Significant difference from small difference? Explaining differing party system development in Scotland and Wales

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Explaining differing party system development in Scotland and Wales

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WORK IN PROGRESS – COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS WELCOME

Abstract

With the 20th anniversary of devolution in 2019, we have now seen five elections to devolved institutions in Scotland and Wales and have plentiful data to analyse trends and developments in the electoral politics of both nations. This paper explores the differences in party system development in Scotland and Wales in this time period. By utilizing a most-similar case study design, we consider two strands of party systems theory – institutional and sociological approaches – and apply those to the two cases. We hypothesise that differences in both the institutional setting and the wider sociological concerns of the electorate in each case has led to the emergence of similar but significantly different party systems.

Introduction

By the time of the sixth devolved elections in the United Kingdom, scheduled for May 2021, the Scottish Parliament and the Senedd will have been in existence for 21 years.[1] Those years have been constitutionally tumultuous. Scotland has seen five First Ministers, three Scotland Acts, three commissions, a 'national conversation', and a referendum on independence. Wales has seen four First Ministers, four Wales Acts, four commissions, an 'All Wales Convention', a review of procedures, and a referendum that provided legislative powers to the institution – powers which the original Government of Wales Act did not envisage. There has also been the small matter of the UK's departure from the European Union – something of fundamental constitutional significance for many reasons, not least of which is that the

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[1] The institution which began life in 1999 as the National Assembly for Wales officially changed its name in May 2020 to Senedd Cymru – the Welsh Parliament. The building in which it has been located since 2006 was already known as the 'Senedd', a term which normally translates from Welsh as 'parliament'. For simplicity, we will generally refer to the institution throughout this paper as the Senedd.

construction and empowerment of devolved institutions was predicated on the assumption of EU membership.

This paper explores the extent to which the party systems in Scotland and Wales have been shaped by the existence of devolution, and considers the differences in the party systems in Scotland and Wales that have emerged during the devolution period. This paper seeks theoretical explanations for these dynamics, and an explanation for the variation that has occurred. To do so, the paper adopts a most-similar case study research design to explain the variation in the party systems of Scotland and Wales. Simply put, a most-similar case study finds cases in which similarities exist between the cases, allowing focus to be centred on the variations and explanations for them (Teune and Przeworksi 1970: 32-34; Della Porta 2008; Keman and Pennings 2014). The institutions in Scotland and Wales differ in scope, but both exist within the parameters of a UK constitutional setting that retains the sovereignty of the UK Parliament; both were established at the same time; and both have sought clear and often substantial public policy divergence from the UK Government's objectives when they did not agree with the direction of travel.

The establishment of devolved institutions in the UK in 1999 saw Scotland and Wales afforded very different models of devolution. Scotland was provided with a parliament, established on a 'reserved powers' model allowing the Scottish Parliament to pass legislation within all areas of competence not reserved to Westminster; the parliament also had some (though limited) tax powers. Wales got an Assembly with no tax powers and a significant limitation on its ability to legislate, within a broader conferred powers model that permitted the institution to act only in areas where it had been specifically given responsibilities. Despite these differences, both exist within the UK political union, both share in the wider socio-political debates that occur at macro and micro levels within the UK, and both have seen significant changes in their powers in the two decades since their establishment. We hypothesise here that differences in both the institutional setting and the wider sociological concerns of the electorate in each case have helped lead to the emergence of similar but significantly different party systems. The paper begins with a consideration of party systems theory before turning to the cases. It concludes with an analysis of the similarities and differences in the two cases.

Party System Theories
Institutional Theories: Party systems can be categorised in a number of different ways. Initial theories focused solely on the number of parties present in any given system – a technique pioneered by Maurice Duverger in 1954 (Mair, 1990: 22). He introduced three classes: single-party systems (usually in non-democratic regimes); two-party systems (believed to be usually a consequence of a plurality electoral system); and multi-party systems (regarded as a predictable consequence of a proportional electoral system). Jean Blondel took the idea further, dividing the classifications established by Duverger by taking account not only of the number of parties in a political system, but also their strength – a factor considered but rejected by Duverger – and their place on the ideological spectrum ([Blondel 1968] in Mair, 1990: 303). His classification differs from that of Duverger, in that he introduces a third category, positioned between Duverger's two-party and multi-party systems: a category for party systems that had three parties. However, Blondel established that in states where there was a third party in the political system, such as the Liberals in the UK or the FDP in Germany, that third party was often much smaller than the other two ([Blondel, 1968] in Mair, 1990:

305). Blondel thus decided that a smaller third party in a system should be classed as a 'half-party' and that systems with three parties would be classified as 'two-and-a-half-party' systems. This is an important stage in the development of party system theory, as it was the first movement away from simple number-based classifications taking another factor into classification – in this case, the relative strength of the parties with regard to one another. Blondel developed this idea further, and divided Duverger's multi-party system in two, using the relative size of parties as a means of better defining the party system. In multi-party system where there are perhaps six or eight parties, but where one party consistently obtains a much higher share of the vote (for example, where party A receives 40% and parties B-F collectively make up the other 60% of the vote, but with no single party obtaining over 15% of the vote) Blondel determines that the larger party is dominant, and as such, classifies party systems with similar characteristics as 'multi-party systems with a dominant party' ([Blondel, 1968] in Mair, 1990: 307).

