

4 A national commitment “Scottish Conviction”

Regional autonomy has given Scottish politicians the ability to make decisions that are collectively binding on the people who live in Scotland. But how is this capacity being used? Does Scotland have an independent policy, and if so, how can it be recognised? This question has often been investigated in terms of specific policies (Mulvey 2018; Hepburn 2015; Cairney 2015; Cairney/Widfeldt 2015). The idea behind this is that the welfare state, and thus the ‘polizey’ itself, could become an important resource for Scottish politics and the autonomy movement.

In reflections on Scotland as a nation, Scottish activists and MPs alike draw on a particular interpretation of egalitarianism associated with Scotland. They reflect on the Scottish nation “itself as distinct from [its] environment” (Luhmann 1984: 601, 626).

Accordingly, Scotland is said to be a nation committed to egalitarianism. The credibility of this statement contains an element that stabilises Scottish democracy by itself. Egalitarianism, interpreted as a national value commitment, motivates Scottish politicians to prioritise individual self-determination over collective self-determination. It is an expression and a reinforcement of democratic nationalism.

To demonstrate this, I outline below how Scottish political-national performance roles talk about this nation. Identifying a research gap in this shift in perspective to the performance side of Scotland’s political system, Nasar Meer argues that “the study of elite political actors in Scotland is relatively sparse, but is consistent with a broader tendency where social and political scientists ‘too rarely “study up”’ (Meer, 2015, p. 1481).

First, the following Chapter explains why Scottish egalitarianism is a value commitment. It then shows how the Scottish independence movement used egalitarianism to shape its political ideology. The Chapter concludes by discussing how effective this egalitarianism was in the 2014 referendum.

4.1 National value commitment

What kind of a community should Scotland be striving to become? Such reflections on Scotland as a national community can be explored through a critical event in the history of the Scottish nation: The opening ceremony of Scotland's first democratic Parliament, which took place on 1 July 1999.

In his opening speech, the then First Minister, Donald Dewar, referred to performance of Robert Burns' song *A Man's A Man For All That* as a "very Scottish conviction". This is an egalitarianism on the basis of the soul of every human being:

"A Scottish Parliament, not an end: a means to greater ends. And those, too, are part of our Mace. Woven into its symbolic thistles are these four words: 'Wisdom. Justice. Compassion. Integrity'. Burns would have understood that. We have just heard – beautifully sung – one of his most enduring works. And that half of the song is a very Scottish conviction: that honesty and simple dignity are priceless virtues, not imparted by rank or birth or privilege but part of the soul. Burns believed that sense and worth ultimately prevail. He believed that was the core of politics and that without it, our profession is inevitably impoverished." (Dewar 1999)

According to Dewar, sound politics can and should exist in Scotland. It can be recognised by the fact that it actively strives for egalitarianism, summed up in Robert Burns' song *A Man's A Man For All That*. The nation is understood from below, i.e. from the side of the people.¹ With his statement that politics should not be "an end" in itself, with which Dewar refers to Burns and egalitarianism as a national obligation, an instrumental understanding of politics emerges.

Five years later, George Reid repeated this assessment. Again, it is a momentous day in the history of this nation. At the grand opening of the completed Scottish Parliament building, Reid proclaims:

"Our land and our history have shaped us as an egalitarian society, reflected in our founding principles of Accessibility, Accountability, Equality of Opportunities, and the sharing of power between our government, Parliament and people. These are the real foundation stones of this new Parliament. If we listen to the building, it will help us." (Reid 2004b)

1 "From the perspective of a theory of inclusion, 'people' signifies an inclusion from below. People were originally the ordinary, simple people who had no claim at all to a privileged place in society. [...] With 'nation' a shift in the opposite direction occurs. The original usage of 'nation' primarily meant the higher strata of society [...]. In this case inclusion is from above." (Ahlers et al. 2020: 29)

Dewar and Reid speak of egalitarianism as a fundamental characteristic of the Scottish nation. This characteristic can and should become more important in the Parliament. Both bearers of political performance roles understand egalitarianism, interpreted as equality of opportunity, in the communication medium of value commitment identified by Talcott Parsons. Egalitarianism becomes “conceptions of the desirable type of society held by the members of the society of reference and applied to the particular society of which they are members.” (Parsons 1968: 136) Egalitarianism is not only claimed and valued as a national characteristic but should also be applied in this “particular society” in Scotland.

