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# **THE RHETORIC OF ALEX SALMOND AND THE 2014 SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE REFERENDUM**

## **Abstract**

This is the first article to examine the rhetoric of Alex Salmond using the Aristotelian modes of persuasion (ethos, pathos, logos) during the 2014 independence referendum. The article examines Salmond's persuasive style, his political discourses, and construction of a specific form of Scottishness between January and September 2014. The article argues that Salmond's rhetorical style was driven in large part by a concern to reassure voters about the consequences of independence (logos-centred), combined with a positive vision informed by both civic nationalism and anti-Toryism (pathos-centred), which he constructed around his own character and credibility (ethos-centred). We conclude that Salmond's rhetoric over the course of the referendum campaign can be understood as part of a wider political transformation in which the legitimacy of Westminster decisions over Scotland is subject to regular scrutiny and doubt.

## **Introduction**

This is the first article to analyse Alex Salmond's political speeches delivered in the Scottish independence referendum using the Aristotelian modes of persuasion. The referendum, held on 18 September 2014 has proven to be an event of enormous consequence in British politics. Although Scotland rejected political separation from the United Kingdom (UK), the high level of support obtained for independence (45%) meant the issue of greater Scottish self-government will remain prominent for the foreseeable future. Moreover, the fall-out from the referendum result has produced a dramatic rise in membership for the Scottish National Party (SNP), which has now fully displaced Labour

as the dominant party in Scottish politics. Furthermore, the referendum debate led to the establishment of the Smith Commission to recommend new devolved powers for the Scottish Parliament. The reasons for such dramatic political developments are complex and include a number of historical factors discussed below. However, the referendum campaign period offered the pro-independence movement a focused period of time to attempt to close the sizeable gap that had still persisted between support for independence and support for retaining the union (during 2013 public support for Scottish independence had hovered continually at around only 30%). Indeed, both the SNP and wider pro-independence Yes campaign were successful in deploying arguments which meant that as the referendum date approached, the result became tantalisingly uncertain. Alongside the influence of an impressive grassroots pro-independence movement, the rhetoric of leading SNP politicians appeared to be significant in altering political dynamics around Scottish independence.

This article provides a detailed study of the rhetoric of the then SNP leader, Alex Salmond. As we argue below, Salmond is an appropriate focus for this study not merely as the leader of the only mainstream pro-independence party, but as a critical figure in the development both of modern Scottish nationalism and in the conceptions of how Scottish ‘independence’ could be practically constituted. Through our analysis we demonstrate how Salmond’s rhetoric dealt with the difficult political challenges facing the pro-independence campaign and took advantage of the wider context of UK politics to develop a popular case for independence. We proceed by first placing Salmond’s referendum rhetoric into the context of the development of Scottish nationalism since the 1970s. Second, we discuss wider studies of rhetoric in British politics, before outlining

the approach and conceptual tools used in our analysis. We then conduct an empirical examination of Salmond's referendum rhetoric between January and September 2014 with two key elements. This discussion looks both at Salmond's key public speeches during the period and also at his approach during two live televised debates with the leader of the anti-independence 'Better Together' campaign, Alistair Darling. We conclude the article with reflections upon how Salmond's rhetoric may be understood as part of a wider process of political transformation with far-reaching consequences.

## **1. Context: Scottish Nationalism and Alex Salmond**

The Scottish National Party (SNP) has historically been by far the most successful vehicle for promoting Scottish nationalism and independence for Scotland. However, it achieved only limited political success before the British post-war settlement broke down in the 1960s and 1970s. The mainstream British left had considerable success in constructing Scottish nationalism as divisive and parochial, even at times dubbing them the 'Tartan Tories' (Webb, 1977). Yet the SNP began to combine its traditional promotion of Scottish statehood with a left-of-centre emphasis on social and economic inequality. Jackson argues 'The familiar Labour narrative of a working-class movement formed out of mutualist organisations to overcome the inequalities of nineteenth century capitalism was imbibed whole sale by Scottish nationalists' (Jackson, 2014).