A further development to party system theory occurred with the work of Giovanni Sartori, who fused the simple numerical classification of parties with other contributory factors, using Blondel's conception of relative party strength and adding ideological distance between the parties to classify party systems. For while the number of parties is certainly important, and was Sartori's starting point, he believed that classification requires more complex criteria. Immediately Sartori set himself apart from other theorists by developing a convincing argument that it is not necessary to count all of the parties in a particular political system in order to classify the party system ([Sartori, 1976] in Mair, 1990: 317-8). Sartori thus established four classes of party system: *two-partism*, which sees limited party fragmentation and small ideological distance between the parties; *moderate multi-partism*, which has moderate levels of fragmentations (three to five parties) but again with limited ideological distance between them; *segmented multi-partism*, in which there are higher levels of party fragmentation (more parties) but ideological distance remains quite limited; and *polarized multi-partism*, in which there is high fragmentation (lots of parties), a weak centre and large ideological distances between the parties (Ware, 1996: 170).[2] Sartori's experience was that of Italy – a highly volatile party system, which often fell into the category of polarized multi-partism – but his schema offers a novel approach at considering how to categorize party systems. Sartori also includes two criteria for counting parties as 'relevant' in the party system: a party having 'governing potential', the possibility of entering government either as a single party or as part of a coalition; or a party having 'blackmail potential', the ability to ensure other parties adopt or avoid particular policy outcomes based on their electoral or parliamentary strength. For Sartori, a party requires either governing or blackmail potential to have an impact on the parliamentary process, which is how he categorizes relevance. Without either, a party should not necessarily be counted in the system.

Sociological Party System Theories: Duverger, Blondel and Sartori's theories are concerned with parties as they exist after the electoral process is completed – party strength within the institutional setting. Nevertheless, we must also consider both why the parties exist in the first place and how they win that electoral support. Lipset and Rokkan's classic study of party systems and statebuilding expressed the view that 'the party systems of the 1960s reflect, with few but significant exceptions, the cleavage structures of the 1920s (1967: 44). The

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[2] It could be argued that Sartori did not allow for the sort of *polarised two-partism* that appears to characterise contemporary party politics in the United States.

combined effect of the national and industrial revolutions of the 19th century helped to develop a politics shaped around four main cleavages and, for decades until the late 1960s, voters aligned to traditional parties around these four main cleavages. The industrial revolution had created the capital vs labour and urban vs rural (or industry vs agriculture) cleavages whilst the national revolutions around states and statebuilding had helped to create both centre-periphery and church-state cleavages (see Von Schoultz, 2017). The extension of the electoral franchise to a universal model allowed each of these interests to be represented, and with limited further changes to sociological structures, Mair (1997) argued that Lipset and Rokkan's thesis – that party systems remained 'frozen' by these cleavages – remained largely the case.

Across Europe, changes in the operation of politics have seen the rise of new post-materialist and transnational cleavages, with new parties representing these interests and party systems restructuring to accommodate these positions. These changes have brought about new political parties associated with both the GAL (green/ alternative/ liberal pole) and TAN (traditional/ authoritarian/ national pole) depictions not just the traditional left-right spectrum (Hooghe, Marks and Wilson 2002). Kriesi et al (2006) and Hooghe and Marks (2018) identified the development of a new cleavage around Europeanisation, globalisation and immigration in recent years defined as a 'demarcation-integration cleavage' or a 'transnational cleavage'. Each occurred across European polities and found new parties and patterns of voting shaped by a reaction to European integration and immigration and potentially creating a new political critical juncture in European politics – just as the four classic cleavage structures had done. This cleavage was exacerbated by the global financial crisis of 2008 and the EU migrant crises of the late 2010s, both of which furthered concerns with immigration and the globalized economy, driving electoral support for authoritarian and nationalist parties across Europe. Hooghe and Marks (2018: 109) described the cleavage as the 'defense of national political, social and economic ways of life against external actors who penetrate the state by migrating, exchanging goods or exerting rule.' This new cleavage was seen to influence party competition in several countries, in addition to bringing about a measure of party system change (Harvey and Lynch, 2019).