However, how did this individualistic interpretation of egalitarianism, closely linked to the active realisation of equal opportunities, become possible in Scotland? Behind this lies a historical semantic of this nation, which originally stems from the religious context of the Reformation (see Dawson 2014: 164f.; cf. on “marital” and “fictive kinship” as functional equivalent Cathcart 2008). Today, egalitarianism is reflected as a national value commitment of Scottish politics.

Dewar explains this “very Scottish conviction” with the song *A Man’s A Man For All That*, which was chosen for the opening ceremony. The very genesis of this song is closely linked to the self-description of the Scottish nation. It was included in the encyclopaedic collection of the ‘most favourite of our national melodies’, published under the title *Select Melodies of Scotland from 1822 to 1825* (Lockhart/Currie 1835: 391 Letter from Thomson to Burns, September 1792). George Thomson had commissioned Robert Burns with the melodic revision of the verses of this encyclopaedia. In the course of this work, Burns wrote *A Man’s A Man For All That* and enclosed it with a letter to his patron in 1795 with the following assessment: “I do not give you the foregoing song for your book, but merely by way of *vive la bagatelle*; for the piece is not really poetry.” (Lockhart/Currie 1835: 419 Letter from Burns to Thomson, January 1795) Thomson took a different view and replied: “Your *vive la bagatelle* song, *For a’ that*, shall undoubtedly be included in my list.” (Lockhart/Currie 1835: 420 Letter from Thomson to Burns, 30 January 1795)

This song deals with the historical semantics of the Scottish nation. The song is based on a religious interpretation of the Scottish nation, which emphasises the equality of all people before God and calls for a struggle against the inequality of the estate-based society. This is John Stuart Blackie’s assessment:

“A man’s a man for a’ that;’ and the fagged weaver brightens up. [...] Certainly in this song he [Burns] soars far above all party feelings, and merely announces plainly what is the poet’s mission no less than the prophet’s, to preach from the house-top that there is no respect of persons with God, and that whosoever pays worship to anything in any human being independent of personal worth and character, is an idolater and a heretic, with whom no professor of a moral and catholic Christianity can hold any fellowship.” (Blackie 1889: 28, 382-383)

The song expresses the expectation that every human being has a unique value. The equality of human beings is indisputable. This attitude is expressed in the appreciation of the ‘The man o’ independent mind’, as Ferdinand Freiligrath’s (Freiligrath 2014[1844]) translation into German puts it. The original lyrics of *A Man’s A Man For All That* are characterised by egalitarianism. The prayer in the last verse, which Freiligrath translated as “jeder fleh” and Burns wrote as “let us pray”, speaks out against the social differentiation of the estates and calls for a brotherhood that includes all people (on this solidarity as a pacemaker of political freedom and equality Schieder 1972: 565).

This religiously based equality is also expressed in the following verses of the fourth stanza, which I have emphasised:

A prince can mak a belted knight,
A marquis, duke, an’ a’ that;
But an honest man’s abon his might,
Gude faith, he maunna fa’ that!
For a’ that, an’ a’ that,
Their dignities an’ a’ that;
The pith o’ sense, an’ pride o’ worth,
Are higher rank than a’ that.
(Burns 1795)

Ein Fürst macht Ritter, wenn er spricht,
Mit Sporn und Schild und alledem:
Den braven Mann kreiert er nicht,
Der steht zu hoch trotz alledem:
Trotz alledem und alledem!
Trotz Würdenschnack und alledem – Des
innern Wertes stolz Gefühl
Läuft doch den Rang ab alledem!
(Freiligrath 2014 [1844])

In reference to faith (“Gude faith”), each person is ascribed “independent mind” (3rd stanza) or “The pith o’ sense, an’ pride o’ worth” (4th stanza), which explains “That Man to Man, the world o’er, shall brothers be for a’ that”, as it says in the last two verses.

In favour of Dewar’s politics reflected as Scottish, it speaks above all in favour of imputing relevant perceptions and preferences to everyone. The value commitment of egalitarianism claimed to be Scottish demands “that sense and worth ultimately prevail”, as Dewar put it in 1999. The equality of people implied in the lyrics of the song is not only to be established but the politics of this nation is to be interpreted as an attempt to orientate itself towards this equality and thus actively strive for it.