A narrative developed which blurred class and national identity (Jackson, 2014) to argue Scottish communities were under threat from UK elites who were primarily promoted the

interests of the South East of England and the City of London. Alex Salmond was a key figure in the 1979 Group which argued that the party needed to target working class Scots by offering a more explicitly social democratic agenda (Harvie, 2004). During the Thatcher era the party grew to rely less on appeals to traditional nationalism and more on a message which suggested Thatcherism was incompatible with the supposedly more egalitarian impulses of Scotland. The idea that Scottish independence must involve a narrow nationalism was further challenged by the SNP's move to support future Scottish membership of the European Economic Community (EEC), as the party increasingly embraced the theme of 'post-sovereignty'. Indeed such developments have prompted some to wonder what remained of traditional Scottish Nationalism. Iain MacWhirter reflected: 'to paraphrase Herbert Morrison's remark on Socialism, Nationalism is whatever the SNP says it is. Indeed, it is what Alex Salmond says it is' (MacWhirter, 2013, p. 27).

During his first stint as party leader (1990-2000) Salmond at times endorsed the idea of 'post-nationalism', constructing Scotland as a modern, open and international-facing country which is ready to drive its own future, yet also willing to pool sovereignty where appropriate. However, the move towards embracing a social democratic identity for the SNP has occurred at the same period during which social democracy has faced crisis across Europe. Thus whilst Salmond has made considerable play of asserting left-wing credentials through seeking to protect welfare and public spending, he has also proposed to make Scotland more competitive by cutting business taxes (Scottish Government, 2013). This uneasy mix of centre-left policies (declared and celebrated), combined with neo-liberal economic strategies (rarely acknowledged as such) reflects the kinds of

dilemmas faced by other political movements such as New Labour. However, Salmond has been aided politically by the long-term decline in the institutions and forms of pro-union politics in Scotland, including the Scottish Conservative Party, traditional unionism and the withering of Scottish Labour. Surveys continued to suggest that a sense of Scottish identity was growing relative to British identity in Scotland (though many continued to feel a sense of both) whilst rival elites tended to offer only a 'poorly-articulated concept of Britishness' (Keating, 2009).

The creation of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 offered a new means for the SNP to develop the case for independence, not least by asserting the primacy of Holyrood as the most legitimate democratic voice of the people of Scotland. Under John Swinney's quiet leadership (2000-2004), the party struggled to make headway against a dominant Scottish Labour Party. Yet when Salmond returned to the leadership in 2004, the party benefitted from his quick-witted charisma and instinctive feel for the tides of large sections of Scottish public opinion. Yet Salmond's pugnacious style divided voters. At the same time, Salmond and the SNP's focus on the promotion of independence constantly served to polarise attitudes. As an 'underdog' political party at that time, Salmond was skilled at seeking to embarrass Labour for its alleged inabilities to deliver for Scotland. His combination of a combative style with the projection of a statesman-in-waiting led to electoral victories, first as a minority administration in 2007, and then in a surprise majority win in 2011. As Labour and the other pro-union parties struggled to accept and adapt to a changed landscape, Salmond took the opportunity to emphasise the sovereignty of the Scottish people in determining their future and asserting the right of Scotland and the Scottish Parliament to hold a referendum on independence. The pro-union parties

offered little to match the emotion and optimism of Salmond's vision for the future (Hassan, 2011). Yet a 'banal unionism' was still prevalent in Scotland, and over a number of years the SNP gained political momentum not through moving voters to become pro-independence, but through a combination of policy appeals using centre-left justificatory rhetoric and projecting an image of governing competence through Salmond's role as First Minister.

Therefore the SNP knew that to stand any chance of winning the referendum they had to reach out and form alliances with wider sections of Scottish opinion. In the years before September 2014, much time was spent helping develop grassroots and community Yes groups. Considerable effort was made to ensure that the SNP did not totally dominate the pro-independence campaign, despite the consistent efforts of the No campaign to tie the referendum to the divisive figure of Salmond himself (Adamson and Lynch, 2014). Yet the No campaign struggled to find a consistent, positive way to package their position. Thus Salmond's approach during the referendum had to combine the goals of helping gather wider support, yet not convey the idea the case for Yes was synonymous with voting for him or the SNP.

## **2. The Study of Rhetoric in British Party Politics**

There is no single methodological school in the study of rhetorical discourses within British politics. This is because, relative to the United States, this sub-field of political science is in the early stages growth (Crines and Hayton 2014, p. 6). Speech acts are

often discussed in relation to the concepts of ideology or discourse, which help place them in the context of wider cultural frames (Martin, 2015). Studies of rhetoric and language in politics are often conducted through forms of discourse analysis, or indeed critical discourse analysis (e.g. Laclau and Mouffe 1995; Fairclough 2000). These approaches have strengths in identifying the shared linguistic and discursive formations which shape political identity and frame political action. For instance the discourse analytical approach of Ernesto Laclau understands the role of rhetoric as one of ‘naming’ and a means of establishing political subjectivities. The emphasis within such work is often on how shared frameworks of meaning can in effect ‘speak’ through the individual, or as Gaffney argues that discourse ‘analysis ‘reveals’ the underlying structures (of power) which are ‘performed’ through rhetoric’ (2015: 10). In contrast our approach in this article conceives of political rhetoric as potentially inventive and creative interventions.