Scotland: the impact of devolution on Westminster elections
The establishment of the devolved institutions across the UK followed the landslide election of a Labour government under Tony Blair's leadership in 1997. Labour's UK-wide performance in 1997 was an extension of their strengthened position in Scotland through the Thatcher and Major governments, and in 1997 they secured over three quarters of the Scottish seats at Westminster. The Liberal Democrats, with their historic strength in liberal heartlands such as the Highlands and islands, finished second with 10 seats, while the SNP doubled their representation with six MPs. However, and just as in Wales, the Conservatives lost all their Scottish seats – including those of prominent Cabinet ministers Michael Forsyth and Malcolm Rifkind. There were minimal changes in the first post-devolution UK election in 2001 – the Conservatives gaining a solitary seat from the SNP, while Michael Martin's role as Speaker notionally took a seat from Labour. Even with a subsequent reduction in the number of Scottish MPs (from 72 at the 2001 election to 59 in 2005, in keeping with a promise to reduce Scottish over-representation at Westminster to account for the establishment of the Scottish Parliament) very similar patterns held through the 2005 and 2010 General Elections.

Labour retained around 70% of the Scottish seats – though their number of Scottish MPs dropped from 55, to 40 of the 59 remaining seats. The Liberal Democrats secured an extra seat to take their tally to 11, the SNP returned 6 and the Conservatives held onto their solitary seat. Indeed, between 2005 and 2010, only one Scottish seat changed hands – that of the retiring Speaker Michael Martin, whose seat Labour regained in 2010. The pattern of Scottish elections to Westminster through the first decade of devolution was one of stability – of limited change – a largely frozen party system, in which the impact of a new layer of governance was almost non-existent. Even in 2010, the first election after the SNP had become a minority government in the Scottish Parliament, the electoral map remained almost wholly unchanged.

Party	1997	2001	2005	2010	2015	2017	2019
Labour	56	55	40	41	1	7	1
SNP	6	5	6	6	56	35	48
Conservative	0	1	1	1	1	13	6
Liberal Democrat	10	10	11	11	1	4	4
Speaker	-	1	1	-	-	-	-
Total Seats Available	72	72	59	59	59	59	59

In 2015, however, the Scottish Westminster party system changed dramatically. Coming as it did just eight months after the Scottish Independence Referendum, the 2015 UK General Election was always likely to be impacted by the surge in political engagement that occurred in Scotland in the run up to the independence vote. One manifestation of that greater engagement was the SNP's party membership, which increased fivefold – from around 25,000 members the day of the referendum to 125,000 members by the time of the election – making them the third largest party in the UK by membership (Convery and Harvey, 2015). The referendum losers became the overwhelming election victors as, in a political tsunami, the SNP harnessed much of the spirit of the independence campaign to win all but three of the Scottish seats. Fifty-six of the 59 Scottish seats were now nationalist yellow – while Labour, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats were reduced to a solitary seat each. In the 2017 UK election the tsunami subsided. The SNP lost 21 of their seats and the Scottish Conservatives, following a campaign that focused heavily on them being both pro-Union and pro-Brexit, emerged as the second party – making twelve gains from the SNP, largely in the North-East of Scotland. Recoveries for Labour and the Liberal Democrats were more limited, though between them they took a further nine seats from the SNP. The nationalists remained by far the largest party in terms of Scottish parliamentary representation, however, with almost three times as many seats as their nearest rival – a situation that would have been unthinkable prior to the independence referendum. And this dominant position was further enhanced when the 2019 election came around, as the SNP recouped many of their 2017 losses, taking them to 48 MPs. The Conservatives lost half of their representation, while Labour were once again reduced to a solitary seat; and the Liberal Democrats, despite losing their UK leader Jo Swinson to the SNP in East Dunbartonshire, picked up the ultra-marginal North East Fife, to stay on four seats.

The party system in Scotland is now predominantly aligned on the issue of independence/the union. The SNP are the overwhelming force on one side of that divide; their unionist

opponents have been well beaten by the SNP in the three most recent Westminster elections in part because the unionist vote has been divided between them. While devolution itself wasn't a direct factor in these changes, the Scottish Parliament created the conditions which allowed both for the SNP to take a prominent position in Scottish politics, and to proceed to an independence referendum which ultimately impacted so dramatically the Scottish party system at Westminster.

Westminster Elections in Wales

Labour dominance under Tony Blair in the 1997 general election was, if anything, even more total in Wales than elsewhere in Britain. In some senses this was unsurprising: Labour has come first in votes and seats in Wales at every UK general election from 1922 onwards. But the Blairite surge extended long-term strength into total domination, as the party won an absolute majority of the Welsh vote (54.7 percent of all Welsh votes cast) and 85 percent of all seats. The remaining seats in Wales (all rural ones) were won by Plaid Cymru and the Liberal Democrats as the Conservatives were wiped off the electoral map in Wales, just as they were in Scotland.