This striving for egalitarianism can also be recognised in how this song was performed at the opening of the Scottish Parliament. Although a small orchestra was placed next to the singer Sheena Wellington, she sang this song in Parliament without accompaniment, solo (a cappella) (see the recording by Bruce Davies 1999).² This

2 For the recording see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hudNoXsUjoo> (Accessed 27 January 2024).

signalled a concentration on the person—singing without instrumental accompaniment—which was typical of the singing in Presbyterian churches in Scotland: “music was limited to the plainest singing. Instrumental accompaniment was forbidden” (Mallinson 2015: 71; still practiced in the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, see Caswell 2016: 312). Scotland’s reformers endeavoured to put the will of the person first.³ As Liam McIlvanney argues, this egalitarian value of the Calvinist-Presbyterian Reformation is the leitmotif of Burns’ *A Man’s A Man For All That*:

“The philosophy of ‘A Man’s a Man’, one might argue, derives less from Tom Paine than from Calvin and Old Light Presbyterianism. [...] Burns’s egalitarianism, like that of Erskine, betrays the unmistakable influence of Calvinism, founded as it is on the repudiation of outward splendour (‘tinsel show’), the distrust of sensual indulgence (‘silks’ and ‘wine’), and the sense of a god-given gradation of worth behind the man-made distinctions of rank and fortune.” (McIlvanney 1995: 145-146)

These implications are expressed in *A Man’s A Man For All That* as the historical semantics of the Scottish nation. The staging of this song for the opening ceremony of the Scottish Parliament puts the pursuit of equal opportunities centre stage.

For the SNP spokesperson, *A Man’s A Man For All That* symbolises a “restating” of Scottish “identity on the international stage”. Similarly, singer Sheena Wellington said the song “sums up what we want the Scottish Parliament to be about.” (both quoted in Galney/Burdman 1999: 48)

Anthony P. Cohen’s observation that a debate structured in such an egalitarian way, which gives every person living in Scotland the chance of political participation, speaks in favour of a ‘personal nationalism’. This nationalism is inalienably centred on the individual and starkly contrasts the extreme massification and subordination of the individual that otherwise prevails in nationalism (Cohen 1996: 803-811).

A similar conclusion was reached by David Brown, who interprets the right of all to have a say as a lasting influence of John Knox on Scottish national identity. Today, it manifests as a sentimental “encouraging concern for the downcast and oppressed” (Brown 2014: 91, 96; Cohen 1996: 807). While recent research based on general population surveys does not find significantly more egalitarian attitudes among the Scottish population than in England (Rosie 2020: 457), the clergy and laity’s discussion

3 From the sermons and works of Presbyterians of the time that he analysed, Williamson concludes: “[God] enjoined political life linked with political forms which emanated from human will and consent” (Williamson 1993: 20; likewise on the “principle of parity” Wormald 1991: 30, 123). Brown points to the egalitarian social structure of Scotland’s Presbyterian church constitution: “Fundamental to the system was the classis, or presbytery – made up of ministers and elders of several neighbouring parishes. Within this ‘Presbyterian’ system, all ministers were to be equal and none was to exercise individual authority over another.” (Brown 2012: 81)

of the referendum shows that equality was an important value (Stoddart 2014), as discussed in more detail in Chapter 7 below.

Referring to *A Man's A Man For All That* for describing Scotland as a nation is about the pursuit of equality of opportunity. From a sociological perspective, this is a core value of modern society, but one that is usually overlooked. Even today, rather than asking how equality of opportunity came to be important in the first place, Talcott Parsons would probably still note that research tends to assume equality of opportunity and look for the causes of inequality: "Sociological interest has tended to focus on inequality and its forms, causes, and justifications. There has been, however, for several centuries now, a trend to the institutionalization of continually extending bases of equality." (Parsons 1977[1970]: 14)

Having shown here that national celebrations are used to reinforce the focus on equality, we now want to ask about the impact of this national value commitment. How widespread is egalitarianism in the independence movement and in Scottish politics?

4.2 Political ideology

In the pursuit of statehood, political ideology is of particular importance. This is closely linked to the historical semantics of Scottish egalitarianism. As Dewar said above, a separate parliament or independent politics is not just an end in itself but a means of realising equal opportunities in Scotland as far as possible, thus coming closer to the population's desire for an egalitarian community.

