

## **Parties, Mandates and Multilevel Politics: Sub-National Variation in British General Election Manifestos**

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*Abstract*

The three main state-wide British parties – Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats – all produce different versions of their manifestos in British general elections. Many policies debated in a British general election no longer apply at the sub-national level, where separate devolved institutions control large areas of policy. This article therefore assesses the roles of national party manifestos at the sub-national level in British general elections. It develops an original theory linking Strom's alternative party goals to Ray's typology of mandate/contract manifestos, advertisement manifestos and identity manifestos. It then explores a comparative overview of British parties' general election manifestos at the sub-national level, before focusing in detail on Labour's 2010 and 2015 general election manifestos, which reflect the party's strategic difficulties caused by devolution. The expected variation is found between the national and sub-national manifestos. In some instances, multiple goals are pursued simultaneously and this is reflected in manifestos which assume elements of more than one manifesto ideal type. This supports the additional conclusion that manifestos can perform multiple functions in complex multi-level systems of government.

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British politics has experienced considerable constitutional change in recent decades, most obviously the devolution of power to new institutions in Scotland and Wales. Many policies debated in a British general election no longer apply at the sub-national level. Instead, they involve policy areas devolved to the Scottish and Welsh institutions. Thus, the three main state-wide parties in Britain – Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats – produce different versions of their general election manifestos in Scotland and Wales.<sup>2</sup> The differences between these manifestos reflect deliberate choices by parties (Finlayson, 2005). However, there has been no systematic comparison of these statements of policy with the national documents, nor any attempt to assess the broader purpose of general election manifestos in complex multi-level systems of government. This is important because an increasing number of advanced democracies are devolving powers to sub-national institutions. In these circumstances, the role of state-wide election manifestos appears uncertain, particularly in unitary states which adopt asymmetric forms of devolution. In Britain, powers devolved to the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly varied considerably, exemplifying this constitutional asymmetry.<sup>3</sup> This institutionalised the need for intra-party variation in manifestos at the UK, Scottish and Welsh levels. That different territorial versions of manifestos are published in Britain is a good example of how both multi-level and temporal calculations impact upon party strategy and the role and purpose of party manifestos.

This article has two objectives. The first is to identify the different goals associated with manifestos in state-wide elections, and develop ideal types of manifesto that result from varying party objectives. Secondly, the article explores manifesto content in British general elections in order to assess how state-wide parties adapt to devolution in elections to the UK

parliament. This provides an initial test of the ideal-type manifesto models. Importantly, the state-wide context means that the focus is *variation within parties*, not *between parties*, making this a different form of analysis from the long-running Comparative Manifestos Project.<sup>4</sup>

The paper begins with a theoretical discussion of the roles and functions of party manifestos, linking these to broader questions about party objectives and strategies. The second section outlines the approach deployed in analysing party manifestos. The third part provides an overview of intra-party variation and assesses the extent to which debates about the role of manifestos are related to their content in the different regions. The fourth section focuses specifically on the Labour party. By the 2015 general election, the party's strategic difficulties resulting from devolution were acute. It was in opposition in Britain and Scotland, and in office in Wales. Each electoral context had distinct challenges.<sup>5</sup> The analysis of Labour explores the extent to which the sub-national platforms vary from the national and suggests that different roles are performed by the party's general election manifestos in Scotland and Wales.

### **Party Goals and the Role of Manifestos**

Although party manifestos are widely reported during elections, much commentary tends to be critical. Not everything that a party stands for is necessarily in the manifesto, while manifestos themselves are not always reliable guides to the policies parties pursue in office. Indeed, many analyses of party manifestos highlight their flaws as much as what can be gleaned from them (Libbrecht et al., 2009). Nonetheless, that manifestos must be produced, debated and voted upon in representative democracies impacts upon how parties, commentators and, to a degree, voters behave. Manifestos are therefore important political documents. As Budge et al. (1987: 18) argue, a manifesto is a 'recognisable statement of policy, which has the backing of the leadership as the authoritative definition of party policy for that election'.

Past analyses of party manifestos have focused on tracking policy positions, relating them to saliency and spatial theories of competition (Budge et al., 2001; Fabre and Martinez-Herrera, 2009; Libbrecht et al., 2009; Mazzoleni, 2009; Pappi and Seher, 2009). Others have concentrated on validating the reliability of measures and methods of coding manifesto content (Alonso et al., 2013; Budge et al., 2001; Laver and Garry, 2000; Laver et al., 2003; Pappi and Seher, 2009; Ray, 2007). Less often, manifesto data have been utilised to measure party change in the light of electoral defeat (Harmel and Svåsand, 1997; Janda et al., 1995). These analyses all provide valuable insights. However, two important issues have failed to get the attention they deserve: the variety of roles manifestos perform for parties; and the goals, incentives and trade-offs that parties may have when designing manifestos. The theoretical integration of both is important for understanding the broader role of manifestos in party politics.

Kavanagh (1981) suggests six overlapping roles that manifestos perform for parties, voters and the political system more widely. First, the manifesto is the basis of mandate theories of government. Simply, the manifesto contains election pledges which parties promise to implement if elected to government. This confers legitimacy on policy carried out in office. Such a view has considerable weight, particularly, but not exclusively, in a system like the UK (Bara, 2005; Hofferbert and Budge, 1992: 152; Thomson, 2001). The idea is close to that of manifestos acting as contracts between voters and parties (Ray, 2007; Rose, 1984: Ch. 4). Some parties explicitly emphasise this; examples of ‘contract’ manifestos can be found in countries as diverse as Italy and Ireland (Däubler, 2012; Palmieri et al., 2012). In general, parties do try to implement their manifestos even if they cannot account for every policy outcome (Hofferbert and Budge, 1992; Rose, 1984).