Party	1997	2001	2005	2010	2015	2017	2019
Labour	34	34	29	26	25	28	22
Plaid Cymru	4	4	3	3	3	4	4
Conservative	0	0	3	8	11	8	14
Liberal Democrat	2	2	4	3	1	0	0
Independent	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Total Seats	*40*	*40*	*40*	*40*	*40*	*40*	*40*

The division of seats between the parties remained identical in 2001. Although Labour had lost some of their popularity from 1997 (reflected in a vote share decline of more than six points) they lost only one seat – Carmarthenshire East and Dinefwr, captured by future Plaid Cymru leader Adam Price, and avenged this defeat by gaining Ynys Mon from Plaid. Plaid's strong performance in the first devolved election two years earlier found a faint echo with their vote share rising to what remains an all-time high in a general election. The Liberal Democrats and Conservatives both saw their vote share edge up on four years earlier – this was good enough for the former to hold their two seats, but not enough for the Welsh Tories to win back a parliamentary foothold.

By 2005 the post-Iraq war Labour party and Prime Minister Blair had lost much of their public popularity. Yet they were still able to retain the electoral support of more than forty percent of Welsh voters, and to hold onto almost three-quarters of parliamentary seats. Many of those disillusioned Labour supporters who did defect went to the anti-war Liberal Democrats, who were able to use this support to capture two student-heavy seats – Cardiff Central from Labour and Ceredigion from a declining Plaid Cymru. The Conservatives, despite being led by Swansea-born Michael Howard, managed only a tiny advance in electoral support; but, alongside Labour decline, it was enough to put them back on the Welsh map with three gains from Labour. Five years later, many of the trends of 2005 went further: a by-now even more unpopular Labour government, under an even more unpopular Prime Minister, lost further

ground while the Conservatives advanced further. Plaid Cymru held their existing three seats but could do nothing to advance amidst stagnating public support; the Liberal Democrats experienced a mid-campaign surge in support, yet actually ended up losing ground as their accident-prone MP Lembit Opik lost his Montgomery seat to the Conservatives.

Opik's fate was to prove the unexpected harbinger for his party. With their support declining dramatically after they joined the UK coalition with the Conservatives in 2010 they only barely managed to hold onto a single seat, Ceredigion in 2015; in 2017 even that went, and they were wiped off the Welsh electoral map for the first time since the emergence of the Liberals in the mid-1800s. Ceredigion reverted to Plaid Cymru but otherwise Plaid's electoral support has also stagnated. The main story of the last decade in Welsh electoral politics has been the erosion – if not yet the destruction – of Labour dominance by the advancing Conservative tide. Although this was partially reversed in 2017, the 2019 election saw the Conservatives equalling Margaret Thatcher's 1983 post-war high of 14 Welsh Conservative MPs – and on a higher vote share than in any general election since 1900.

The Devolved Party Systems
Scotland: The first elections to the Scottish Parliament, fought using the broadly proportional additional member system (AMS), generated some change from what had been the norm in Westminster elections but also a remarkable degree of continuity. The changes included the electoral system – which made demands of both the parties (in considering the optimal strategy under this new system) as well as the voters. In many cases, voters did not appear to fully understand the implications of the way they voted – such that even if they wished to vote tactically, it was not clear that they would do so effectively (Farrell, 2001: 101). Nevertheless, in both 1999 and 2003, the dominance of Labour at the Westminster level was largely repeated in the devolved electoral context – at least in the constituency part of AMS. Labour was rewarded by leading the government during the first two terms of the Scottish Parliament; however, falling short of a majority, they sought out coalitions with the Liberal Democrats (Lynch, 2001: 175). Similar to what is often observed for autonomist parties around the world, the SNP saw their support rise significantly for an election to an institution dedicated solely to Scottish concerns; this allowed them to become comfortably the second largest party in the Scottish parliament in both the first two elections, although 2003 was a disappointing result with them losing eight seats overall.

The 2003 election was also significant for the increase in 'others': while a single Scottish Green, Scottish Socialist Party and an independent MSP were elected in 1999, in 2003 no fewer than 17 MSPs came from outside the 'big four' parties that had representation at Westminster – including 3 independents (Mitchell, 2004: 21). After 2003 only the Greens have maintained representation in the Scottish Parliament, overtaking the Liberal Democrats for fourth place in 2016. Facilitated by the electoral system, 2003 marked a clear divergence between the Scottish party system in the Scottish Parliament and at Westminster. The latter remained 'frozen' in a lopsided four party model, with Labour dominant and the Conservatives struggling to regain representation. However, the Scottish Parliament saw a significant fragmentation of the party system – a direct result of proportional representation and the fact parties and the public were becoming more attuned to the electoral system and how it worked (Curtice, 2009: 61).