Activists in the Scottish autonomy movement and the SNP governments that have been in power since 2007 take up egalitarianism as a value commitment. They link it to the political ideology of social democracy. Social democracy prioritises a democratic and socially just social order, which sees uncaused inequality as its most important problem to be tackled through political intervention (Berman 2002; Jackson 2013). This distinguishes it from direct democracy, which is more orientated towards direct co-determination, and liberal democracy, which focuses on individual freedom and the market economy (Ahlers et al. 2020: 227-229).

How powerful is the social democratic interpretation of the historical semantics of Scottish egalitarianism in the autonomy movement? In particular, the Scottish autonomy movement's social democratic interpretation of egalitarianism has become very important in recent years.

Egalitarianism and the political ideology of social democracy are hugely crucial to Scottish self-understanding. The Rev Martin Johnstone, Council Secretary of the Church and Society Council of the Church of Scotland, explains to me in an interview that the Scottish population is convinced that it is more progressive and egalitarian than the rest of the population: "The surveys that have been done about attitudes ac-

tually don't really demonstrate that Scotland is more progressive or egalitarian than other parts of the UK but it has that sense about itself that it is. I think that has been one of the things that is going on." (Johnstone 2015)

The question of Scotland's autonomy had led to reflection on the desirable policy. They came to the conclusion that something had to change. This is the assessment of the band Stanley Odd in their song *Son I Voted Yes*: "It's time to change how we 'do' politics. Responsibility and independence". (Stanley Odd 2014)

With its social democratic self-image, Scotland is on a particular path in the United Kingdom, as journalist Iain Macwhirter writes. Feeling committed to egalitarianism can mean striving for political autonomy if the state institutions and policies of social democracy are jeopardised:

"The Scots were not hypnotised by identity politics, but turned against Labour because of the Iraq war, Trident and Tony Blair's promotion of market reforms to public services like NHS. [...] Scots were quite content with the United Kingdom as it emerged from the Second World War – with the welfare state, nationalized industries, regional policy, the NHS and social security. But as these values have been eroded, first by Margaret Thatcher and then by Tony Blair (at least in Scottish eyes), the Scots found themselves turning to nationalism the better to defend the achievements of social democracy." (Macwhirter 2014: 104, 108)

At the centre of the Scottish autonomy movement is the defence of a political ideology. The welfare state institutions, first created by social democracy, would have to be defended by secession if necessary. John McGurk, also a journalist, takes the same view:

"Working in Scottish newspapers in the 1980s, at the height of Thatcherism, rammed home the archetypal image of downtrodden Scots at the hands of those English. The miners' strike; the shutdown of Ravenscraig; the further erosion of real shipbuilding on the Clyde; the protests over the poll tax; the loss of big business as our nation was sacrificed. How it would all change, we believed, if we got rid of those dreadful Tories and were able to run our own affairs." (Devine/Logue 2002: 166)

The post-war welfare state had created the expectation in Scotland that the State should be seen as an instrument of social control. Thatcher, in particular, broke with this expectation and thus brought about Scottish nationalism:

"The de facto devolution of administrative powers to Edinburgh had, if anything, heightened expectations that the state should provide solutions for problems of the Scottish economy. [...] Given the prevalence of a consciousness of Scottish identity and interests and a longstanding concern over 'external control' of the

Scottish economy, the Conservatives have been from 1979 prone to be regarded as an external imposition with little local base of support. This response has intensified with the growing unpopularity of the last two Thatcher administrations.” (Clarke/Mooney 1987: 50-51)

In Scotland, the expectation has become entrenched that addressing inequality is the responsibility of the State and not, as Margaret Thatcher suggested at the opening of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1988, the responsibility of Christian love of self and neighbour (Finlay 1998; cf. Thatcher 1980; Thatcher 1983).