Finlayson argues that there are key aspects to political rhetoric beyond those emphasised by discourse analytical approaches, including issues of delivery, narrative arrangement and the ‘invention’ of reasons suitable for presentation to others (Finlayson 2012). It requires reflection on how to bridge the gap between what oneself believes and how other imagine them to be (ibid.) Martin argues that the situational emphasis of rhetorical studies helps to relate speech to specific moments and issues, examining how speakers choose to address audiences at particular junctures (Martin 2015):

‘it is still possible to conceive public speech as a type of action designed to assert control over an unfolding situation (a crisis, a policy decision, an election, and so



forth) whose parameters are not absolutely defined in advance.. rhetorical analysis re-describes speech-action as a means to ‘appropriate’ such situations. This is sought by supplying arguments, definitions, characters, turns of phrase, and so on, to configure the moment, often displacing other available representations. (Martin 2015)

Our analysis emphasises the significance rhetoric can have as acts of creative agency. As Martin argues, rhetorical acts enter political space as ‘projectiles’ with the potential to disturb or shake existing frames of reference (2014: 106). Our purpose is not to conduct an in-depth study of Scottish nationalism, or the evolution of the debate around Scottish independence. These are important backdrops to our study which play a role in enabling and constraining particular sorts of rhetorical intervention from Alex Salmond. Yet our focus is on the way Salmond attempted to alter or reinforce particular political dynamics during the referendum campaign – in this way we treat his contributions as (potentially at least) ‘creative acts’ (Finlayson, 2014: 4) or events in their own right.

Thus this article forms part of a still limited but growing literature on British politics which takes an explicitly Aristotelian approach to an applied study of political rhetoric.

As Richard Toye notes, there are few ‘explicitly conceived rhetorical analyses’ in the field (Toye, 2011, p. 177). Atkins, Finlayson, Martin and Turnbull (2014) (eds) provide a landmark volume which includes studies of rhetoric devolution, multiculturalism, race issues as well as leadership in Britain. Charteris-Black (2005) explores the political metaphors; Crines and Hayton examine political oratory (Crines and Hayton, 2014); whilst Gaffney concerns himself with political personas and the development of

reputations (Gaffney and Lahel, 2013). More broadly, other analyses have drawn out the rhetorical construction of morality, party renewal (Atkins 2014), and/or leadership (Crines and Theakston, 2015; Lawrence, 2008). However none of these examples have explored political rhetoric in the context of Scottish politics or the independence movement in Scotland, a gap we seek to address.

### **Conceptual framework**

We follow the recent literature in privileging three concepts drawn from Aristotle's analysis of how rhetoric functions. Aristotle suggests effective communicators make use of particular elements in their rhetoric - these are: the individual character/credibility of the speaker (ethos); their use of emotions such as hope or fear (pathos); and their use of evidence and/logic (logos) (Finlayson and Martin, 2008; Toye, 2013; Atkins et al., 2014; Crines and Hayton 2014). The scholastic value of these modes of persuasion comes from their ability to provide an intellectual framework into how politicians are constructing and delivering their speeches in the expectation of producing specific reactions.

Thus concepts of ethos, pathos and logos are drawn upon to help tease identify key components, themes and arguments in Salmond's rhetoric. Central to this endeavour are the assumptions that political rhetoric is never 'mere rhetoric' (Finlayson and Martin 2014) and that what is significant to the success of rhetoric is not necessarily self-evident. Political rhetoric can often fail, underwhelm or take forms which foster cynicism, despite the best intentions and professional energies of politicians and political marketers. Attempts to unpack how rhetoric can persuade requires tools of analysis. We believe these

three key Aristotelean categories are appropriate for the analysis of Alex Salmond for a number of reasons.