	1999	2003	Change
Labour	56	50	− 6
SNP	35	27	− 8
Conservative	18	18	0
Liberal Democrat	17	17	0
Green	1	7	+ 6
SSP	1	6	+ 5
SSCUP	-	1	+ 1
Independent	1	3	+ 2

Divergence from the Westminster party system became much more substantial with the result of the 2007 election: the SNP (on 47 seats) emerging from an extraordinarily tight election with a single seat lead over Labour (on 46). With the Conservatives on 17, the Liberal Democrats on 16 and the Scottish Greens on just 2, a minimum-winning coalition would require more than one partner for government – which, given the constitutional and political barriers between them, proved impossible to achieve. Thus the SNP governed for the first time as a minority: this meant that it was unable to rely on parliament to support government policy outright, but the lack of a coalition partner also allowed them to retain doctrinal purity. This was an advantage – it allowed the SNP to remain committed to an independence referendum, as well as to abolishing university tuition fees and charges for prescription drugs, without having to dilute their position in deference to a coalition agreement. That advantage became clear in the 2011 election when the SNP turned their minority position into a majority – a result which caught many political commentators by surprise, not least because single-party majority government was, by design, difficult to achieve under AMS. Nevertheless, a gain of 22 seats gave the SNP 69 MSPs – four more than the 65 required for a majority. These gains came largely at the expense of Labour, who lost nine seats, and the Liberal Democrats who lost eleven, with the latter suffering in Scotland as elsewhere for their decision to enter a UK coalition government with the Conservatives in 2010.

Party	2007			2011		
	Constituency Seats	List Seats	Total Seats	Constituency Seats	List Seats	Total Seats
SNP	21	26	47	53	16	69
Labour	37	9	46	15	22	37
Conservative	4	13	17	3	12	15
Lib Dem	11	5	16	2	3	5
Green	0	2	2	-	2	2
Independent	0	1	1	0	1	1

The 2016 Scottish Parliamentary election saw the SNP fall back from the historic performances in 2011 (Scottish Parliament) and 2015 (UK Parliament), losing their position as

a majority but returning 63 seats to maintain a significant plurality of seats.[3] But crucially for the independence agenda, the return of six Green MSPs allowed for a pro-independence majority to persist within the parliament (in addition to providing the SNP a broadly-reliable partner to negotiate on budget proposals). The SNP's position was maintained largely at the expense of the Labour party, who once again lost seats and slipped to being only the third largest party behind the Ruth Davidson-led Scottish Conservatives. The revival of the Scottish Conservatives – campaigning on a staunchly pro-Union, anti-independence message – was perhaps the most significant story of the election and meant that, for the first time, the government and largest opposition parties in the Scottish Parliament broadly represented centre-left and centre-right political positions respectively.

Party	2016		
	Constituency Seats	List Seats	Total Seats
SNP	59	4	63
Labour	3	21	24
Conservative	7	24	31
Lib Dem	4	1	5
Green	0	6	6
Independent	0	0	0

The 2016 Scottish Parliament election took place in the shadow of two key constitutional referendums – in the aftermath of the Scottish Independence referendum of 2014, and the month before the 2016 UK Referendum on leaving the EU. As a result, the broader constitutional and policy context provides much in the way of explanation for voter motivations. Nevertheless, we can identify a number of explanations based upon the institutional and sociological theories outlined in the early part of this paper.

Wales: The most dramatic devolved election thus far was the first one. Having won at Westminster so overwhelmingly just two years previously, and with the Welsh version of AMS being significantly less proportional than that in Scotland, a Labour majority in the first term of the Assembly was all-but-universally expected (Trystan et al, 2003). However, after the resignation of Welsh Labour leader Ron Davies in late 1998, and a bruising internal leadership battle between Rhodri Morgan and Alun Michael, Labour in Wales were led into the election by an uninspiring figure who was widely viewed as having been imposed from London. Plaid Cymru were able to gain by far the best ever election result – both through having more obvious relevance in an election to a Welsh representative institution than they ever had in a Westminster context, and by being able to appeal to many disgruntled Labour supporters as an alternative left-of-centre and more distinctively Welsh party. With the Conservatives still beyond the pale for many Welsh voters, Plaid were able to leap from fourth at the general election of 1997 into a far stronger second place than anyone had expected – in the process

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[3] As Table X records, the SNP actually made a net gain of six constituency seats on their remarkable 2011 performance. However, a weaker performance on the regional list vote than in 2011 cost the party dearly as their total of list seats fell by twelve.

capturing long-standing Labour bastions in Llanelli, Rhondda and Islwyn, and denying Labour their expected majority.[4]

	1999	2003	Change
Labour	28	30	+2
Plaid Cymru	17	12	-5
Conservative	9	11	+2
Liberal Democrat	6	6	-
Others	0	1	+1

Four years later, Labour had learned many painful lessons. With Rhodri Morgan now installed as leader and First Minister, they had a voter-friendly figure at the helm; whereas leadership had been a weak point for Labour in 1999, now the contrast between Morgan and the uninspiring figure of Ieuan Wyn Jones of Plaid Cymru had the opposite impact. The party that Morgan led was also now aggressively branded as Welsh Labour, encroaching deeply into what had been Plaid's distinctive appeal in 1999. Morgan had also taken care to craft a distinctive policy appeal for Welsh Labour, based around 'clear red water' between the more modernist approach of the New Labour London government of Tony Blair and a more 'Classic Labour' stance in Wales where prescription charges and school league tables were abolished and English policy initiatives such as foundation hospitals and academy schools were resisted. In the election, the shock 1999 constituency losses to Plaid Cymru were all avenged, and Labour were able to win fully half the Assembly seats; with the roles of Presiding Officer and Deputy Presiding Officer both being claimed by opposition members this gave Labour an effective majority within the devolved chamber.[5] While the Conservatives made some modest advances in vote and seat numbers on 1999, Plaid Cymru saw their vote share fall by nearly a third on 1999, and they lost five seats overall.