In his book *Building a Nation: Post Devolution Nationalism in Scotland*, then SNP strategist Kenny MacAskill explains the social democratic strategy as a contradiction to Thatcher’s phrase, “Who is society? There is no such thing!” (Thatcher 1989). To this, MacAskill replies:

“Fundamentally, Social Democrats believe that it’s not just the interests of the consumer that matter, but that there is such a thing as society. [...] The role of the State in the 21st century economy is to provide the framework in skills and infrastructure upon which enterprise can develop; to promote the national interest and protect the rights of the citizen. It is not to run business or micro-manage the economy.” (MacAskill 2004: 44, 54f.; cf. the ‘Nordic Council’ in Newby 2009: 310)

Not only should the economic interests of consumers be addressed by state policy, but state policy should be used to enable previously unimaginable careers in Scotland. Scotland’s ‘kent is faither’ syndrome—literally: ‘I knew your father’ syndrome – is to be combated with expectations projected onto the State. Political interventions have the task of ensuring equal opportunities:

“For too long a ‘kent is faither’ syndrome has been prevalent and festered. The support to so high but go no further, to do well but not to excel, to shine, but not too brightly. This attitude is simply unacceptable. [...] This is a national malaise and indicative of a society lacking in self-confidence. [...] It’s ironic that such a destructive attitude should prevail in a Nation that venerated education, promoted self-improvement and was the home of the Enlightenment. Success abroad was laudable, but success at home becomes a liability.” (MacAskill 2004: 72-73)

MacAskill links these views to the hope of “Independence in Europe” and distinguishes them from Anglo-American, Southeast Asian and transatlantic alliances:

“The global economy is seeing the creation of major trading blocs whether in Europe, the American continent or South East Asia. The logical one for Scotland formed both from trading alliances and social perspectives is to align with Europe. Not just Scotland’s economy but much of her social perspectives are in tune and

harmony with the European not transatlantic model. From the rights of citizens to the duty of the State; from war in Vietnam to conflict in the Gulf, Scotland has greater affinity with European colleagues than Atlantic cousins. Scotland is a European Nation not the 51st state. It's a social and economic union not a NAFTA for us." (MacAskill 2004: 65)

Based on by-election surveys, Mooney and Scott also conclude that Scotland's secession campaign is not about a nationalist ideology but a "social justice movement", defending the welfare state against measurements of austerity (Law/Mooney 2012; Mooney/Scott 2015, 2016). The national value commitment to egalitarianism is politically interpreted as the ideology of social democracy. Scottish ethnicity is not at the centre of Scotland's desire for autonomy, but the fight against social problems is made possible by the welfare state and its policies. Scotland's secession campaign and the SNP are fuelled by protests against austerity imposed by the State (Glen 2015; Jackson 2014; Scott-Samuel et al. 2014).

In *The Case for Scottish Independence: A History of Nationalist Political Thought in Modern Scotland*, Ben Jackson looks for "the precise rationale political actors have offered for supporting state-seeking nationalism [...] in late twentieth-century Scotland" (Jackson, B. 2020: 4). What does he find? The political ideology of social democracy oscillating between state control and economic liberalism:

"Nordic social democracy on the one hand – which requires high levels of direct and indirect taxes and social spending as well as active labour market policies – and the low tax and low social spending of Ireland. As Maxwell observed in 2009, 'over the last decade, as the SNP's social heart has become more attached to social democracy, its economic head has inclined to neo-liberalism', leaving it with 'a persisting ambivalence about the social democratic model itself.'" (Jackson, B. 2020: 124; Harvey 2015)

Analysing the social and economic policy proposals in the secession campaign's White Paper (*Scotland's Future*), Michael Keating and Malcolm Harvey come to the same conclusion: "The SNP continues, as it long has, to mix market-liberal and social-investment strategies." (Keating/Harvey 2014: 64) James Foley examines the ideological shifts that have occurred in Scottish nationalism over the last century. He also notes that the political ideology of Scottish nationalism can be characterised, at least for the moment, as the ideology of social democracy with leanings towards liberalism. At least in the current circumstances among the leading parties at Westminster, he argues, "the broad Scottish independence movement led by the SNP could become a force of protest simply by promising to conserve the post-Thatcher remains of the welfare state." (Foley 2024: 128, 140; White 2015; Wiggan 2017)

Indeed, the political ideology of social democracy is at the centre of Scotland's Future: Your Guide to an Independent Scotland. Under the keywords "equality", "unequal", "inequality", "fairer Scotland" etc., there are numerous entries that are orientated towards the egalitarianism described above and hold out the prospect of social democratic policies. One example:

