourne, went ahead of the

membership (interview with Nick Bourne, 2 March 2012). However, unlike in Scotland, they did not see such attitudes or an anti-devolution feeling in the party as impeding their agenda. This may be due to the weaker institutionalisation of the Welsh Conservative Party. The lack of a powerful Central Office (which had existed in Scotland for years and was retained under the Strathclyde reforms) and the installation of a relatively weak Welsh Party Board meant that there were fewer institutional constraints for the party leadership in the Assembly. Thus, armed with the same *de facto* policy autonomy as the Scottish Party, a leader with a clear strategy for change in Wales was able to significantly alter the party's policy programme. All AMs interviewed for this thesis credited Nick Bourne for this strategy and, in particular, the idea of appearing 'more Welsh' or 'Welshification' (interview with Conservative AM 3, 1 March 2012).

Thus, in post-devolution Scotland and Wales, ideological factional arguments on a left-right scale did not really exist. Instead, in the Conservative Party, the main splits were over devolution itself. In Wales, the change of leadership from Rod Richards to Nick Bourne ensured a new faction took charge which embraced devolution and pursued a new specifically Welsh profile for the party. Leadership and factional change is the main driver for other changes in the party. In contrast, in Scotland, there was not until the 2011 leadership election a vocal or visible faction within the party that was alive to the Conservative possibilities of devolution. Instead, a significant body of opinion within the party that expressed only grudging support for devolution was not confronted by either David McLetchie or Annabel Goldie. McLetchie believes in hindsight he could have pushed further on fiscal devolution, but fundamentally both leaders did not set much store by the ideas of brand detoxification or that their policies were outside the mainstream. Thus, whilst the Welsh Conservative Party concentrated on problems at a macro level (the system-wide perceptions of the party which they thought prevented voters from engaging with its message), in Scotland leaders concentrated instead on micro (on-the-ground campaigning) and meso (institutional organisation) level problems that were easier, both intellectually and practically, to resolve.

7.5 The Territorial Conservative Party: Between Hierarchy and Federation, But Not Quite Stratarchy

In Bolleyer's (2011) terms, we may therefore view the territorial Conservative Party as located somewhere between hierarchy and federation. Nevertheless, it would not quite be accurate to describe the Conservatives as (even partly) overall a stratarchical party because although power is dispersed to some extent at different levels, this arises from central party ignorance or benign neglect, rather than because it is particularly tolerant or welcoming of sub-state input into national decisions. Nor does it occur as a deliberate product of the way the party was formed or is structured. Moreover, in contrast to literature that suggests territorial party demands for autonomy, what is remarkable in the Conservative Party is the extent to which sub-national elites know and accept (perhaps even *embrace*) their place in a hierarchy that places a strong premium on Westminster office. In this sense, they embrace the statecraft goals of the centre (Convery, 2013). Access on a territorial basis to central policy-making is tokenistic and extremely limited, but this is not in the main resisted by the territorial branches.

In this sense, comparing the territorial Conservative Party to the party at an English level is like viewing the lopsided nature of devolution in the UK. While there has been considerable devolution to Scotland and Wales, England is still run as if it were a unitary state. In a similar fashion, the central Conservative Party's relationship with English constituency associations and area forums is in most respects much more explicitly hierarchical than its relationship with Scotland and Wales.

7.6 Constitutional Changes, Electoral Defeat and (Further) Organisational Change in Scotland and Wales

The main change prompted by constitutional changes for both parties was in terms of organisation. For both parties, this constitutional change also came almost directly after one of the Conservative Party's worst ever election defeats. For the Welsh Conservatives, organisation has remained largely constant since the original Welsh Party Board was created in 1998. For the Scottish Conservatives, the Strathclyde reforms of 1998 were much more wide-ranging. However, whilst they also had consequences for internal party debates and disagreements, post-devolution leaders felt that they were inconvenienced rather than significantly constrained by the structures Strathclyde created.

