Young Scottish Party Members' Discourse about National Identity

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Context

- Scottish independence referendum, September 2014

- Young people went to the polls massively

- Upsurge of the membership of some political parties and their youth wings. This was particularly the case of the Scottish National Party (SNP) that led the 'Yes' camp

Research Questions

➤ How do young Scottish party members perceive and define their national identity?

➤ How do they understand the notion of national identity?

➤ How do they view and talk about Scottishness?

➤ How do they view and talk about Britishness?

Methods

➢ Interviews

- ✓ 37 young Scottish party members (25 SNP, 7 Conservatives, 4 Labour, and 1 Brexit Party)

- ✓ 18 to 32 years old

- ✓ Aberdeen, Glasgow, Edinburgh, video and phone calls, from 2018 to 2020

- ✓ Semi-guided interviews (45-90 minutes)

➢ Online survey

- ✓ Questionnaire sent to Scottish political parties' youth and student wings (2020)

- ✓ 53 responses submitted (YSI, SNP Students, Scottish Young Conservatives, Scottish Young Labour, Scottish Young Liberals, Scottish Young Greens, Brexit Party)

➢ Social media analysis (Twitter, Facebook)

Young Scottish National Party (SNP) Members' Understanding of National Identity

➢ Something personal, individual, subjective (Alex: 'People have different interpretations of national identity')

➢ 'National identity is omnipresent' (Sean), 'subconscious in people's lives' (Alex)

➢ **93% of civic definitions** (Josh: 'You live here, work here, doesn't matter where you're from', Alex: '(feeling) connected to the nation, whether that you speak the same language, or you share the same cultural values')

I changed interviewees' names

Is national identity political, cultural, both?

- Cultural: 7% of young interviewees

    - Conservatives: 50%

    - SNP: 22%

    - Labour: 0%

'Identity comes from the culture of the country where you live'
(Kate, Scottish Young Conservatives)

Is national identity political, cultural, both?

➢ Political: 24%

- Labour: 25%

- SNP: 11%

- Conservatives: 0%

➢ Both cultural and political: 69%

- Labour: 75%

- SNP: 72%

- Conservatives: 50%

➢ **Relationship between version of national identity and political party / party family**

Young Scottish Party Members' Versions of Scottishness

➢ Online survey

▪ You are Scottish if you…

… were born in Scotland from Scottish parents: Conservatives 67%, Labour 67%, SNP 34%

… were born in Scotland from immigrant parents: Labour 33%, SNP 11%, Conservatives 0%

… came to Scotland and became a Scottish citizen: SNP 39%, Labour 33%, Conservatives 0%

This was a multiple-choice question.

Young Scottish Party Members' Versions of Scottishness

➢ Online survey

▪ Characteristics that represent Scotland best (top in each party)

SNP: 1) Social equality, fairness, social justice (89%)

        2) Humour (79%)

        3) Progress (76%)

Conservatives:

        Saltire (Scottish flag)

        Bagpipes, Scottish music   (100%)

        Landscapes

Labour: Saltire, Bagpipes, Scottish music, Scottish History, Landscapes, and Ceilidh (67%)

Young Scottish Party Members' Versions of Scottishness

➢ Scottishness both cultural and political

'I think having common values such as internationalism, supporting human rights and freedoms, and being willing to contribute to the welfare of your community are symbols of what it is to be Scottish. Our history, cultural heritage and languages (e.g. Scottish Wars of Independence, Highland Dress, Burns Suppers or speaking Scots or Scottish Gaelic) are also indicators of what symbolises Scotland.' (Questionnaire respondent, SNP)

Young Scottish Party Members' Versions of Scottishness

➢ Scottishness as a cultural identity (interviews)

- Conservatives: 75%

- SNP: 12%

- Labour: 0%

'I think even now there's still perhaps a slightly more romantic view of Scotland being something that is very much intrinsic to the union, that kind of Highland scene of a stag and a Scotsman in a kilt with a bagpipe. (…) Even now to me it kind of sums up Scottishness.' Jack (Conservative Party)

Young Scottish Party Members' Versions of Scottishness

➢ Scottishness as a socio-political identity (interviews)

   ▪ SNP: 56%

   ▪ Labour: 50%

   ▪ Conservatives: 0%

'Traditional values of socialism, progress, equality, respect, social security system' Jonathan (SNP)