"Within the UK, Scotland is part of an increasingly unequal society. [...] Seeking to become a more equal society is not just the right thing to do. It also makes sense for the economy. We know that the most equal societies also have the highest levels of well-being and are most prosperous. They are also, more often than not, nations like Scotland; the fairest and most successful countries in the world are independent European nations of similar size." (Scottish Government 2013: 44, 47)

The differentiation of Scotland's political ideology as social democracy from the neo/liberalism associated with Thatcher is important in Scotland's quest for autonomy. This is the observation of literary scholar Fiona McCulloch. McCulloch uses a character from a contemporary Scottish youth book to illustrate the contrast between English market orientation and Scottish state orientation, between "neoliberal" and social democracy:

"[P]ost-referendum Scotland demonstrates the powerful desire of a grassroots collective people to shape a nation that shows compassion rather than Thatcherite individualism. [...] [B]oth literature and nation have set a route that rejects the austerity measures and self-interests of a neoliberal globalisation that Westminster's Conservative Government has whole-heartedly embraced despite its painful impact on the vulnerable sectors of society. [...] Anais, the socially discarded yet intelligent teenage narrator of Jenni Fagan's *The Panopticon*, observes: Kindness is the most underrated quality on the planet." (McCulloch 2015; cf. on James Robertson's 'Republics of the Mind' see Kaličanin 2018: 93)

The political left was at the centre of Scottish secessionist activism. Most of the 933 activists Iain Black and Sara Marsden interviewed following the 2014 referendum categorised themselves as being on the political left, as seen in the following table. The table shows where Scottish secession activists place themselves on average on a scale of 1 (left) to 11 (right) and where they see the respective party (Black/Marsden 2016: 6).

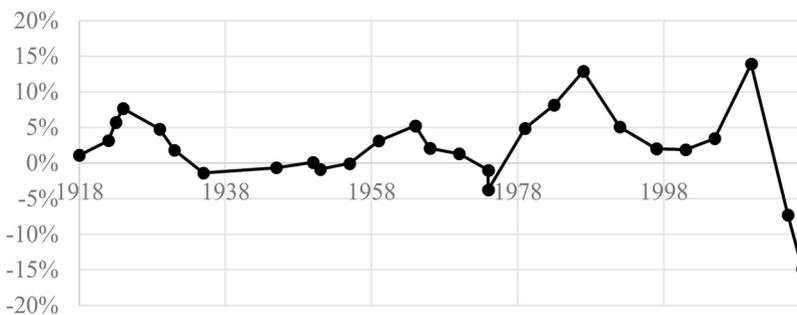
With a score of 3.19, those actively campaigning for Scottish secession also ranked far to the left of most parties. The exception is the Scottish Socialist Party (1.86).

Table 2: Average political self-assessment and parties of Scottish separatist activists

	Self-assessment on a political scale from left (1) to right (11)	Party membership of respondents
Self-assessment of the 933 activists for secession	3.19	
Scottish National Party	4.31	654
Green Party	3.35	84
Scottish Socialist Party	1.86	29
Labour Party	8.42	3
Liberal Democrats	7.76	1
UKIP	10.17	0
Conservative Party	10.2	0
No party membership		162

However, the party membership of respondents in favour of secession also shows this left-wing, mainly social democratic orientation. 83 % of respondents declared a party affiliation during the survey. The distribution is shown in the second column of the table. It is interesting to note that, at 654 people, most of the activists surveyed are SNP members. This is interesting because, on average, these respondents placed themselves further to the left (3.19) than the SNP (4.31).

Figure 13: Labour vote share in Scotland compared to England in 27 House of Commons elections (1918–2017)

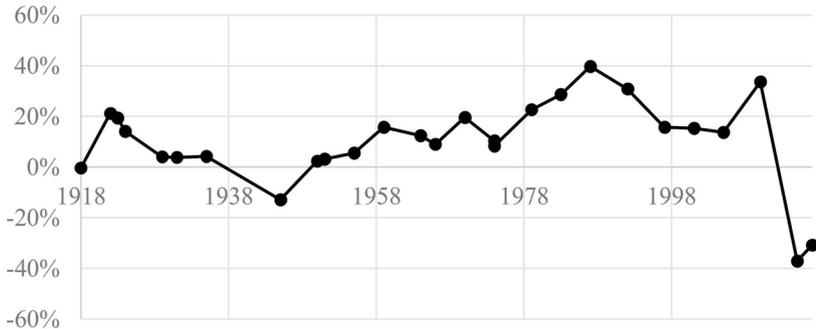


It is also striking how far to the right those committed to Scottish nationalism place Labour. Only 3 of the respondents are Labour members. However, 143 of the 933 activists surveyed said they had recently been a Labour party member (Black &