Just as significant in terms of organisational reform for the Scottish Conservatives was the defeat in 2010 as well as in 1997. This caused a similar level of trauma as the 1997 defeat. Using Janda *et al.*'s (1995: 182-183) classifications of party defeats, 2010 may be placed alongside 1997 as not merely 'disappointing' but 'calamitous'. Indeed, one senior party official thinks that it created a unique potential critical juncture for radical party change that was not seized:

> I think if the leadership election had been in 2010, then Murdo [Fraser] would have won…Because that is the biggest point that there has been palpable...amongst people who have done it all, been through it all, been at the counts, lost everything, lost whatever, you know, just thought, oh shit...we have got a Tory prime minister again and we have made no progress here. So I think it took that because I think 2005, because of Michael Howard, people didn't really...a lot of people didn't like him...2001 you could say, William Hague, that's why we didn't do well and Labour had been returned at Westminster, therefore of course Scotland is going to vote Labour. It took until 2010 to realise, well, actually, there is something more fundamental wrong (interview with Scottish official 4, 30 November 2012).

Thus, in Panebianco's terms, this defeat resulted in a crisis of identity and legitimacy for the party's dominant elites who appeared to have lost control over the key 'zones of uncertainty' (Panebianco, 1988: 246). Thus: 'the full support given by the believers in exchange for symbolic remuneration (namely, the tutelage of collective identity) is withdrawn. The specific consensus the careerists gave in return for material remuneration and/or status is also withdrawn' (Panebianco, 1988: 246).

However, the response to such a defeat was organisational rather than ideological: the establishment of the Sanderson Commission. Subsequently, the party rejected the radical proposals of Murdo Fraser at the 2011 leadership election for more thoroughgoing change. The period of flux and crisis of legitimacy may have settled by 2011 and reduced the willingness of party members to embark on the 'adventure' proposed by an alternative to the dominant elites in the party (Panebianco, 1988: 246).

7.7 A Tale of Two Parties? Institutions, Ideas and People in Scotland and Wales

How did a Welsh party with almost no on paper autonomy end up changing more and becoming more territorially distinctive than a Scottish counterpart with considerably more power and freedom? By combining previous scholarship about party change and sub-state parties with detailed interviews and documentary analysis, this thesis builds an explanation through three themes: institutions, ideas and people.

Firstly, in terms of institutions, the Welsh nation and the Scottish nation, and consequently the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament, are entirely different projects at varying stages of maturity. From the outset, the Scottish Parliament was an institution at the harder end of a federal spectrum that represented a stateless nation. In Wales, the Welsh Assembly reflected an uneasy compromise (mostly as a result of internal arguments in the Labour Party) between those who saw Wales as a nation and those who did not. Thus, a path to being seen to accept and embrace devolution was much clearer for the Welsh Conservatives. From almost every political perspective, the design of the 1999 Welsh Assembly was deeply unsatisfactory and presented opportunities to suggest improvements which could not easily be branded as concessions to nationalists (Melding, 2012). In Scotland, there was not a great deal of scope to strengthen the Scottish Parliament, beyond proposing greater fiscal devolution[16], which was more difficult because it was complicated and appeared more radical.

Secondly, in such a context, some in the Welsh party began to think differently about the possibilities of devolution. Thinkers within the party started to articulate the idea of an authentically Welsh Conservative agenda (Evans, 2002; Melding, 2003, 2009; Bourne, 2005). Such an effort is comparable with some of the thinking which underpinned the Cameron modernisation agenda in the UK Conservative Party (for instance, Vaizey *et al.*, 2001; Boles, 2010). In Scotland, there was not only a dearth of new ideas, but also a lack of interest in pursuing any of them. Instead, the party chose the easier and achievable task of integrating itself in the Scottish Parliament, becoming a competent opposition party. The party was so successful in this endeavour that it was able to work well with the SNP minority government, 2007-2011, to pass three of its budgets and achieve some concessions on

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[16] Although Murdo Fraser proposed this in a pamphlet entitled *Full Fiscal Autonomy* in 1998 (before his election to the Scottish Parliament), he did not take up this theme again until his leadership election campaign in 2011.

business rates, town centre regeneration and police numbers. However, in terms of party change, this was displacement activity. It did not address more fundamental questions about the future of Scottish Conservatism (Smith, 2011).

Nevertheless, such differences in institutional and party organisational conditions are not sufficient to fully explain party change. Thirdly, and crucially in the hierarchical Conservative Party, the Welsh Conservatives had elected members who shared the analysis and goals of revisionist thinkers within the party. Thus, while a change of leadership in Scotland made almost no difference to party strategy, the transition from Rod Richards to Nick Bourne represented a fundamental shift in how the Welsh Conservatives formulated policy and presented themselves. In contrast, in her 2013 speech to the Scottish Conservative Party conference in Stirling, Ruth Davidson was still proposing essentially the same version of school vouchers trailed in the Rifkind Policy Commission in 1998.