Secondly, manifestos have symbolic significance, and can be used to highlight parties’ philosophy, identity and values. According to Ray (2007: 17) an identity manifesto is likely to be closest to a party’s ideal policy profile. Such a manifesto may be proposed by a party

unlikely to contribute to a post-election government. Thirdly, manifestos can be an expression of intra-party democracy, since in some parties they are contributed to by members and activists who can hold party leaders to account for their actions in office.

Fourth, manifestos contribute to responsible party government (APSA, 1950). Voters can punish a party in subsequent elections if it has not lived up to policy pledges outlined in a manifesto. Such accountability, while not perfect, has traditionally been held to be a central idea of British politics. Fifth, manifestos can be used as a ‘battering ram of change’ against the perceived inertia of government bureaucracy. Sixth, manifestos can act as draft legislative programmes for government, followed through with even when circumstances might suggest that not to be prudent.

Ray (2007: 17) additionally suggests that manifestos may be used as advertisements for parties. An advertisement manifesto may exaggerate policy differences and consist of vague promises. Importantly, these differ from identity manifestos which seek to set out the party’s ideal programme. The idea of an advertisement is that, at some point, the voter will be convinced enough to buy the product in question. Manifestos as advertisements, therefore, may be aimed not directly at the election to hand, but at building support for some future election.

The functions performed by manifestos are not mutually exclusive. A clear sense of the influences on party behaviour is required to understand the types of roles performed by manifestos. The dynamic nature of parties’ changing incentive structures is captured by models which emphasise various party objectives. Vote-seeking parties aim to maximise their vote in any given election; policy-seeking parties emphasise the articulation of policy over winning votes or taking office; and office-seeking parties aim to maximise their control over political office (Strom, 1990; Wolinetz, 2002). Party objectives reflect a combination of the three sets of goals, with parties making trade-offs between them. Strom (1990: 573) highlights the fact that vote-seeking is inherent in each; without votes parties will find it difficult to seek office or

maximise policy gains. However, as Wolinetz (2002: 151) suggests, it may be sufficient for a policy-seeking party to articulate its policy vision without wanting to be damaged by the compromises of office. Such a schema can cover the goals of a diverse range of parties.

Organisational and institutional conditions shape incentive structures and party strategies (Strom, 1990; Wolinetz, 2002). Organisational factors include the level of intra-party democracy, leadership accountability, and policy infrastructure. Electoral factors include the competitiveness of the election, electoral system distortion, number of relevant parties, and the type of campaign run by parties. Institutional factors include the nature of executive power, incumbency and the potential differential policy pay offs between taking office and remaining outside government.<sup>6</sup>

Other factors can be added to these incentive structures, not least the increasing emphasis on regionalisation and decentralisation in a number of countries. Decentralisation of power has been evident in, for instance, Italy, France, and Germany (Allen and Mirwaldt, 2010; Mazzoleni 2009). In Britain, an increasing emphasis on devolution from the late-1960s culminated in powers being granted to the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly in 1999. In most states, parties now operate in complex multi-level environments where institutions have different powers and state-wide parties grant their regional organisations varying degrees of policy autonomy. The interaction of the powers of the national and regional institutions and the level of intra-party regional autonomy must therefore also be taken into account.

How parties view institutions will impact upon their goals. A party with little chance of being part of a state-wide government may prioritise the regional institution over the national parliament, whereas a party dependent on its regional level for its representation nationwide may prioritise the national parliament.<sup>7</sup> This multi-level environment means that the temporal spacing of elections to regional institutions is increasingly important. As Strom (1990: 573) suggests, ‘the conflict between present office (and policy) seeking and future vote seeking boils

down to a trade-off between short-term and longer-term benefits'. The trade-off between two or more institutions is now relevant. If a party's goal is office or policy in a regional institution, it is possible the party will emphasise policy articulation in state-wide elections at the expense of immediate vote-seeking in order to position itself for the regional election.

Manifestos therefore perform various roles which vary according to the party, its electoral standing, policy character and internal organisation. The picture is complicated by devolution, which produces varying patterns of electoral competition and potentially a situation where manifestos perform different roles at the state and regional levels. Theoretically, three ideal types of party goals and manifesto types are implicit in the extant literature. This tripartite classification of manifesto roles informs the analysis below:

- (i) *Contract/mandate manifestos* are oriented towards office seeking, containing many specific pledges for the immediate election, with much less thought given to future positioning. Contract manifestos are associated with parties most likely to form an administration immediately after an election.
- (ii) *Advertisement manifestos* aim ultimately to promote the party, and such a manifesto is associated with vote-seeking parties. This may be vote-seeking for an immediate election, or it may be an effort to build up credibility and support for a future election.
- (iii) *Identity/principle manifestos* are associated with policy-seeking parties, where it may be enough to articulate ideal policies or ideological values. Identity/principle manifestos are also likely to have a considerable degree of future orientation, looking towards the ideal situation where compromise is unnecessary.