Marsden, 2016, p. 6). Therefore, the Labour Party, which has enjoyed significant electoral success in Scotland, particularly in the decades since Margaret Thatcher's first government, can no longer do so since the secession campaign launched in 2012. As can be seen in the following two charts, Labour performed better than average in Scotland—compared to Labour's share of the vote in England—until 2010.

When Margaret Thatcher was first elected Prime Minister in 1979, Labour gained 5% more of the vote in Scotland than in England. Including the 2010 general election, just before the start of the secession campaign, this remains the case. In 2010, Labour won 14% more votes in Scotland than in England and, in relative terms, won 40% more seats in Scotland than in England. The latter is shown in the chart below.

Figure 14: Share of MP seats for Labour in Scotland compared to England in 27 House of Commons elections (1918–2017)



In the next elections to the House of Commons (2015 and 2017), however, Labour loses many votes and seats in Scotland. This was due to the surprising electoral success of the nationalists in Scotland following the Scottish secession referendum (2014).⁴

The SNP won 56 of Scotland's 59 seats in the House of Commons election held the year after the Scottish secession referendum. In the subsequent House of Commons election (2017), the SNP won 35 of the 59 seats. From the 1959 to the 2010 general election, Labour always won most seats in Scotland. In the two subsequent elections to the House of Commons, Labour lost these seats mainly to the SNP.

Nationalist constituencies are, as a graph by Alasdair Rae shows, typical Labour constituencies (Rae 2019). In this diagram, Rae has plotted all 650 constituencies

4 Previously, the SNP had won an average of 4 of the 71 seats in the Scottish House of Commons since the 1970s. During a constituency reform in 1983, the number of seats for MPs elected in Scotland in the House of Commons increased to 72, and since the reform that came into force in 2005, Scotland still has 59 seats in the House of Commons.

in the 2017 House of Commons election, from the most deprived constituency (1) to the most affluent constituency (650) from left to right. 10 of the 35 constituencies won by the SNP in the 2017 general election are among the 30 % most deprived constituencies in the UK (measured multidimensionally and standardised based on Abel/Barclay/Payne 2016). The remaining 35 of the 59 Scottish constituencies won by the SNP are in the upper middle (4th to seventh decile). This also shows that the SNP competes primarily with Labour. It helps to understand why social democracy is the main political ideology of the Scottish independence movement.

As abstract value commitments, egalitarianism does not specify what must be done. However, it provides a “direction of choice, and consequent commitment to action” in the Scottish autonomist endeavour (Parsons 1968: 136). As seen above, this value pattern is, for the moment, interpreted in the political ideology of social democracy. Against this background, the distinctions between a Scottish state orientation and the English market orientation (see Jackson 2014, 2018), as well as the left-wing political self-assessment of the secession activists and their parties—SNP, Greens and SSP (on the SNP Wiggan 2017: 646)—appear as interpretations of the egalitarian value commitment of this nation.