'Not the clichés like kilts, ginger heads, but fairness, openness, being honest' Mark (SNP)

'Outward looking, liberal country... too often our national identity is probably perceived to be bagpipes, tartan and people drinking alcohol, but Scotland is a very, very, liberal country now.' Peter (SNP)

'Broadly I would say that we are a social-democratic country. Multiculturalism is a part of what we are as a country, diversity shapes our identity, what the country is. There's nothing to do with kilts and bagpipes for sure.' Josh (SNP)

Young Scottish Party Members' Versions of Britishness

➢ Online survey

▪ You are British if you…

… were born in the UK from British parents: Conservatives 100%, Labour 67%, SNP 21%

… were born in the UK from immigrant parents: Labour 33%, Conservatives 33%, SNP 8%

… came to the UK and became a British citizen: SNP 47%, Labour 33%, Conservatives 33%

This was a multiple-choice question.

Young Scottish Party Members' Versions of Britishness

➢ Online survey

▪ Symbols of the UK

SNP

'The Queen, British Empire, Union Jack, Tea, British Rock, the Pub'; 'Multicultural, diversity, fish and chips, the monarchy, Westminster'; 'Divisiveness'; 'Inequality, the remnants of a dying empire'; 'Union Jack, Imperialism, Empire, English Defence League, Nigel Farage, Incompetent Parliament'; 'Right-wing politics'; 'Oppression, colonialist attitudes'; 'I think the empire and similar crimes. It is mostly about harking back to the past.'; 'The UK is England'; 'Outdated system, racism, prejudice, death, no democracy.',; 'Not a thing'

Young Scottish Party Members' Versions of Britishness

➢ Online survey

▪ Symbols of the UK

Conservatives

'Freedom, strong institutions, the welfare state, the determination to carry on no matter what'

'The Union Jack. It shows the cultures coming together.'

Young Scottish Party Members' Versions of Britishness

➢ Online survey

▪ Symbols of the UK

Labour

'Democracy, multiculturalism.'

'As a young person, who is a strong supporter of left-wing politics, when considering this question, largely negative symbols come to mind. Having been let down time & time again (Brexit, general elections, austerity) by politics in our country, I honestly view the United Kingdom as a society which is riddled by hierarchy and class, has a huge problem with bigotry and racism & cannot fairly deem itself as a leading democracy.'

Young Scottish Party Members' Versions of Britishness

➢ Britishness both cultural and political (interviews)

  ▪ Labour: 67%

  ▪ SNP: 38%

  ▪ Conservatives: 17%

➢ Definition of Britishness based on socio-political criteria (interviews)

  ▪ SNP: 54%

  ▪ Labour: 33%

  ▪ Conservatives: 17%

Young Scottish Party Members' Versions of Britishness

➢ Positive views of Britishness (interviews)

  ▪ Conservatives: 100%

  ▪ Labour: 100%

  ▪ SNP: 0%

➢ Negative views of Britishness (interviews)

  ▪ SNP: 85%

  ▪ Labour: 0%

  ▪ Conservatives: 0%

Young Scottish Party Members' Versions of Britishness

➤ **Relationship between young party members' understanding of Britishness and the issue of Scottish independence**

'Britishness is nothing to be proud of. It's a union born out of corruption. Not a very good reputation at all. Very harmful thing. Connotations of harm and damage.' Matt (SNP)

'Something ageing, something lost and negative' Mark (SNP)

'It's non-existent. I am ashamed of it.' Magnus (SNP)

Some SNP members nonetheless qualified such views.

Young Scottish Party Members' Versions of Britishness

➤ References to colonialism and the old British Empire when talking about Britishness (interviews)

- SNP: 40%

- Conservatives: 0%

- Labour: 0%

➤ Britishness sometimes associated with Englishness

Conclusions

➢ Differences and similarities between young SNP members, Scottish Young Conservatives and Scottish Young Labour members when it comes to thinking of and talking about **national identity**.

➢ **Young SNP members** understand national identity from a **civic and territorial** perspective.

➢ **SNP members**, and to a lesser extent **Labour members**, see **Scottishness and Britishness** through a **socio-political** lens, whereas **young Scottish Conservatives** tend to base the definition of their national identity on **more cultural** views and arguments.

➢ Relationship between **young people's political ideology and their national identity**, and more generally, between **party family and national identity.**

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Thanks a lot! Mòran taing!

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