As Finlayson argues ‘appeals to the character of the addresser may be based on implicit claims to authority, or perhaps sympathy, and may be attempts to encourage an audience to identify with the speaker or to see them as ‘just like us’’ (Finlayson, 2007, p. 558). In terms of Salmond’s rhetoric, he strives to show that he reflects the same concerns and desires of his audiences, to garner support, and thereby increase his credibility when arguing for his conception of Scottishness and, ultimately, independence. Alongside his appeals to ethos, he may also use emotions ‘to move them by putting them in the right frame of minds, or, put differently, to create the right disposition’ (Greiner, 2005).

Furthermore, he also uses empirical arguments through statistical data and evidence in order to show Scotland can exist as an independent state thereby appealing to the logos of his audience. Needless to say, the use of emotional, logical and character-based arguments depend upon the type of audience being addressed, and are often used asymmetrically by the speaker, however for the purposes of analysis, these can be examined intellectually in isolation.

In this article we also make distinctions between forms of Scottish nationalism which should be clarified. We emphasise Salmond’s promotion of a civic nationalism, which emphasises the themes of quality, tolerance and the idea of an independent Scotland gaining legitimacy from the active citizenship of people in Scotland, regardless of their nationality, race, or cultural background. Salmond and the SNP have been at pains to distance themselves from types of ethnic nationalism which would argue that common

ancestry, culture or ethnic characteristics establish the case for Scottish independence. The latter has been associated with forms of Anglo-phobia, and instances of such ethnic nationalism have been politically damaging for the SNP in the past. Salmond has also privileged civic nationalism over more romantic forms which would represent Scotland's historical culture in an idealised manner. At the same Salmond has made appeals to the uniqueness or distinctive qualities of Scottish society and politics.

We argue that Salmond's rhetorical style is reliant upon his character as a constructor and defender of Scotland as a distinct political entity. Indeed Salmond's political success arguably owes much to his 'unapologetic provincialism' (MacWhirter, 2013). The former Scottish Labour leader and First Minister Henry McLeish argues Salmond's popularity derives not from his stance on independence but because he is 'distinctly Scottish' and 'it's all about the pride, passion, patriotism issues that the people like' (Scottish Television, 2013). This form of Scottishness is informed by a civic nationalism which is used to demonstrate Scotland's distinctive character in contrast to the rest of the UK. His rhetorical strategy also aims to transcend divisions in Scottish politics, thereby conflating his arguments with a certain universal national identity upon which Scots are assumed to subscribe.

This article seeks only to examine how Salmond frames and constructs notions of nationhood within the exceptional circumstances of a referendum and the specific challenges posed by the respective yes/no campaigns and the intense scrutiny placed upon Salmond's plans for an independent Scotland.

### **3. Analysis of Salmond's Referendum Rhetoric**

The referendum presented Salmond with a number of major challenges; the other main political parties were lined-up against independence, and most of the print media had an editorial line opposing independence. Opponents accused him of seeking to tear-up the fabric of the Union in the cause of a narrow nationalism, and bring great economic uncertainties. As the proponent of radical change, he had to justify the break-up the Union and simultaneously provide reassurance to those worried about how their interests would be affected by separation. In the course of the campaign he faced the difficulty of prominent politicians at the UK and European Union level fundamentally questioning his plans to keep sterling and smoothly obtain Scottish membership of the EU. Salmond had to offer robust practical detail on how the transition to independence could be managed.

At the same time, the structure of the referendum offered Salmond and the Yes campaign certain advantages. They could provide the prospect of an exciting new future whilst the opposition was left to effectively defend the status quo (pledges on more devolved powers notwithstanding). They had the opportunity to potentially channel disaffection from mainstream politics to their cause, and to generate a sense of challenging established power. Yet Salmond was also able to do this from a position of great pre-existing political strength, given he was First Minister, with the backing of a majority of the Scottish

Parliament. Thus he immediately possessed a level of legitimacy and credibility (ethos) which none of his rivals could match. He did not have to spend time justifying why he should be listened to, but rather carried the authority of his office into any referendum speech he delivered. Salmond would sometimes buttress this authority by making numerous references to history and literature affirming his command of Scottish culture. He would also selectively reference or cite politicians, ministers or academics at the level to provide further credibility to key arguments. The cumulative effect of these elements was to project an image of himself as someone who was both embedded in the practical business of government yet also uniquely in tune with the sensitivities and outlook of the Scottish electorate. Indeed, Salmond sought to rhetorically distance the referendum itself from the machinations of everyday politics:

This referendum isn't about politicians. It's not about me, or David Cameron – and it's not even about David Bowie... it's about the people of Scotland (Salmond, 2014a).