By 2007, Labour in Wales – as elsewhere in the UK – was being dragged down by the post-Iraq war unpopularity of the Tony Blair-led government that was in its final weeks. Yet while Labour's vote share fell substantially on 2003 (to below one-third of the vote on both ballots), there was no single clear and strong challenger to Labour dominance in Wales – unlike in Scotland, where the SNP had grown in strength. So while Labour declined, both Plaid Cymru and the Conservatives saw only modest increases in their vote share, and in their seat numbers; the Liberal Democrats stagnated; and there was a notable rise in votes (although not seats) for a variety of 'others'. It was after this election that Wales came the closest it has thus far to experiencing a non-Labour devolved government. Helped by moderate and emollient leadership of both Plaid Cymru and the Welsh Conservatives, agreement was very nearly reached on a 'rainbow' coalition involving Plaid, the Tories and the Liberal Democrats. Ultimately, however, the promise of Labour support to win a referendum on primary law-making powers for the Assembly helped push Plaid into becoming the junior partner of Labour in what was named the One Wales coalition.

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[4] Averaged across the two ballots, Plaid's 1999 vote share in Wales was actually higher than that won in Scotland by the SNP. This is the only time that Plaid Cymru have outperformed the SNP in devolved elections.
[5] Labour's majority in the Senedd was lost in advance of the 2005 UK general election, when Blaenau Gwent AM Peter Law defected from the party in protest at Labour's imposition of an all-women shortlist for the choice of Westminster candidate in his constituency.

Party	2007			2011		
	Constituency Seats	List Seats	Total Seats	Constituency Seats	List Seats	Total Seats
Labour	24	2	26	28	2	30
Plaid Cymru	7	8	15	5	6	11
Conservative	5	7	12	6	8	14
Lib Dem	3	3	6	1	4	5
Others	1	0	1	0	0	0

Four years later, the political context had been changed dramatically by the 'five days in May' that saw the Liberal Democrats enter government at the UK level as coalition partners to the Conservatives. No longer tarnished by association with an unpopular UK government, and reclaiming much centre-left support from the Lib-Dems, Labour's poll ratings in Wales dramatically improved almost immediately after the change in UK government. While the Conservative's support remained strong, that for their coalition partners began to ebb. And while Plaid Cymru had proven solid contributors both in government and in the successful March 2011 referendum campaign for enhanced legislative powers for the Senedd, Plaid's 2011 election campaign was dismally lacklustre. Led by Rhodri Morgan's popular successor, Carwyn Jones, Labour achieved their best ever devolved election vote share and once again won fully half the seats in the Senedd. The Conservatives continued their slow advance by, for the first time, relegating Plaid to the status of the third party; the Liberal Democrats, held onto a couple of their regional list seats by achingly small margins and thus limited their overall losses to one seat.

Party	2016		
	Constituency Seats	List Seats	Total Seats
Labour	27	2	29
Plaid Cymru	6	6	12
Conservative	6	5	11
UKIP	0	7	7
Lib-Dems	1	0	1

By 2016 the Lib-Dems decline had continued to the point where they lost all their remaining regional list seats; although party leader Kirsty Williams held her own Brecon and Radnor bastion comfortably, her party disappeared as an official Senedd party.[6] Labour were much less popular than five years previously, with new UK party leader Jeremy Corbyn already underwhelming many Welsh voters. Yet the Conservatives too had their troubles; their Welsh leadership remained anonymous to most Welsh voters; the party was deeply split on the forthcoming Brexit referendum; while the UK government spent much of spring 2016 associating the Conservative brand with negative headlines (including an unpopular budget, a junior doctors strike in England and the 'Panama Papers' leaks). In this context, two parties

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[6] Senedd rules require a party to have a minimum of three members to be recognised as an official party group.

benefitted. Plaid Cymru made a modest recovery on their dismal 2011 showing – narrowly reclaiming their standing as second party in the Senedd, and with party leader Leanne Wood winning a famous constituency victory in Rhondda. The greatest beneficiaries, though, were UKIP – building on their strong Welsh showings in the 2014 European and 2015 general elections, they won seven regional list seats and displaced the Lib-Dems as the fourth party in the Senedd.