Table 7.2 Conservative Party Change in Scotland and Wales, 1997-2011

	Personnel	*Organisation*	*Policy*	*Autonomy*
Scotland	Limited	Significant	None to limited	None
Wales	Moderate	None	Significant	None

For Hayton (2012), David Cameron's reconstruction of Conservatism did not amount to much more than putting a more appealing gloss on policies which were still constrained by a neo-Thatcherite inheritance. In Wales, it could be argued that the reconstruction of Conservatism has gone much further towards a One Nation tradition (Hayon, 2012: 28-31).

7.8 Implications for Studies of Party Change (at the Sub-State Level)

As we noted in chapter two on methodology, there are problems with generalising from one case study. However, we can suggest some broad comments about the nature of party change in sub-state parties. Firstly, as Bale (2012: 318) notes, party change is more complicated and considerably less neat than might be comfortable for political scientists to accept.

In the Conservative Party, leadership change can be decisive for party change because it is a party with weak internal democracy and a hierarchical culture. This thesis has found that broadly the same assumption holds in its sub-state branches.

Internal democracy and members' input into policy-making is no greater in Scotland and Wales than it is at the UK level. Substantive decisions are not taken at party conferences; they are taken by a small group around the party leader.

In terms of sub-state parties, it is worth reflecting that the default setting for these parties need not always to demand more autonomy for the region and the party. We should not assume that sub-state parties are always straining at the leash. Instead, we have to examine the particular motivations of sub-state elites and at what level they consider they would most like their party to be in power. Secondly, examining the formal organisational autonomy of a sub-state party will not always tell us how much room for manoeuvre it has in practice. Party constitutions are not living documents. They tend only to come to life during moments of crisis (deselecting candidates) or when they are being changed (during the Strathclyde and Sanderson Commissions). Otherwise, they remain in the drawer and of interest only to party officials and comparative political scientists. Thus, party autonomy may in part, as Van Houten (2009) suggests, only become explicitly apparent during moments of crisis. However, we can use other methods such as interviews and examination of documents and speeches to gauge the extent to which sub-national parties can change their policy programmes or choose candidates.

A party's *formal* structures and arrangements for sub-state autonomy and its constitution are important as an expression of its attitude to territorial politics. However, it is also just as important to engage in detailed qualitative studies of a party's *enacted* organisation: what actually happens on the ground when the exact provisions of the constitution have been long forgotten by those busily engaged in everyday parliamentary politics and campaigning.

7.9 Conclusion: The Construction of Problems

Much depends on how problems are constructed. The Scottish Conservatives constructed their problems at the micro level: the problem is one of not having the right type of candidates or those candidates not working hard enough to communicate the party's message. The Welsh Conservatives saw their problems at a macro level: the problem is the brand of Welsh Conservatism. Until this was dealt with, party elites felt that the party could not move forward. Crucially, the Welsh Conservative Party's leadership decided that it wanted to be in power. The only route to power involved being a coalition partner with the two other left-leaning parties who had a history of

loathing the Conservatives. Having made such a decision, the strategy that needs to be followed becomes much clearer. Being office-seeking in Wales requires a different set of calculations from being office-seeking at a UK level. Making this intellectual leap was crucial for Welsh Conservative elites.

Detterbeck and Hepburn (2010: 117) suggest that the Conservative Party adopted an autonomist strategy because there were elements in the Scottish and Welsh Conservative Parties that desired further autonomy. A more plausible explanation is that UK party elites were prepared to offer a high degree of self-rule for these parties because they could have no negative impact on the party's primary goal of securing office at Westminster (Convery, 2013). Thus, there may very well have been elements in the Scottish and Welsh Conservative Parties that desired more autonomy, but this was not the primary reason why it was granted. Indeed, this thesis argues that the Scottish Conservatives in fact had *more* autonomy than they needed or wanted. The UK party did not pursue an assimilationist strategy with regard to Scotland: on the contrary, the *Scottish* Conservative Party did.

8. Conclusions

> Mary died with the word 'Calais' written on her heart. You will die with the word 'Scotland'.
>
> R.A. Butler to Margaret Thatcher, 1978 (quoted in Pearce, 1997: 6)[17]

> We have to remember that the Conservative Party is not a debating society. It is not indulging in internal discussion for some sort of literary purpose. Politics is about power.
>
> Malcolm Rifkind, BBC *On the Record*, 18 December 1994

8.1 Introduction

This thesis began with the puzzle of the contrasting fortunes of the Welsh and Scottish Conservative Parties. Through a comparative examination of party change it sought to find out *how* but also, crucially, *why* both parties changed in the way they did in the period 1997-2011. Using an analytical framework derived from the literature on party change, multi-level party politics and path dependency, it explored the reactions of both parties on a series of common drivers and indicators of change.