## **Data and Approach**



Manifesto analysts have adopted inventive methods to examine them. This has predominantly involved quantitative forms of content analysis, counting mentions of words, phrases (so-called quasi-sentences), sub-headings and the amount of space given to various topics. Difficulties have been discussed at length elsewhere (Budge et al., 2001; Laver and Garry, 2000; Laver et al., 2003; Ray, 2007). While this quantitative content analysis has yielded many valuable insights, it can only tell us about how frequently topics are mentioned, the amount of space allocated to them and so on. It cannot tell us about the meanings associated with these words, nor the way in which topics are presented to create a particular impression of a party, its goals and the role of the manifesto in that election. To do so, a more qualitative approach is required. Allen and Mirwaldt's (2010) analysis of British, German and French manifestos was based on a qualitative reading of manifestos to identify general underlying themes. As they explain:

By actually reading the manifestos ... we were able to analyse mentions of democracy *in their full context and to explore more fully* changes in the way political parties have talked about it (Allen and Mirwaldt, 2010: 875, emphasis added).

We build on both these approaches. A qualitative reading of manifestos is complemented with some quantitative analyses in order to provide a sense of the role and differences in each manifesto. The manifestos used in this study are from recent post-devolution British general elections (See appendix). More than a decade and a half from devolution, parties should have learned to adapt their general election manifestos to devolved circumstances. We expect increasing variation between state-wide documents and those produced by the parties in the regions, suggesting different strategic roles of the manifestos.

Discussion begins with a broad overview of party expenditure on manifestos. An analysis of key structural characteristics of manifestos, including length and number of

chapters, follows, before focusing on 2010 and 2015 and the different British, Scottish and Welsh versions of the state-wide parties' manifestos.<sup>8</sup> The period since the advent of devolution has seen increasing distinctiveness in regional British politics, especially in Scotland. A referendum on Scottish independence in 2014 and the rise of the SNP over a decade, culminating in unprecedented success in the 2015 general election, has presented a challenge to the state-wide parties to respond to the identity politics of the regions. We therefore examine the national identity discourse of general election manifestos and the extent to which state-wide parties address the constitutional challenges of post-devolution politics.

Another indicator of how national parties are adapting and utilising manifestos for different roles is the way in which they frame party competition in elections. We examine how the parties present and deal with their competitors, which can be very different at national and sub-state level. The Labour party is a very good example of a state-wide party facing increasing competition from regional parties, but with a different principal opponent at the state-wide level. Consequently, we complete our analysis with a focus on the strategic dilemmas of Labour and how the party's general election manifestos suggest a reluctance or inability to adapt to the new politics of devolution. In doing so, we provide an understanding of the purpose of party manifestos and their territorial variations in post-devolution British general elections.

### **Intra-Party Variation across Britain: A Comparative Overview**

An initial indicator of what parties are trying to achieve with their manifestos is the amount of resources devoted to producing them (Brunsbach et al., 2012; Dolezal et al., 2012). Table 1 reports manifesto expenditure in the 2001, 2005 and 2010 elections.<sup>9</sup> There are clear variations both within and between parties. It should be expected that parties would spend more in

England than in Scotland and Wales, beyond simply the geographical size of the regions. Work on party organisation in federal or multi-level systems generally acknowledges the relative powers of the different institutional levels in guiding expectations (Brunsbach et al., 2012; Bratberg, 2009; Fabre, 2008). There are two ways of looking at this. Parties might spend more on their Welsh manifesto than their Scottish variant since fewer powers were devolved to Wales than Scotland. Westminster has therefore remained more relevant to Welsh politics than in Scotland. An alternative expectation may be that Labour spends more in Scotland because, until 2015, the party held a greater number of Westminster seats there.

(Table 1 about here)

Labour and the Conservatives in 2005 and 2010 and the Liberal Democrats in 2010 all spent more in Wales than in Scotland. For the Conservatives this is perhaps a reflection of being more competitive in Wales than in Scotland. The reasons are less clear for Labour and the Liberal Democrats except in terms of the powers of the respective institutions, with Wales having fewer powers than Scotland and therefore more reliant on Westminster to legislate. An alternative explanation may be that parties spend more in Wales because of the need to have manifesto content translated into Welsh.<sup>10</sup>

Between 2001-10, parties generally spent decreasing amounts on developing and producing their manifestos. The exceptions to this are the Liberal Democrats in 2005, the Conservatives in England and Wales in 2010, and Labour in England also in 2010. The Conservatives outspent Labour in 2001 in all three countries, while in 2005 the Liberal Democrats outspent the Conservatives in England and Scotland. The Nationalist parties spent sharply decreasing amounts on general election manifestos over this time period, with Plaid Cymru (PC) declaring only £430 in 2005 and the SNP £1,458 in 2010. Such paltry sums would

suggest a declining relevance of UK general elections for the Nationalists in the post-devolution period, but it also reflects the move to online distribution of manifestos.<sup>11</sup>

Manifesto content and style varies on a number of dimensions (Merz and Regel, 2011). First, manifestos vary in the format they are published, taking the form of a leaflet or pamphlet, a magazine or brochure, or even book form. Secondly, the manifesto layout can also be significant. Aspects for analysis include the use of chapters to separate topics, pictures or photographs, use of headlines, party branding and presentation of the text. These can all be designed to convey a particular image. Finally, manifesto length, which has been rising consistently in a number of countries, has been identified as a proxy for the importance of the manifesto to parties (Bara, 2005; Brunsbach et al., 2012; Däubler, 2012; Dolezal et al., 2012). This can be quantified relatively easily in terms of page and word length.<sup>12</sup>