Analysis: similarities and differences
Scotland: Kellas' (1989) argument that while the Scottish system was both largely similar to the wider British party system and largely stable, he also identified that there were some differences in the period from 1974 onwards that could begin to be exaggerated. This was certainly true of the Westminster party system through the early years of devolution – Scotland had already moved away from the Duverger-defined two-party system of UK mid-twentieth century politics toward Blondel's categorisation, not only of Scotland as a two-and-a-half party system but also with Labour as a dominant party. This remained true of Scotland's Westminster party system until the 2015 General Election, where the SNP replaced Labour as the dominant party – and since then, the system appears to have stabilised into what it looked like pre-devolution, with the SNP continuing to dominate. The devolved party system, despite a semi-proportional electoral system, took some time to adapt. The first election (in 1999) maintained a similar outlook to the Westminster system, though Bennie and Clark (2003: 150-1) argue that the first election to the new Scottish Parliament delivered – in Sartorian terms – 'moderate pluralism'. That is, parties competing in a largely centripetal manner, with limited (socio-economic) ideological distance between them, usually with some form of coalition government that requires some form of cooperation between parties. This system remained through the 2003 parliamentary term, even with the election of a more fragmented opposition. The emergence of the SNP in government – in minority in 2007 and 2016, and in majority in 2011 – changed this dynamic, for while the socio-economic distance between the parties largely remained static the *constitutional* distance between the parties became more of a significant factor: indeed, by 2011 it was the defining factor in Scottish electoral politics. This was exacerbated by the independence referendum in 2014 (and, to a lesser extent, the 2016 EU referendum). Thus, although the institutional setting has changed – and, indeed being a distinctively Scottish institution, benefits the SNP – according to Blondel and Sartori, the party system at both Holyrood and Westminster has remained largely the same, with the SNP supplanting Labour as the dominant party at both levels, and the number of parties remaining the same, with only the 'relevance' of the Scottish Greens marking a significant difference between the two levels.

On a sociological basis, Mitchell (1992) applied Lipset and Rokkan's cleavages theory to the Scottish party system pre-devolution, arguing that the classic cleavages overlapped and interacted with each other and hadn't led to either a completely diverse UK or a homogenous one but rather elements of both. Mitchell looked too at how the parties in Scotland had positioned and repositioned themselves along these classic cleavages, which helped to explain – then, as now – how parties adapted to the changing salience of these issues (1992: 612). Lipset and Rokkan's seminal work is now over 50 years old, and the cleavages they identify, though retaining some relevance, are also being challenged by the rise of new cleavages – identified by Hooghe and Marks (2018) among others. Of particular relevance in

the UK are those referencing a 'transnational cleavage', though this was less prevalent in the Scottish case, with the prominence of the independence question aligning more closely with Lipset and Rokkan's traditional centre-periphery cleavage. Undoubtedly, we can frame the rise of the SNP in this context – and, indeed, the institutional setting aided their advance, providing both electoral and strategic advantages. However, while at times we have seen a recalibration of the dominant forces in Scottish politics, there have not been fundamental changes to the party system. Labour have been supplanted by the SNP as the dominant party in the system at both Holyrood and Westminster levels, but there remains a dominant party in a multi-party system. On that basis, while the actors have changed, the stage really has not – and that is a curious outcome.

Wales: Wales evinces much more obvious continuity in the party system than Scotland. Labour were the dominant party in Wales before devolution, and they remain so. They have come a clear first in all devolved elections hitherto, and they have continued to be the dominant force in UK general elections – they have now won the most votes and seats in Wales at the last 27 Westminster elections. Beneath this obvious continuity has been some more subtle change. Most obviously, the Conservatives continue to under-perform in Wales relative to England in general elections; but the extent of that under-performance has reduced in scale (Awan-Scully 2019).

Plaid Cymru have continued to do better electorally at the devolved level than the UK one, unlike SNP – while their overall performance is now at a much lower level than that of their Scottish sister party. Plaid have not been able to challenge Labour successfully on the basis of valence as a better party of government, as did the SNP in 2007 and 2011 (Johns et. al., 2013); nor has Wales experienced a transformative event like 2014 referendum to change the relevance of supporting Plaid Cymru in the Westminster context. Independence has risen somewhat in popularity since 2016, and has assumed a somewhat greater place on the political agenda, but the Welsh debate on this remains in a very different place to that of Scotland.

There has been only one substantial change in the Senedd party system during the entire life of devolution: the decline of the Liberal Democrats and their replacement as the fourth Senedd party in 2016 by UKIP. This was part of a flowering of Welsh Euro-scepticism during the second decade of the century that closely followed simultaneous patterns in England, but which was much more muted in Scotland. But there has been no change in the party leading devolved government in Wales. Labour have not been seriously challenged thus far as the leading Senedd party, not has an alternative coalition formed. Such an alternative came close in 2007. But the Welsh Conservatives period as a potential coalition partner for other parties was very brief; they have subsequently (and largely because of the actions of Conservative-led governments at Westminster more than those of the party in the Senedd itself) moved back to being beyond the pale for parties on the centre-left. This means that the centre-right finds itself permanently in opposition until or unless they can win sufficient electoral support to craft an alternative majority; any bridge to the centre-left now appears blocked. Among parties of the centre-left the 'One Wales' coalition between Labour and Plaid was important in signalling the priority of socio-economic ideology over the constitutional dimension. This was not without controversy within Welsh Labour in 2007 (Wyn Jones and Scully, 2012). But whereas Scottish Labour have, in the last decade, appeared to prioritise fighting

independence and been clearly in the 'unionist' political camp, Welsh Labour has continued to be able to straddle the unionist and nationalist divides in Wales – although were an independence referendum ever to come to Wales, then the 'unionist devolutionism' through which Labour have been able to maintain a broad appeal would struggle to remain a sustainable position.