Thus Salmond had a populist, anti-elitist streak, which sought to emphasise that those living in Scotland should think of themselves firstly as part of a distinct Scottish nation. The circumstances of the referendum provided him with an enhanced opportunity to simultaneously make use of his elevated position as First Minister, yet also to ally himself as with the 'people' in a struggle against (UK-level) elites. Yet against claims that the Yes campaign equated with a narrow nationalist agenda, Salmond's rhetoric was relentless in asserting that he was advocating an outward-looking approach.

### 3.1 Rejecting Narrow *Nationalism*, affirming *Scotland's global contribution*

Scotland was presented as a significant global citizen. For example, Salmond highlights the importance of the 1320 Declaration of Arbroath as the first ever contractual theory of monarchy in Europe (Salmond, 2014b). The idea of popular sovereignty is seen to have subsequently been crucial in the emergence of modern democracies such as the United States. He draws attention to the fact that Scotland was the first country to provide universal education for all, a fact which helps explain the subsequent stream of great Scottish inventors whose work shaped the modern world (such as the telephone, television and penicillin) (Salmond, 2014a). Yet Salmond argues more could be achieved through independence, citing the impressive contributions made to global politics by small independent countries such as Norway (peace-building); Finland (Research and Development); and Singapore (economic development). Thus he suggests that it is not the particular size of a country which is key to its global contribution, but what rather what it tangibly contributes to the international community. In contrast he laments those who at the UK level seem too attached to ideas of 'old Empire' (Salmond, 2014c). The past military battles with England are lamented for their loss of life, but also viewed as firmly in the past given the social and economic unions between the nations. Yet more often it is the Scots international reputation as creative innovators which Salmond stresses comes not from:

Our hard-won reputation for being Bravehearts in the battle, but our hard-won reputation for invention which generated wealth ... in Arthur Herman's phrase 'it sometimes seems as though Scotland has invented the modern world' (Salmond, 2014a).

Salmond does not shy from referencing well-known cultural memories or myths (Bravehearts) but makes them subordinate to a more progressive historical impacts made by Scottish innovation. Pathos is deployed, in a manner constrained by the need for sober reflection upon what is worth celebrating from Scotland's past. He does so with an awareness of how pro-unionist supporters may seek to dismiss his agenda with reference to the romantic nationalism promoted in popular culture by films such as Braveheart, directed by Mel Gibson. Rhetorically, his efforts are attempt to establish himself as in possession of a 'bigger picture', which seeks to leave dogged unionism or ethnic types of nationalism as missing a key internationalist perspective.

The idea of Scotland as an internationally-minded nation is also articulated in Salmond's presentation of identity, which is viewed as potentially multiple and cross-cutting:

We're comfortable with the idea of over-lapping identities – we know that you can be Scottish and British, Scottish and European, Scottish and Polish or Scottish and Pakistani ... (there are) many threads to the Scottish tartan of identity (Salmond, 2014c).

Thus Salmond emphasises that Scottish identity is not exclusive and is far removed from ethnic nationalism or racism. The concept of 'threads' of varied cultural identities



contributing to the ‘tartan’ of Scotland seeks to transcend rather than abandon traditional Scottish identifiers – it is such threads that are taken to constitute Scottishness rather than some kind of fixed ethnic or cultural cores. He describes the Yes campaign as ‘an inclusive, civic - and above all democratic and constitutional movement’ (Salmond, 2014c). Scotland’s positive attitude towards the EU is also used by Salmond to reject claims that independence could lead to isolationism. In the context of claims by Manuel Barroso (Whitaker, 2014) that an independent Scotland would not obtain automatic EU membership, Salmond generally adopted a statesmanlike emphasis on the perceived impracticality and lack of legal basis for such an outcome. The tone was to emphasise that there would be no such barrier in Scotland’s way, however Salmond became momentarily more aggressive on the issue, arguing that without EU membership Scotland could block the access of a dozen other countries to fishing zones (Salmond, 2014c). The use of such ‘bad cop’ techniques was far outweighed by ‘good cop’ stresses on the positive role Scotland plays in the EU. Yet it is suggested that Scotland’s contribution could be all the greater if an independent country, given Scotland would be free of the anti-Europeanism prominent in England (Salmond, 2014c).