(Table 2 about here)

Table 2 sets out the general characteristics of parties' manifestos in the 2010 and 2015 general elections. Merz and Regel (2011: 14-15) suggest that manifestos which have fewer than 35 pages can be classified as short documents, those with 35-85 pages as medium length, and those with more than 86 pages as long. Variation is evident, highlighting differential content both within and between party organisations. In 2010, of the three state-wide parties, the Conservative party's three manifestos each have more than one hundred pages, classifying them as long manifestos. The only other manifesto of similar length is the British Liberal Democrat manifesto. Three manifestos can be categorised as medium length. Labour's British and Scottish manifestos have similar page lengths, while the Liberal Democrats Scottish manifesto is around 28 pages shorter than its British counterpart. With all three state-wide parties, the Welsh manifesto is shorter than its British and Scottish equivalents. The nationalist

parties had the shortest documents, with PC's manifesto at 18 pages, being only 14 per cent of the longest Conservative manifesto in 2010.

In terms of words used, the pattern is relatively unambiguous in 2010. Across all three parties the British manifesto is longer than its Scottish or Welsh counterpart. Wales appears distinctive, however, particularly so with Labour, its Welsh manifesto being less than half the size of the party's Scottish or British documents. By contrast, the Liberal Democrats' Welsh 2010 manifesto is longer than the party's Scottish equivalent, which in turn is around a quarter shorter than the British version. With the two Nationalist parties, their general election manifestos were considerably shorter than their main Labour Party competitors in 2010 by more than half in both cases. According to Brunsbach et al (2012: 95), variation in length of a half or more is 'a clear and strong sign of less resource assignment, meaning [a] strong second order characteristic'. These variations in length are suggestive of the declining relevance of British general elections to nationalist parties in 2010, and arguably also to the Labour Party in Wales.

In 2015, the number of pages in all three Labour manifestos increased making them long manifestos, but the Scottish document is longer than the British and Welsh manifestos. Liberal Democrat manifestos can also be classified as long, with Scottish and particularly Welsh versions growing significantly in pages, by close to three times in the case of the Welsh version. All three Conservative manifestos have shortened, to being medium length documents. Finally, the two nationalist parties produced much longer documents in 2015, with Plaid Cymru in particular producing a manifesto more than three times the length of its previous general election document.

In 2015 word length remains longest with the British manifesto for both the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats. However, Labour's Welsh manifesto is longer than the British document by around 2,500 words. It is also around a third longer than Labour's Welsh

equivalent in 2010. Liberal Democrat manifestos all have significantly more words than in 2010. Similarly, the SNP and PC coverage also increased, with documents well over double the word length of their 2010 manifestos.

Interestingly, while Labour's British and Scottish manifestos have more pages in 2015, they contain significantly fewer words, being more than 10,000 words shorter than 2010. The Conservative and Liberal Democrat British documents both have fewer pages, yet have grown in word length, by around 14,000 in the Liberal Democrat case. Liberal Democrat manifestos in Scotland and Wales also grew sizeably, by more than 13,000 words in the Welsh case.

Chapter structure suggests differing priorities for the parties in each region. Labour's chapter coverage declined between 2010-15, while that of the Conservatives expanded and that of the Liberal Democrats remained roughly the same in Scotland and Britain, but with additional coverage in Wales in 2015. Chapter coverage expanded considerably in both nationalist manifestos, with PC offering 13 chapters in 2015 by comparison with only five in 2010.

The use of photographs varies quite considerably by party and year. In 2010, the Welsh Labour manifesto stands out, with the presentation of 14 Welsh-themed images; the Scottish and British Labour manifestos contained no photographs. Across all parties, there is an increase in the use of photographs between 2010-15. The largest increase is with PC, up from seven in 2010 to 110 in 2015. By 2015, state-wide parties increasingly use images of high profile regional figures. Normally this is the regional leader, sometimes alongside the British leader. Occasionally it is another regional figure such as the regional Secretary of State, as in the 2015 Welsh Conservative and Labour manifestos. National and regional leaders are occasionally given equality in their profile. Liberal Democrat manifestos in Scotland and Wales in 2015 had a joint introduction by British leader Nick Clegg and the party's regional leader. Similarly, the introduction of the Conservative manifesto in 2015 saw shared images of the party's regional

leaders with David Cameron. In both Scottish and Welsh Conservative manifestos in 2015 and the Labour Welsh manifesto, the regional figures are placed after the national leader. Only in the Scottish Labour manifesto is the regional leader placed before the national leader, Ed Miliband, possibly reflecting the increased challenge the party faced from the SNP.

(Table 3 about here)

Table 3 examines references to different types of national identity and territorial allegiance. Regional manifestos emphasise identity more strongly. This is especially marked in Wales, where, with the sole exception of the Conservatives in 2010, discussion of Wales or Welsh issues appears more frequently than equivalent discussion in the Scottish manifestos. The state-wide parties infrequently refer to ‘the union’, but the Conservatives, across all their manifestos, appear most likely of the three parties to talk of Britain or British, while there is a sharp rise in the discussion of the UK or United Kingdom in all three Liberal Democrat manifestos in 2015. References to England or English issues have increased in Conservative and Liberal Democrat documents, presumably as an attempt to address constitutional imbalances brought about in England by devolution.<sup>13</sup> By comparison, the Labour Party is the least likely to mention England or English issues. Overall, in the aftermath of the Scottish independence referendum, increased discussion of territorial allegiances and constitutional debate is apparent in 2015.