The party system in Wales has more obviously continued to be influenced by UK-level politics than has been the case on Scotland. This is not to say that Scotland is immune to UK-level influences – most obviously, in recent years, Brexit. But we see greater impact in Wales both at the level of individual voters (where attitudes to UK party leaders and to the performance of the UK government shape devolved voting decisions more in Wales than in Scotland (Scully, 2013); and also at level of party support, where the Welsh poll ratings of the main UK parties' rises and fall very much in line with UK polling dynamics. Welsh Labour has certainly benefited during much of the devolved era from effective Welsh leadership under Morgan and Jones; Plaid Cymru were hurt by the more than decade of lacklustre leadership of Ieuan Wyn Jones. But these are influences at the margins, within a political context that Westminster politics has largely defined.

Compared to 1999 – Wales in 2021 sees mainly the same parties fighting in a similar political arena. Their respective fortunes have ebbed and flowed, but they are still the same actors in largely the same political space.

Conclusion
This paper has explored the differences in party systems in Scotland and Wales during the devolution period. The evidence presented shows that, despite the establishment of devolved institutions in Scotland and Wales at the same time, created with similar electoral systems, and existing within the same state, the party systems have diverged significantly. There are a number of potential explanatory factors for this. First, on an institutional level, the powers of the Scottish Parliament and the Senedd Cymru were initially very different, and further powers devolved have also been uneven in their distribution and speed. As a result, while at a base level, the initiation of a devolved layer of government created a similar space for political activity in Scotland and Wales, the actual operation of these institutions was thus very different. This created different dynamics within the institutions, and different opportunity structures for the respective parties in each nation. While the electoral system is the same for both institutions, the level of proportionality in Scotland (43% of the seats are elected by the list system) is higher than in Wales (where only 33% of seats are regional). This has the potential to alter electoral strategies for parties – and, indeed, Labour in both Scotland (voluntarily) and Wales (as mandated by electoral law, subsequently changed) initiated rules that stopped candidates standing in both constituency and list contests. At the same time, the pre-existing first-past-the-post contests for UK Parliamentary seats remained the same – albeit with a reduction in constituencies in Scotland from 2005 onwards. What this meant was that, while the same actors were involved in the contests, the dynamics at the devolved level and the central government level were different. However, for the first two electoral cycles at the devolved level, the outcomes remained largely in line with the outcomes at Westminster level. In the Scottish Parliament, the dynamics at both levels

changed when the SNP won a minority government in 2007 while in Wales, largely the actors and their fortunes did not dramatically change.

To understand the reasons behind this, we turn to sociological considerations alongside the institutional differences. The classic Lipset and Rokkan centre-periphery cleavage played a significant role in Scotland from the 1970s onwards, and with the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, allowed a setting within which the SNP could promote their vision of a solution to questions raised by it. The institution provided opportunity to push for and get an agreement for an independence referendum in 2014, while at UK level a further constitutional referendum on the issue of EU membership (dealing with the Hooghe and Marks cleavage around globalisation and Europeanisation) followed in 2016. The independence referendum had a significant impact on the party system in Scotland, effectively dividing Scotland into two polarized camps on the question, with the SNP benefitting significantly from this in subsequent elections at all levels. The EU referendum had more of a limited impact in Scotland – the issue of Brexit was still largely considered through the independence-unionism prism – but in Wales, the emergence of UKIP in the Senedd in 2016 was the precursor to Welsh support for Brexit in the referendum held a month later. As we identify above, the Scottish party system has changed significantly from its pre-devolution days, both at Scottish Parliamentary and Westminster level, and much of this appears to have been clearly driven by the constitutional debate, and the outcome of the 2014 referendum. By contrast, the Welsh party system has seen much more limited change and appears to be influenced much more by Westminster politics. Nevertheless, in Blondel's terminology, both would be described as 'multi-party systems with a dominant party', and in Sartorian terms, both exhibit characteristics of 'moderate multi-partism', that is, the continuing representation of 3-5 parties, with limited ideological distance between them. Where the divergence has occurred is in the dominant actors – the SNP in Scotland, Labour in Wales – to which we would argue that the Lipset and Rokkan centre-periphery cleavage has impacted in Scotland much more apparently than in Wales.

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