### 3.2 Rejecting Anglo-phobia, affirming anti-Westminsterism/Toryism

Aware that the SNP continues to face accusations of ethnically nationalist Anglo-phobia, Salmond has been at pains to stress that relations between Scotland and England are both healthy and of great mutual importance. His speeches repeatedly use pathos to describe England as Scotland’s ‘closest friend’, and emphasise ‘the ties of family and friendship’ (Salmond, 2014d). He highlights that these relations are ‘facts of geography, not acts of

Parliament' (Salmond, 2014d). Furthermore he stresses that under his plans Scotland and England would continue to share not just social union, but economic union and the same monarchy. He is dismissive of unionist politicians who stress the danger of England becoming a 'foreign country', citing the precedent of the 1949 Ireland Act in which it was declared that Ireland would not be considered foreign by the UK. Salmond contends:

Scotland will not be a foreign country after independence, any more than Ireland, Northern Ireland, England or Wales... We share ties of family and friendship, trade and commerce, history and culture (Salmond, 2014e).

Rhetorically, this intervention seeks to turn the tables on Salmond's unionist opponents i.e. his wishes to convey that it is not he contemplates any idea of rendering the rest of the UK as 'foreign' – rather it is pro-union politicians who are bringing in this divisive political discourse. Indeed Salmond's rhetoric on future Anglo-Scottish relations places provides a logos-based emphasis on the theme of continuity; for example highlighting that currently Anglo-Irish relations are managed from an office based in Edinburgh, meaning no great difficulty should occur in switching the focus from a two-sided to a three-sided relationship. He highlights that the five nations of the British Isles current worked together on shared issues such as transport and energy of the Irish Rim Project (Salmond, 2014d); whilst communities near the English-Scottish border already work together in the Borderlands initiative that would continue after independence.

The SNP are also aware of the argument that Scottish independence could leave the North of England more exposed to domination by the South East. In addition, there is the argument made by some on the Left that Scotland secession from the Union could mean England is more likely to have Conservative governments in future. Yet Salmond again seeks to invert such arguments by arguing that Scottish independence could actually benefit the North of England. He cites Tony Travers, who states ‘London is the dark star of the economy, inexorably sucking in resources, people and energy’ (Salmond, 2014e). In so doing Salmond’s rhetoric is logos driven - drawing attention to the north-south divide and the fact that the UK has the highest levels of regional inequality of anywhere in the EU. For example he points out the vast disparities in transport spending between London (£2,700 per head), the North East (£130 per head), and the North West (£5 per head) (Salmond, 2014d). Here Salmond suggests that a more successful Scottish economy could be a ‘counter-weight to London and the South-West’ and a ‘Northern light to redress the dark star’ which could benefit regions such as Yorkshire and Northumbria (Salmond, 2014d). Against claims that such thinking is purely wishful, Salmond highlights that under devolution Scotland has risen to become the third wealthiest part of the UK, behind only London and the South East. The message is that Scotland has achieved but could achieve yet more both for themselves and other parts of the UK after independence.

Crucially in so far as Scotland is seen to suffer as part of the union, Salmond does not hold ‘England’ or the rest of the UK responsible as such. Instead, blame is focused, laser-like, on two targets, namely ‘Westminster’, and also the Conservative Party. The terms ‘Westminster Establishment’ or ‘Westminster Elite’ are frequently used to refer to the

other mainstream parties, the intention being to bind them together in the public mind as jointly responsible for Scotland's problems. The formation of the cross-party No campaign 'Better Together' aided this approach. For example he criticises 'Westminster Labour' for agreeing with the Conservatives on the issue of currency. It is in this area that Salmond is most comfortable in using his rhetoric to try to engender or articulate public anger. Pathos is used to emphasise both perceived Tory indifference, and Labour's alleged betrayal of the left-wing values which previously gave the party a large audience in Scotland. Indeed Scottish Labour are constructed as having capitulated to a South East dominated political agenda having 'lost touch with Labour values... supporting the Tory assault on social security' (Salmond, 2014f). Thus the contest is constructed as a battle between a broad Yes movement opposed to the out-dated Westminster system of rule. These Westminster elites are presented as uninterested in Scottish needs and far more interested in preserving the privileges enjoyed by London and the South East. Thus Salmond condemns the 'destructive campaigning style of the Westminster Establishment' and 'the most miserable, negative, depressing and thoroughly boring campaign in modern political history' (Salmond, 2014f). He suggests that 'Better Together' have internally self-described themselves as 'Project Fear'. This latter phrase was picked-up by Salmond and the SNP as a neat way of presenting the No side as hopelessly negative in tone, and referenced every-time a 'scare' story emerged about possible negative consequences of independence. As such it was an instance of an old trick of political rhetoric i.e. cloaking negativity in the guise of criticising the negativity of others. Salmond also invoked the judgment of posterity in the effort to question the manoeuvres of the No campaign, arguing that their decision to 'posture' in ruling-out a currency union with Scotland would be later seen as a huge misjudgement. On many occasions Salmond suggests that the