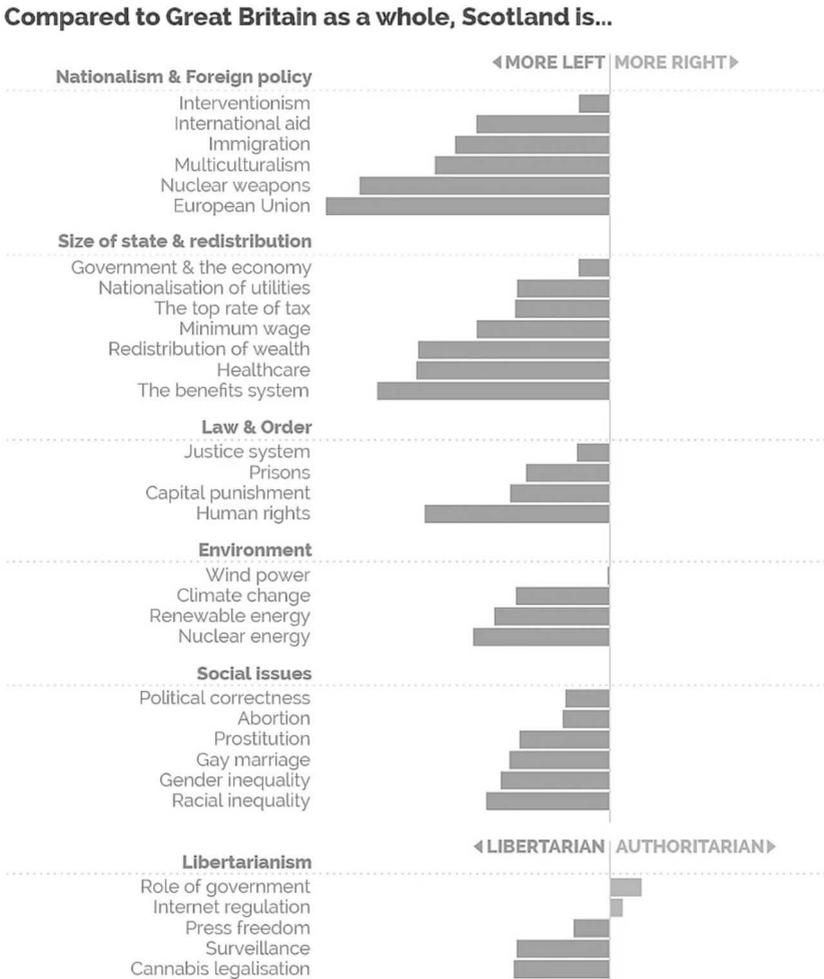
4.3 Conclusion

As explained above, egalitarianism is structuring in Scotland’s quest for statehood. Activists, the SNP, and their professional observers in academia and journalism have pointed to the enormous importance of egalitarianism and its interpretation as social democracy. For this reason, we can causally conclude that the social democratic ideology convinced the majority of those who voted in favour of secession. Consequently, in municipalities where there is a greater need for the inclusionary services of the welfare state, an above-average number of people voted in favour of secession (see Foley 2024: 139; Glen 2015).

Policy enlarges the political space and promotes the visibility of the Scottish nation. An independent Scottish policy will then be visible not only as a democratic deficit in a particular election, but also in the services provided by the welfare state, such as the free provision of toiletries for girls in schools and universities. Social democracy increases the possibilities of political inclusion and strengthens the differentiation of Scotland as an independent political system within (devolution) or outside (secession) the United Kingdom.

An example of the Scottish population’s extensive room for manoeuvre in politics can be seen in the YouGov survey from March 2015 shown below, in which respondents categorised themselves on a scale of 1 to 5 between left/right and individualist/collectivist (“libertarian/authoritarian”). There are apparent differences between the Scottish and British populations.

Figure 15: Self-assessment categorised by political left/right and individualist/collectivist based on YouGov opinion polls conducted in Scotland and the UK in March 2015 (graphic from Jordan, 2015)



William Jordan summarises the difference: “Scots are to the left of the rest of Britain on almost every issue” (Jordan 2015). Underlining Scotland’s particular social democratic path, the Scottish population attaches above-average importance to the government. Compared to the UK population, we also see a greater willingness to redistribute and intervene among the Scottish population. The open-mindedness towards the values associated with Europe increasingly distinguishes the Scottish desire for autonomy from English nationalism. The smallest injustices must be de-

tected immediately and addressed with political measures. It may also be possible to anticipate what is only just beginning to emerge and anticipate it with policies. This political responsiveness can turn social democracy into an authoritarian expertocracy anytime. A current example of this is the initiative, supported mainly by Nicola Sturgeon, to enable the individual self-determination of transgender people from the age of 16 and without a medical certificate. Her prominent opponent, J.K. Rowling, sees this as a battle between “authoritarians and liberals” as she fears unforeseeable consequences for young people and an increase in violence against women (BBC 2022).

However, how does one understand Scotland as more than just a territory in which a parliament and a government, some of which have their sentiments about what should be influential in politics, are elected? Let us move on to the question of when and how the people living in Scotland describe themselves as a nation.