This conclusion draws together the two strands of party change and the sub-state Conservative Party that have run through this thesis. It begins with conclusions about the Conservative Party itself. It then considers what this case suggests about the wider study of multi-level party politics.

8.2 A Tale of Two Parties

The Welsh and Scottish Conservative Parties both faced similar challenges in different contexts in 1997. The Welsh Conservatives were able, despite their lack of formal autonomy, to more successfully manage four central post-devolution

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[17] For a slightly different telling, see Moore (2013: 378n).

challenges: being a statewide party in a sub-state context; finding a party goal or new sense of purpose; making sense of the Thatcher legacy and the Conservative Governments (1979-1990); and dealing with devolution.

Firstly, both parties had to work out how to be effective statewide parties in sub-state contexts. They had to find a way of appearing to place Scotland and Wales first, whilst also maintaining their commitment to the integrity of the UK. This is the essential tension for statewide parties (Roller and Van Houten, 2003). The Welsh Conservatives managed to do this by realising that constantly emphasising a Conservative commitment to the UK was not necessary. The Scottish Conservatives could not break out of the priority of Westminster office. While the Welsh Conservatives saw a need to try to appear as distinctly Welsh as possible, the Scottish Conservatives happily stuck more closely to the UK party.

Secondly, in the absence of the previous UK office-seeking priority, both parties had to find a new sense of purpose or mission. The Scottish Conservatives concentrated their energy on being a competent opposition party in a multi-party parliament and, especially at the 2011 elections, tailored their manifesto to emphasise how they could be relevant by winning concessions from the government. The Conservatives in Scotland could not (or would not) envisage a path to being in government in the Scottish Parliament. In contrast, the Welsh Conservatives under Nick Bourne rediscovered an appetite for power and could see a path to achieving it. Significant consequences flow from a desire to do what it takes to be in power in the Welsh Assembly. This laid out a clear path for dealing with both Thatcherism and devolution.

In terms of making sense of the legacy of Thatcherism and the Conservative Governments (1979-1997), the Scottish Conservatives found it difficult in many areas to move on from policies they had pursued in government before 1997. They lacked an incentive to fundamentally re-examine their policy platform because they were not in search of new voters or a plausible programme for coalition government. Their main strategy was to attract back voters who identified as Conservatives but did not vote for the party. In contrast, for the Welsh Conservatives under Nick Bourne, there was a deliberate strategy to deal with the legacy of the Conservative Governments and previous opposition to devolution. From the 2003 manifesto, they began to abandon or repackage older policies and present themselves wherever possible in a distinctly

Welsh manner. This is the difference between the Scottish Conservatives' pragmatic acceptance of devolution and the Welsh Conservatives' imaginative embrace.

8.3 Losing an Empire, Finding a Goal

The British state has been a principal cast member in this thesis. The peculiar workings of administrative devolution created strange incentives and dulled consequences for the Conservatives. It was not necessary to win a majority of seats or votes in Scotland and Wales in order to govern. This is also the case of course in England. However, when the plurinational element of the UK is taken into consideration alongside administrative devolution, this has consequences that go beyond those in, for instance, the difference in voting patterns between the north and south of England. The Conservatives were artificially sustained in office in Scotland and Wales. This not only had lethal consequences for their electoral success; it also trapped many of them in a warped sense of what was possible or implementable without power flowing through Westminster and without a severely majoritarian electoral system.

To be clear, there is nothing about the British Constitution that suggests governing different parts of the UK is illegitimate or lacks a mandate if it is not accompanied by a majority of votes or seats in that region.[18] However, declining Conservative Party support in both Scotland and Wales in the 1980s and 1990s[19] combined with administrative devolution created the impression that it was governing beyond or at the limits of its authority. Opposition to the Conservative Party mobilised the base of support for the Scottish Parliament in 1997 and in large measure explains the difference in the referendum result compared to 1979 (Mitchell and Convery, 2012: 170).