Westminster parties are hopelessly out-of-touch with opinion in Scotland and seeks to capitalise upon perceptions of elite contempt for Scotland. He condemns ‘lofty interventions, telling us all the things we can’t do... [by] a succession of day-tripping Conservative ministers flying up to Scotland’ (Salmond, 2014e).

3.3 *‘The Westminster Establishment: Telling Scots what we can’t do, running Scotland down’* (Salmond, 2014f)

This emphasis on the supposed condescension of London politicians served Salmond well when put under pressure about how realistic his plans for a post-independence currency union with ‘rUK’ were. For example, the substance of George Osborne’s statement on currency in Edinburgh (Osborne, 2014) was not so different from that offered by Mark Carney a few weeks earlier (Carney, 2014). But the fact that it was delivered by a Conservative politician on a brief foray up to Scotland played into the Yes campaign narrative concerning a distant and unsympathetic London elite. Salmond referenced the transaction costs that could emerge if an independent Scotland was forced to have a separate currency, dubbing this the ‘George Tax’. In response to Osborne’s currency statement Salmond argues ‘no one with a semblance of understanding of Scottish history and indeed the Scottish character would have made a speech such as that’ (Salmond, 2014b). More generally, Salmond exploited the low-ratings of senior Conservatives politicians in Scotland, repeatedly using his speeches to challenge David Cameron to a televised debate, accepting Cameron was unlikely to concede, and reinforced the wider message that the No campaign had nothing positive to contribute to the debate. The

approach of Westminster politicians is said by Salmond to have ‘badly misread the character of the Scottish people’ (Salmond, 2014b). Thus whilst Salmond eschews making negative judgments on England or English traits, he does assume knowledge of ‘the Scottish character’, and that such characteristics are beyond the knowledge of senior UK political figures. Arguably, her Salmond skirts close to providing an essentialist or culturally ethnic idea of ‘Scottish character’, yet the rhetorical emphasis is on the alleged detachment of elites rather than specific Scottish characteristics.

The idea the Conservative Party have views diametrically opposed to most Scots is a theme Salmond returns to in many ways on different occasions. It is also the area in which Salmond makes some of the most overt use of emotional language (pathos) in the hope to draw upon the deep anti-Tory sentiment within large sections of the Scottish electorate. For instance, on the issue of welfare, Salmond references the ‘striver versus skiver, shirkers or workers’ rhetoric emanating from Westminster. He suggests that in contrast ‘(t)hat language scarcely features in Scotland’ (Salmond, 2014c). More generally Salmond emphasises that within the UK Scotland very often ends up with Conservative governments they did not vote for. His rhetoric is designed to portray the idea that this is not just an unfortunate happening but indicative of a cultural and political gulf between Conservative elites and most of Scotland. This is taken to be reflected in the opposition of many Scottish voters to NHS ‘privatisation’ and the renewal of Trident: ‘Westminster wants to renew a weapons system that can destroy the world’, ‘In Scotland, the National Health Service is under pressure because of austerity. In England, the National Health Service is under threat because of austerity and privatisation’ (Salmond, 2014g). However with independence ‘The era of Tory governments handing out punishment to the poor and

the disabled will be gone'. But this type of emotive and negative portrayal of Westminster rule is balanced by emphasisthe positive opportunities created by Scottish self-government:

Over the last 15 years, the Scottish Parliament... has delivered real social gains for this country. World-leading homelessness legislation, the ban on smoking on public places, the most ambitious climate change targets in the world, free university tuition and personal care for the elderly...(Salmond, 2014h).

Note that in some respects here Salmond eschews the opportunity for a more ethos-based rhetorical emphasis on what he as First Minister or the SNP in government have achieved. In the context of the referendum, Salmond's rhetoric instead attributes the successes of devolution not to himself or the SNP, but to the existence of a Parliament which can cater for the specific interests of Scotland. The preferences of the Parliament and by the extension the Scottish electorate are seen to prioritise leading on issues which contrast with a Thatcherite agenda.