In 2010, the Welsh Labour manifesto was less ‘British’ in its discourse than the Scottish Labour document. By 2015, the Scottish version of the Labour manifesto is the least likely of the two to refer to Britain or the UK. Note, however, that the Welsh Labour manifestos of both 2010 and 2015 are markedly more likely to project a regional identity through references to

‘Wales’ or ‘Welsh’ than the equivalent Scottish documents (through use of ‘Scotland’ or ‘Scottish’). To an extent this is explained by frequent references to the Welsh language, but it results in a more distinctive, regional feel to the Welsh document, especially in 2010.

If parties are using their programmes as mandate or contract manifestos, it should be expected that there will be a focus on the immediate election and their main opponents in that election, rather than potential opponents in a forthcoming regional contest. Table 4 assesses parties’ treatment of their competitors in 2010 and 2015. In 2010, regional opponents were largely ignored. Instead, the state-wide parties focused on their rivals for power at Westminster. Labour manifestos focused on the Conservatives (or Tories), particularly in Wales, with their nationalist opponents scarcely mentioned. Similarly, the Conservatives focused on Labour, not the nationalists. Neither Conservatives nor Labour refer to Liberal Democrats at all. The nationalist parties mentioned the Conservatives a handful of times, and Labour somewhat more.

A similar pattern is evident in 2015. Labour and Conservatives concentrate on each other, with both parties’ Welsh manifestos standing out with a focus on their main Westminster competitors. However, it is notable that both parties also pay more attention to the SNP in their Scottish manifestos. This is a reflection of the increased role of the Scottish nationalists after winning a majority in the Scottish parliament in 2011, their higher profile after the 2014 Scottish independence referendum and the expectation that they would perform well in the 2015 election. The SNP mainly competes with Labour in Scotland, but the party’s emphasis in 2015 was to remind voters of its opposition to the Conservatives, consistently referring to them by the less respectful term Tories.

(Table 4 about here)



The framing of party competition in this way suggests a consistent focus on and prioritisation of the general election. It therefore supports the idea that the manifestos are performing a mandate or contract role, with parties concentrating on the immediate consequences of the nationwide election. Distinctiveness in some manifestos does however hint at aspects of both the advertisement and identity manifestos, evident in different manifesto formats, length and use of national identity to present the party to voters. These issues are discussed in more depth through examination of Labour in 2010 and 2015.

### **Labour: Strategic Dilemmas and Multilevel Manifestos**

Devolution has caused strategic difficulties for parties with state-wide aspirations, particularly Labour. From 1997-2010, Labour held office at the UK-level. This coincided with the party forming the core of the devolved administrations between 1999-2007. In Scotland, Labour was in coalition for two full terms with the Liberal Democrats. In Wales in the same period it both governed alone and in coalition with the Liberal Democrats. Since 2007, the SNP has formed the government in Scotland; both as a minority and a majority administration. Labour continues to be the main party of Welsh government, alongside Plaid Cymru between 2007-11 and as a single-party administration from 2011. Thus, at the time of the 2010 general election, Labour was a three-term unpopular government at Westminster, the main opposition in Scotland, and part of a 'grand coalition' in Wales. By 2015, Labour was a single-party government in Wales, and in opposition in both Scotland and at Westminster. Comparison of British, Scottish and Welsh versions of the Labour manifestos in 2010 and 2015 focuses on two key aspects. First, how policy differentiation in areas of devolved power is reported in a manifesto for a British election. Secondly, the extent to which British, Scottish and Welsh Labour manifestos conform to the ideal types of manifesto outlined earlier.

The basic structure of the manifestos suggests a high level of similarity across the three versions of the Labour manifesto. In other words, the three manifestos appear to work with an agreed framework. However, there is an exception to this general rule. In 2010 the Welsh manifesto is more distinctive, demonstrating variation in structure and approach. This is immediately apparent in the covers of the documents, Welsh Labour using a cover very different from the British and Scottish manifestos. As noted above, Labour's 2010 Welsh manifesto makes distinctive use of photographs and is considerably shorter. Contents pages also suggest uniformity between Britain and Scotland but a different approach in Wales. The structure of the British and Scottish manifestos are nearly identical, Scotland replicating rather than diverging from the British template. The Welsh Labour document looks very different, closer to the ideal type of identity manifesto. Chapter titles are quite distinct, as is chapter order. Eleven chapters rather than ten deal with less focused policy themes. Welsh Labour does not have separate policy-focused chapters on health and education. Instead chapters deal with broader themes, such as 'protecting services' or 'standing up for the many'. There is a distinctiveness in the 2010 Welsh manifesto not evident in the Scottish version.

In 2015, the three Labour documents demonstrate greater uniformity than in 2010. The Welsh version is much more like the British manifesto than in 2010. The result is that all three appear similar in length, structure, and chapter headings. All use a version of the same cover, with the Scottish version replacing 'Britain' with 'Scotland' and the Welsh version mentioning a 'better Wales' alongside a 'better Britain'; all begin with the 'Budget Responsibility Lock' and contain the same foreword by Ed Miliband.<sup>14</sup> As previously noted, in the Scottish manifesto this is preceded by a statement from the Scottish Leader, and it is the Scottish version that looks the more distinctive of the three. The party appears to have enhanced the regional identity of the Scottish manifesto. On the whole, however, the British document still strongly guides the content.