Thus, adding a democratic element to administrative devolution fundamentally shifted the political and policy possibilities. The economic shift rightwards of the Conservative Party in Scotland in the 1980s (Seawright, 1999), for example, did not have electoral consequences that removed the Conservatives from the Scottish Office. They were thus able to pursue assimilationist policies in health and education that were beyond what might be considered as mainstream policy-making. This

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[18] Donald Dewar, for instance, was always uncomfortable with the argument that the Conservatives had 'no mandate' in Scotland (see Torrance, 2009: 189).

[19] It should be noted, however, that the Scottish Conservative vote share increased slightly by 1.6 per cent at the 1992 general election.

manifested itself in, for instance, nursery vouchers in Wales and grant-maintained schools in Scotland.

In the post devolution period, it became difficult to shake off this inheritance. The Scottish Conservatives broadly stuck to the same themes in health and education for the next decade and more. However, the Welsh Conservatives managed to move on more comprehensively because key party elites decided that they wanted to be in government. The Welsh Conservatives needed therefore to make themselves a viable coalition partner for two other parties of the centre left. David Melding is quite clear, for instance, about the idea of placing the Welsh Conservatives on the 'optimum centre-right position of the *Welsh* political spectrum', not the centre-right of England or the UK (Melding, 2012: 176). In contrast, the Scottish Conservatives could never make the mental leap necessary in order to explicitly locate the party on what might be considered the moderate centre-right of Scottish politics (where many SNP members might be located: see, for instance, MacLeod and Russell, 2006). In the absence of the explicit goal of office, they diligently applied themselves to being a respectable opposition party in the parliament: a process that might be called 'banal parliamentarianism'. This mirrored processes that Alexander Smith (2011) observed in his ethnographic study of the Conservative Party in Dumfries: banal activism in place of a strategy.

However, even before 1999, the Conservatives failed to recognise that they were buffeting against the acceptable limits of administrative devolution: both for the party itself and the Welsh and Scottish nations. Would it seriously have been satisfactory for the Conservative Party to continue to govern Scotland and Wales with a dwindling number of MPs? John Major hints that he could foresee the inevitability of devolution in the mid-1990s, but he could not take such a thought to its logical conclusion for the Conservative Party.

The party was also hitting against one of the paradoxes of appealing to Scottish or Welsh aspirations through its form of devolution. Granting more powers to the Scottish or Welsh Offices meant that they could sometimes be seen as even more illegitimate because they were now being exercised by a government of Scotland or Wales that lacked strong political support. Latterly, Michael Forsyth tried to deal with this by devolving power even further towards Scottish local authorities. However, according to one Scottish official, it was by then too late (interview with Scottish official 2, 2 November 2011).

This thesis has identified three central factors that eased the Welsh Conservatives' transition, but which were not present to the same extent in Scotland. First, there was the different context of devolution. The powers and standing orders of the first Welsh Assembly were almost universally considered inadequate. This provided an opportunity from the outset for the Conservatives to be on board with the devolution project *in a manner that did not seem to hard-line supporters like it involved making concessions to Plaid Cymru*. The Conservatives' were then able to publicly demonstrate their commitment to devolution when all senior members of the Welsh party campaigned for a Yes vote in the 2011 referendum. The substantial initial powers of the Scottish Parliament, forged in large measure through the consensus of the Scottish Constitutional Convention, did not afford the Scottish Conservatives this opening.

Second, the nature of the Welsh party system means that any alternative to the Labour Party being in government in Wales has to involve the Conservative Party. In contrast, in Scotland, the greater strength of the SNP presents the possibility of governing coalitions or minorities that do not need to involve the Conservatives. The Conservatives' pivotal position in Wales places some responsibility upon party elites who believe strongly that Wales should have an alternative to Labour in government. In Scotland, the Conservatives can be more painlessly ignored.

Third, the post-devolution Welsh Conservative Party was much more weakly institutionalised than the Scottish Conservative Party (Panebianco, 1988: 261). This presented party elites with an opportunity to change the party that involved consulting or bypassing fewer party activists or officials with their own power base. In the words of a senior party official, 'policy development happens in this [National Assembly] building' (interview with Welsh official, 26 March 2013). The Welsh Central Office is weak and does not have the same history of autonomy as the Scottish party's central office.

However, alongside these more favourable circumstances for party change, the Welsh Conservatives had politicians within the pool of its AMs who were determined to change the party. Nick Bourne was able to take advantage of the above circumstances, but, crucially, people who thought like him and David Melding had to be selected as candidates in the first place. We return therefore to Harmel and Janda's (1994) un-improvable observation that party change does not 'just happen'. The crucial intervening variable between changing circumstances and party change is how

problems are perceived and constructed by those in charge. Significant party change requires those determined to carry it out to be available to take up leadership positions.

8.4 The Conservative Party

In his resignation letter to Gordon Brown in 2009, James Purnell wrote: 'We both love the Labour Party…We know we owe it everything and it owes us nothing.' As Robin Harris (2011: 4) argues, 'No Conservative politician at any stage of the party's history would have written such a letter.' The Conservative Party has instead been viewed by scholars as having instrumental value, rather than a sense of attachment for its own sake (for instance, Blake, 1985; Davies, 1995; Norton, 1996: 10; Ramsden, 1998; Ball, 2005). As Norton (1996: 2) observes, 'Conservatives are not prone to reflect on why they are as they are…they are more concerned with the practicalities of life and learning from experience, than they are with abstract reasoning and reflection.' The often-implicit idea that the pursuit of office is the primary function of the Conservative Party is a feature of its 20th century history.

Devolution thus presented Conservatives with a problem. Adding a democratic element to administrative devolution required it to become a different party in Scotland and Wales. This is especially the case because both the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly adopted proportional electoral systems. The Welsh Conservatives have shown that the Conservative Party can adapt to such a situation. However, it appears from this case study that the Conservative Party works best when there is the prospect of office. Change may be more likely when there is the prospect of office (Bale, 2012: 145). One of David Cameron's slogans during his leadership election campaign was 'Change to Win'. Murdo Fraser's campaign in 2011 reflects in part a rediscovery of the perceived instincts of the 20th century Conservative Party. If the objective is to win and the party is holding politicians back from winning, then the party has to go. It is difficult to think of a precedent for such a radical plan or of another UK party so equally lacking in sentimentality in which it could be contemplated.

It might be putting the case too strongly to suggest that there is no point in the Conservative Party unless it is seeking office (see, for instance, Harris, 2011: 4). However, it might be fairer to say that the Conservative Party works optimally, and its elites are able fully to take advantage of its flexible structures, when change can be justified on the basis that it is the only way to regain office. The Conservative Party

may well have a distinctive purpose beyond this, but the Scottish Conservatives never appeared to manage to discover it.

8.6 The Drivers of Party Change

When it comes to the drivers of party change, we can say the following about the case of the sub-state Conservatives after devolution:

(a) Defeat does not always drive party change. In particular, in multi-level states, *relative* electoral success between regions becomes important. Thus, whilst the UK Conservative Party performed poorly, the pressure on its Scottish branch to change was lessened, even though it made little progress. The pressure to change intensified only when the Welsh and UK parties started to outperform the Scottish Conservatives. Instead, in keeping with Deschouwer's (1992: 17) and Wilson's (1994) findings, what matters is how electoral defeat is *interpreted*. While decline could be blamed on a wider malaise within UK conservatism, the potential driver of electoral defeat was blunted. For the Welsh Conservatives, electoral defeat was not the main driver of party change. Thus, as Bale (2012: 316) concludes, 'election defeat is another example of a variable whose impact (and whose status) we should never simply assume.'

(b) Where defeat did act as a driver of change, it tended to result in organisational changes, rather than shifts in policy or strategy. Both parties were reorganised in 1998 in response to the results of the 1997 general election and the implementation of devolution. The Scottish Conservatives also carried out another internal restructuring exercise in 2011 through the Sanderson reforms, prompted by their interpretation of the results of the 2010 general election in Scotland.

(c) This case confirms Harmel *et al.*'s (1995: 6) finding that changes of leader are necessary but not sufficient drivers of change. In the case of the Scottish Conservatives, one change of leadership (McLetchie to Goldie) occurred without any significant change in the party's organisation, strategy or policies. For the Welsh Conservatives, significant party change occurred when a change of leadership (Richards to Bourne) was also accompanied a change in the party's dominant faction. However, the evidence in this thesis does not support Harmel *el al.*'s (1995: 7) hypothesis that 'the relationship between leadership changes and party change is stronger for parties with strong

leadership structures than for parties with severely limited leaders.' Instead, we must treat the variable of leadership change much more cautiously, even in parties like the Conservative Party where a great deal of power (particularly in opposition) is placed in the hands of the leadership. Having significant powers to change a party is different from using them. Strong leadership structures provide the potential for change, but they do not necessarily make it more likely to happen.