The comparison of the three 2015 Labour documents points to broad similarity of content. Large sections are almost identical, such as those dealing with global challenges, foreign and European policy. However, this disguises the ways in which Labour attempts to deal with devolution in the detailed content of the manifestos. It addresses devolution in a number of ways. There are some up-front descriptions of the UK's devolution settlement, providing an account of reserved and devolved powers. In both 2010 and 2015, the Scottish document adds this material in the introductory sections. There is also much discussion in 2015 of extending devolution in Scotland and Wales. The British document talks of spreading devolution across the UK, including England. The Scottish manifesto explains how new powers being devolved to Scotland following the independence referendum will be used and extended, including more control over welfare benefits. The Welsh manifesto emphasises the need to achieve 'parity with Scotland'. All refer to the setting up of a 'people-led constitutional convention' and to decentralising power to local government. The 2015 Labour documents all contain more discussion of constitutional politics than in the previous general election.

There is, however, one dominant characteristic in the way the party deals with devolution. Discussion of devolved and reserved powers are mixed together throughout the manifestos. This is partly a reflection of the complexity of devolution and is illustrated by Scottish Labour's 2015 commitment to employ 1,000 more nurses in Scotland funded by a UK government mansion tax. Largely, deviation in policy commitments in the regions of the UK is dealt with by reworking or removing paragraphs. For example, in 2010 the Scottish version removes British commitments to 'guarantees' about public service standards, and the possibility of 'best providers taking over others where they don't make the grade'. These are sometimes replaced with inserts which are bland statements and indications of a broad policy approach on devolved matters, rather than a detailed account of policies. Thus, the Scottish and Welsh manifestos often convert the specifics of the British policy description into general,

undetailed description, as might be expected from an advertisement manifesto. For example, in 2010 the Scottish manifesto removes reference to a ‘Higher Education Innovation Fund’ but keeps the broad sentiment of support for University research.

Another approach is when the manifestos provide quite detailed illustrations of how British policy would affect Scotland and Wales. For example all versions of the manifestos contain similar broad description of employment policies, but the impact in terms of job numbers are specified differently in the respective territorial documents. As already established, the 2010 Welsh manifesto does not replicate the model of the British document and it is more difficult to directly compare the text of the two versions. However, there is a similar pointing to the achievements of Labour at Westminster, interspersed with illustrations of how this impacts on Wales. A number of chapters outline precise details of the British document, followed by more specific demonstrations of how this will affect Wales.

In areas that are unambiguously devolved – such as health and education – the manifestos offer more varied content, reflecting the local circumstances of devolution in Scotland and Wales. Chapters on health and education provide evidence of adaptation to devolution, acknowledging Scottish/Welsh differences, and pointing to achievements when in government in Scotland and Wales. This is especially clear in the Welsh manifesto of 2015, reflecting the party’s governing status in Wales at that time. The manifestos also include some distinctive proposals likely to be developed in a future Scottish Parliament or Welsh Assembly manifesto. This is important because these policies are strictly speaking not relevant at the time of a general election. They can be interpreted as advertising for future elections.

The sense that general election manifestos are used as advertisements is confirmed by comparing the general election manifestos of 2010 with those presented in the 2011 devolved elections. This reveals much similarity. The 2011 manifestos for the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly elections contain many policies which first appeared in the 2010 general

election manifestos. Indeed, some commitments are identical, particularly in the Scottish case, making the general election manifesto look like a form of advertising for future elections. Some policies are revised or not included, perhaps in response to intensifying financial constraints. Overall, however, the 2010 general election manifestos strongly influence the themes developed in 2011. It would be going too far to say that the Scottish and Welsh manifestos are drafts of manifestos for 2011. There are only 14 references to the Scottish Parliament in the entire Scottish document, and in the Welsh manifesto there are 12 references to the Welsh Assembly or Welsh Assembly government. However, there is undoubtedly evidence of the party using their territorial manifestos as advertisements for future devolved elections.

In 2015, the Scottish and Welsh Labour general election manifestos are again quite detailed on what the party hopes to achieve in the devolved institutions. The Scottish version of the manifesto promises to ‘maintain free education’, to provide a Future Fund for young people to support them into further and higher education, a number of health care pledges, and to lift the ban on the sale of alcohol in Scottish football grounds. Whether or not these policies are maintained for future elections, they fall within the jurisdiction of the Scottish Parliament, not Westminster.

An additional feature of the manifestos in the devolved territories is a tendency to refer to party values. This occurs more frequently than in the British documents. This was especially apparent in the Welsh manifesto of 2010. A distinct philosophical world-view is outlined, in the form of social justice, community, decency, tolerance, empowerment, equity, multiculturalism and active government, although this is seen as compatible with ‘working with private enterprise’. The British and Scottish documents of 2010 include references to ‘New Labour’, something which is studiously avoided throughout the Welsh manifesto. Combined with its different structure, and more extensive use of pictures, the 2010 Welsh manifesto contains more symbolism and ideological discussion. This is a good example of the identity

manifesto, where a party is articulating its principles rather than policies for the immediate election. It also has characteristics of the advertisement manifesto, situating Welsh Labour for the subsequent Welsh Assembly elections in 2011.