(d) However, whilst there was no change in the dominant faction in charge of the Scottish Conservatives, the transition from Richards to Bourne in Wales did result in a shift in the party's dominant faction. Thus, for the Welsh Conservatives, party change followed factional change, as hypothesised by Harmel and Tan (2003).

(e) The impact of these drivers of change is not always immediate. As Clemens (2009) discovered for the German CDU under Merkel's leadership, changes can be inconsistent and *ad hoc*. The Welsh Conservatives under Nick Bourne began a gradual process of change, which, while significant in most areas, did not ever achieve a fully united policy for the party on further devolution.

(f) An important driver of change present in Wales but absent in Scotland was the prospect of office. Thus, the political opportunity structure matters, particularly for parties that have traditionally been office-seeking. The opportunity to be in office in Wales was a central factor in the substantial changes in policy and presentation for the Welsh Conservatives. This gave the party a goal and a plan: holding office in Wales meant doing what it took to be a viable coalition partner for two parties of the centre-left.

8.6 Party Change and Multi-Level Politics

For the wider study of multi-level party politics, this thesis suggests four broad conclusions. First, there can be a marked difference between a party's *formal* organisation and its *enacted* organisation. In particular, it is not possible to divine the true extent of a sub-state party's autonomy by simply examining its constitutional structures. This goes further than Van Houten's (2009) suggestion that the true extent of a party's autonomy may only become apparent during times of crisis. If we want to understand the extent of a sub-state party's autonomy on the ground, then it is necessary to engage with party elites about the informal 'everyday life' of political

parties, which may at the sub-state level involve negotiation, conflict or indifference. On paper, the Scottish Conservative Party has more autonomy than the Welsh Conservative Party. In practice, both had similar levels of freedom and, somewhat counter-intuitively, the Welsh Conservatives ended up becoming more distinctive than their Scottish colleagues. Not having formal autonomy is not necessarily an indication of sub-state party subservience; having formal autonomy is different from using it.

Second, in this context, people seem to matter more than (formal) structures. In parties whose leaders can only be drawn from elected MPs, the extent of the thinking among them will in large measure determine the extent of party change. In parties like the Conservative Party with virtually no internal democracy (beyond leadership and candidate selection) this is especially important. The Conservative Party's sub-state branches mirror the flexibility of the UK organisation. Changes in leadership in Scotland and Wales also resemble wholesale changes in regime (Bale, 2010: 17; Norton and Aughey, 1981: 266-267). Thus, this thesis supports Fabre's (2008) central conclusion that parties' internal workings and leadership are crucial intervening variables in processes of sub-state adaptation. Parties do not simply respond to functional pressures (Bratberg, 2009).

Third, this case has demonstrated that the default setting for sub-state parties need not always be to demand more autonomy. Making this assumption for all sub-state parties has the potential to miss important subtleties in elites' loyalties and priorities. In particular, parties may choose to pursue an explicitly assimilationist strategy at the sub-state level because they perceive a higher level as the most important level of government. This thesis also found no evidence of factional conflict between the different levels of the Conservative Party (Verge and Gómez, 2009).

Fourth, as predicted by Hopkin (2008: 228), sub-state parties exhibit features of institutional stickiness and path dependency. The Scottish Conservatives came to rely on a stock of policies and answers that served them in the 1980s and 1990s. In the post-devolution period, they found it extremely difficult to break out of this inheritance. They also had difficulty letting go of their traditional attachment to the priority of achieving office at the UK level. Whilst this was once a rational reaction to the political opportunity structure of the pre-devolution UK, after the creation of the

Scottish Parliament it locked the party into a strategy that was increasingly sub-optimal.

8.7 On Being a Statewide Party

This conclusions presented here also suggest wider questions about what it means to be a statewide party in a plurinational and quasi-federal state. Does supporting more powers for the devolved legislatures necessarily involve a dilution of one's commitment to the central state? Is it impossible to remain a committed unionist whilst supporting greater policy divergence and perhaps an entirely separate sub-state party structure? The Sanderson Commission (2010) seemed to conclude that this was indeed the case. However, perhaps unexpectedly, the Conservative Party has come further in raising ideas in this area than any other UK statewide party.

Murdo Fraser's suggestion of an entirely separate party of the centre-right in Scotland goes further than any of the other statewide parties have thus far contemplated. In the end, the Conservatives in Scotland still held on to a view of a statewide party that was more unitary: that Scottish people should have the opportunity to vote for Conservative candidates. History may judge that, electorally, this was a noble act of self-sacrifice for a conception of unionism and being a statewide party that is increasingly challenged by the deepening of sub-state identity, policy divergence and party politics. For most Conservatives in Scotland in the 2011 leadership election, it appeared that unionism was, once again, an 'important matter of principle' (Seawright, 1999). Similarly, the strategy of the Welsh Conservative Party under Nick Bourne is more explicitly regionalist than the other statewide parties. The Welsh Conservatives have managed an under-the-radar transformation, but they lack the party structures to take what appears to be a logical step to becoming a fully Welsh political party.

Centre-right instincts allow Conservatives to come some of the way towards a more radical position. Ian Lang, for instance, argues that devolution has created 'a supplicant and dependent Parliament – a sure recipe for the politics of grievance and the fostering of a dependency culture' (Lang, 2002: 192). A conception of unionism prevents him and others, however, from taking a step towards supporting a more fiscally powerful parliament or a more explicitly federal UK. The Conservative Party may be ideologically disinclined to use other people's money to subsidise struggling

enterprises, but in continuing to finance Welsh and Scottish branches from London, that is surely what it is doing.

However, a certain conception of unionism prevents the Conservative Party fully embracing a radical rethinking of what it means to be a statewide party in a plurinational state. For Michael Russell (currently the SNP government's education secretary) and Dennis MacLeod (2006: 130), 'The Tories' problem is that their Unionist ideology is overcoming their free market common sense.' The greater threat to the Union surely lies in continued Conservative weakness in Scotland and Wales, rather than in a possible slide towards a Belgian-style break-up of statewide party links.

The idea of what it means to be a statewide party also affects the Conservatives beyond the territorial dimension of UK politics. The Conservatives made little progress in the north of England at the 2010 general election. The Conservative Party also struggles in local government in the north of England. The Conservative Party's overall statewide credentials might also benefit from a more radical rethink along the lines of Murdo Fraser's decentralised party structures or Nick Bourne's explicit (but without fanfare) strategy of being seen to put the region first.

8.8 Unionism, Nationalism and Conservatism

For Keating (2009: 174), studies of nationalism often suffer from two central flaws: 'One is to generalize from a few cases into a theory of the whole. The other is to claim that one's own case is an exception to a general rule, itself expressed as an ideal-type of unitary national state.' This study sought explicitly not to claim either of these things for the sub-state UK Conservative Party. Instead, it has sought to view detailed analysis of both parties through the wider comparative lenses of party change, multi-level party politics and path dependency. The Scottish and Welsh Conservatives are not unique in facing the dilemmas of being statewide parties in regional contexts. Many other European parties of the centre-right must also confront multi-level politics. However, the nature of the British state and the Conservatives' place within it has deeply marked their strategy and attitudes.

Ultimately, the Welsh Conservatives adapted better to devolution because instead of simply accepting it, they embraced it. This progress may be prone to exaggeration and easily lost, but it marks a stark contrast with the Scottish

Conservative Party. The Scottish Conservatives could not take the mental leap necessary to formulate a forward-looking strategy for their place in the Scottish Parliament. They cherished UK party links and power more than they coveted being in government in Scotland.

The forerunner to what eventually became the Scottish National Party was formed partly by a group of former Conservatives. Since then, the distinction between unionism and nationalism has been over-emphasised (Kidd, 2007: 264). This is the great insight of the Welsh Conservative Party. In the end, the Scottish Conservatives forgot something that the Welsh Conservatives discovered for the first time: the best unionists are nationalists.

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Appendix: List of Interviewees

Scotland: Politicians

MSP 1, 6 March 2012

MSP 2, 28 March 2012

MSP 3, 29 March 2012

MSP 4, 10 April 2012

MSP 5, 17 April 2012

MSP 6, 8 May 2012

MSP 7, 30 May 2012

MSP 8, 2 October 2012

MSP 9, 24 October 2012

MSP 10, 27 September 2012 (telephone)

MSP 11, answered questions via email

Scotland: Officials

Party official 1, 25 October 2011

Party official 2, 2 November 2011

Party official 3, 10 November 2011

Party official 4, 30 November 2012

Wales: Politicians

AM 1, 27 February 2012

AM 2, 29 February 2012

AM 3, 1 March 2012

Nick Bourne, 2 March 2012

David Melding AM, 2 March 2012

Wales: Officials

Party official 1, 26 March 2013