In 2015, the Scottish Labour manifesto puts more emphasis on this symbolic, value-based content. It frequently refers to fairness and equality and contains more of an up-front emphasis than the other documents on ending austerity and ‘reversing Tory damage’. This document is stronger on the discourse of national identity, at the same time emphasising the ‘pooling and sharing of resources’ across the UK, to an extent continuing the rhetoric of the 2014 independence referendum. In addition, the manifesto develops more of a critique of the SNP, and refers to topical issues in Scotland, including the problem of food banks and how to maintain high levels of participation in Scotland post-referendum. Generally, the 2015 document looks to be more focused on the uniqueness of Scottish politics.

Thus, the Scottish and Welsh manifestos, with the exception of the Welsh document in 2010, work within the boundaries of the UK documents but require adaptation in order to accommodate devolution. An important finding is that the manifestos contain detail on policies that are dealt with by the devolved legislatures, and therefore involve future commitments rather than policies for the specific general election being contested at that time. The mandate or contract manifesto, therefore, is the basis of much of the content, but there is considerable evidence of Labour’s territorial manifestos also being used as ‘advertisements’ for future regional elections, and there is additional evidence of the ‘identity’ type of manifesto. It is clear that general election manifestos perform multiple functions for Labour, but regional versions are more strongly characterised by policy advertising and the promotion of party values and identity.

## **Conclusion**

The focus on Labour has demonstrated the difficulties facing parties when designing manifestos in complex multi-level systems, where elections to multiple institutions are in play, and trade-offs are necessary. In the 2015 general election, Labour was essentially wiped out in Scotland, with only one MP remaining. While the party also lost ground in Wales, this was to a much lesser extent. One narrative evolving from Scottish Labour's travails is that the party has been slow to adapt to devolution. The analysis in this article is consistent with this perspective. In its general election manifestos, Labour in Scotland has appeared reluctant to diverge from the British party line. In Wales, more distinctiveness, national identity and symbolism has been evident in party manifestos. While this appears to have changed in Scotland in 2015, for the Labour Party to have taken sixteen years to adapt to a constitutional change introduced by the Labour Party was much too little, too late. Welsh Labour's distinctiveness in 2010 suggests there may have been more scope for a distinctive path than the Scottish party was able or prepared to take.

This article has demonstrated that in complex multi-level systems parties can deploy manifestos for a range of different purposes in national general elections. The type of manifesto developed will depend on trade-offs between office, policy and vote-seeking at both national and regional levels. Through the use of contract or mandate manifestos, these may be focused on the immediate election but manifestos may also be used to advertise for future regional or devolved elections. Finally, some parties also use their manifestos as statements of their symbolic identity through statements of principle rather than more detailed policy promises. This analysis has shown that British general election manifestos contain elements of all of these roles, but advertising and identity-based functions are more prominent at the regional level. Although demonstrated through analysis of recent post-devolution British manifestos, the emphasis on decentralisation across Western democracies means that these insights into

party behaviour have broader applicability. Further research is naturally necessary, both in federal and devolved systems of government.



## Appendix

(Table A1 about here)

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Table 1: Manifesto Expenditure in UK General Elections, by Region (£000's)

	2001			2005			2010		
	England	Scotland	Wales	England	Scotland	Wales	England	Scotland	Wales
Lab	397	65	57	261	47	49	276	32	37
Con	886	79	60	68	11	19	176	8	32
Lib Dem	68	12	11	108	14	13	37	4	6
SNP	-	14	-	-	17	-	-	1	-
PC	-	-	18	-	-	0.4	-	-	4

Source: Electoral Commission Register of Campaign Expenditure, <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/> [27/1/11]. Note: The expenditure category is D, manifestos and party political documents.

Table 2: Structural Characteristics of General Election Manifestos

<b>2010</b>	Labour			Cons			Lib Dem			SNP	Plaid
	Brit	Scot	Wales	Brit	Scot	Wales	Brit	Scot	Wales		
N pages	75	74	52	131	124	111	112	84	49	32	18
N words	30,277	28,466	13,901	28,459	28,115	26,329	21,343	16,252	18,317	8,769	7,068
N chapters	10	10	11	6	6	6	11	11	9	6	5
N photos	0	0	14	18	19	18	12	11	9	4	7
<i>UK leader</i>	0	0	0	1	2	1	6	5	2	-	-
<i>Regional figure</i>	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	3	6	4	0
<b>2015</b>	Labour			Cons			Lib Dem			SNP	Plaid
	Brit	Scot	Wales	Brit	Scot	Wales	Brit	Scot	Wales		
N pages	86	96	87	84	74	70	158	117	143	56	64
N words	18,964	18,304	21,463	31,370	28,991	26,591	35,536	25,291	31,965	19,171	18,452
N chapters	7	7	7	8	8	8	11	11	11	11	13
N photos	24	24	15	24	22	21	35	31	36	11	110
<i>UK leader</i>	1	1	1	3	3	4	4	4	3	-	-
<i>Regional figure</i>	0	2	1	0	2	3	0	1	4	3	9

Note: Number of chapters includes introduction/preface.

Table 3: National Identity in General Election Manifestos

2010	Labour			Conservatives			Lib Dems		
	Brit	Scot	Wales	Brit	Scot	Wales	Brit	Scot	Wales
Britain/British	132	112	13	140	139	142	107	99	53
UK/United Kingdom	25	41	37	51	66	60	32	47	25
Union/Unionist*	2	6	0	7	9	7	0	0	0
Scotland/Scottish	3	185	2	9	176	9	23	103	3
Wales/Welsh	7	5	360	15	4	95	11	8	218
England/English**	4	7	7	14	13	15	15	18	7
Devolution/ devolved powers to Scotland & Wales	4	11	4	8	22	17	6	6	9
2015	Labour			Conservatives			Lib Dems		
	Brit	Scot	Wales	Brit	Scot	Wales	Brit	Scot	Wales
Britain/British	72	51	78	150	113	125	98	89	95
UK/United Kingdom	15	48	68	59	63	84	115	147	107
Union/Unionist*	3	1	5	7	9	5	0	0	0
Scotland/Scottish	8	236	5	22	183	16	34	118	9
Wales/Welsh	11	0	335	30	27	342	39	28	155
England/English**	12	4	26	56	39	62	45	28	25
Devolution/ devolved powers to Scotland & Wales	7	16	21	5	29	21	16	23	22

Note: \*Excludes references to Northern Ireland, EU and Trade Unions, Credit Unions etc; \*\* Excludes references to the English language.

Table 4: Mentions of Competitors in General Election Manifestos

2010	Labour			Conservatives			Lib Dems			SNP	PC
	Brit	Scot	Wales	Brit	Scot	Wales	Brit	Scot	Wales	-	-
Conservatives/ Tories	14	17	31	-	-	-	8	6	5	7	5
Lib Dems/Liberal Democrats	0	0	1	0	0	0	-	-	-	0	0
SNP/Plaid/ Nationalists	0	2	3	0	1	0	1	1	0	-	-
Labour	-	-	-	78	69	69	12	9	11	14	24
2015	Labour			Conservatives			Lib Dems			SNP	PC
	Brit	Scot	Wales	Brit	Scot	Wales	Brit	Scot	Wales		
Conservatives/ Tories	13	13	40		-	-	4	3	3	29	1
Liberal Democrats / Lib Dems	0	0	2	1	1	1	-	-	-	2	0
SNP/Plaid/ Nationalists	0	10 (SNP)	0	0	24	1 (SNP)	0	6	0	0	1
Labour	-	-	-	40	28	53	4	2	5	13	3

Table A1: General Election Manifestos Analysed

Labour Party (British)	2010	2015
Scottish Labour Party	2010	2015
Welsh Labour Party	2010	2015
Conservative Party (British)	2010	2015
Scottish Conservative Party	2010	2015
Welsh Conservative Party	2010	2015
Liberal Democrats (British)	2010	2015
Scottish Liberal Democrats	2010	2015
Welsh Liberal Democrats	2010	2015
Plaid Cymru	2010	2015
Scottish National Party	2010	2015

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<sup>1</sup> Add acknowledgement. Blinded for anonymous peer review.

<sup>2</sup> The three main British parties were the only serious state-wide parties in the 2010 and 2015 general elections, and are therefore the focus of this article. Of smaller parties, UKIP remain a predominantly English phenomenon, even though they made some inroads into the Welsh Assembly in 2016. There is no state-wide Green Party, the Scottish Greens being a separate party from the Greens in England and Wales.

<sup>3</sup> Scottish powers were more extensive than in Wales, the Scottish parliament having primary legislative powers and the ability to vary income tax by up to 3 pence in the pound. Wales only had secondary legislative powers and no income tax raising powers. The initial devolved powers have been expanded over time. However, there are 'blurred' boundaries in governmental jurisdictions e.g. all three institutions have powers in relation to economic development, yet it is the UK Treasury and Westminster which is responsible for the UK's macroeconomic stability.

<sup>4</sup> See: <https://manifestoproject.wzb.eu/>

<sup>5</sup> For an outline of the development of the different party systems and party competition in Scotland, Wales and the UK see Bennie and Clark (2003) and Clark (2012).

<sup>6</sup> For discussion see Strom (1990) and Wolinetz (2002).

<sup>7</sup> For a similar approach applied to the relationship between national and European manifestos, see Brunsbach et al (2012).

<sup>8</sup> Terminology is potentially problematic here. As we note in the introduction, what are normally taken as national manifestos in general discourse are in fact, on devolved issues, only relevant to England. We retain the use of 'British' to refer to this manifesto throughout because Westminster remains the dominant institution, holding UK-level powers that were not formally available to the devolved institutions during the 2010 and 2015 general election, such as foreign affairs, defence and taxation.

<sup>9</sup> Data for the 2015 general election is not yet available. Table 1 refers to England because this is the categorisation used by the Electoral Commission.

<sup>10</sup> We are grateful to Dai Moon for this observation.

<sup>11</sup> It has been suggested to us that this reflects a move to internet-based distribution and development of the manifesto for these parties. In 2015, for example, the SNP printed only a few thousand copies of their manifesto. However, we might expect other parties to equally be affected since all utilise the internet extensively. In the absence of such an effect, this is more likely to represent a deliberate choice on the part of the Nationalist parties.



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<sup>12</sup> Occasionally this is measured as quasi-sentences in the tradition of the manifesto research group (Brunsbach et al., 2012). Our preferences, as reported here, are word count and number of pages since these are also used in the extant literature and more intelligible to those outside that manifesto group research strand. Bara (2005) also quantifies the number of pledges made in British party manifestos, suggesting that these are also on the increase.

<sup>13</sup> English devolution is mentioned eight times; also note there are additional references to Holyrood, Cardiff Bay etc. not counted here.

<sup>14</sup> This was reportedly a late addition, not approved by the broader party (Mason, 2015).