Given Salmond's combative political reputation, it is perhaps striking the emphasis of much of his referendum rhetoric is on shared culture, co-operation and indeed the ways in which Scottish independence would actually bring so much continuity. The bulk of his arguments for independence make use of data and sources, and have a logos character rather than, usually, a pathos driven one. Whilst there are examples of Salmond's trademark use of humour, his referendum speeches are featured more by arguments from

authority, with sources and key figures being cited to add weight to the case for independence. For instance in his speech to the International Festival of Business, Salmond variously cited economic Danny Dorling and Joseph Stiglitz, the OECD, RSA, the Institute for Public Policy for the Regions and the House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee. Whereby he made detailed claims as to specific economic benefits from independence:

We have calculated the consequences of increasing current spending by 3% a year between 2017 and 2019, rather than 1%, as the UK Government prefers... Under our plans, the Scottish Government's budget deficit would still decline - to 2.2% of GDP – and public sector debt would be on a downward trajectory as a share of our GDP. But we would free up additional spending resources of £2.4 billion in 2018-19 (Salmond, 2014g).

The desired effect of heavily-loading rhetoric with such specific claims is to convey a sense of being fully in command of the details and likely outcomes of independence, countering any suggestion that the plans may be uncostered or ill-considered. Here the vision he offers for the future is more pragmatic, constructing an optimistic view of the role that small countries can play as global citizens.

#### **4. Analysis of the Salmond/Darling Debates**



Two centrepiece televised debates were held ahead of the vote. They represented significant keynote moments in the campaign because they enabled the representatives of the respective campaigns, Salmond and Alistair Darling to articulate their cases for the future of Scotland directly to the Scottish electorate, and beyond. The debates provided an audio-visual context for the deployment of political rhetoric that was quite distinct from the purely 'set-piece' speech formats analysed above. In the debates both Salmond and Darling had the opportunity to reduce the 'distance' between themselves and the audience by speaking live to a very large number of viewers (1.2 Million watched the first debate, from an electorate of 4.2 million). They could both make use of opportunities to make prepared statements, but much of the discussion was driven by questions put to them by the programme presenter, and by direct debate between the two leaders themselves. The interactive element is therefore a crucial dimension of the debate, thus we must consider Alistair Darling's approach alongside that of Salmond to help tease out the salient aspects of political rhetoric in these debates. Within such a contest the ethos of the rhetor is under threat and scrutiny in an unusual way – they must be seen to respond quickly and effectively to rival rhetoric. Logos cannot always be applied through careful preparation of narrative structure – there can be a need to respond spontaneously to a point of challenge. Ethos can be a powerful tool in such debate, but this has to be balanced against a need to project being 'in control' in the effort to sustain broader ethos appeals.

Indeed, many judged that Darling 'won' the first debate, partly due to Salmond appearing to struggle to convincingly respond to his questions on the currency an independent Scotland would use. Yet after the second debate Yes campaign appeared to enjoy a boost in support, which led to a more galvanised 'Better Together' campaign with Gordon Brown taking a prominent position. As such, the debates represent significant points

during the referendum campaign worthy of analysis. Two issues dominated the debates, namely i) the issue of currency; ii) pursuing social justice.

Fundamentally, Salmond argued that Scotland could and should become an independent country because of the social and psychological distance between Westminster and Holyrood. He argued he wanted to win over 'hearts and minds' (Salmond, 2014i) to the idea of an independent Scotland by using the emotional sense of a unique Scottish identity alongside a more pragmatic approach to civic nationalism. A consistent theme was tying optimism about a better future to the power held by the Scottish people in the referendum: 'The future of Scotland should be in Scotland's hands. It's about believing we can govern ourselves better than anyone else' (Salmond, 2014j). As stated earlier, one of the essential tenets of Scottish nationalism is its sense of difference with the rest of the UK. This perception is given credence by the social effects produced by processes of deindustrialisation and lack of subsequent reinvestment. During the two debates Salmond spoke to this narrative of discontent, using rhetoric which was far more emotive than Darling to remind his audience of these alleged mistreatment in order to secure support for independence. Whilst Salmond made significant use of logos in the set-piece speeches discussed above to rebut anti-independence arguments, his approach in the debates was more pathos focused. In contrast Darling opted for a more sedate approach in supporting Scotland within the Union: 'I want to see Scotland prosper. I don't want to see new boundaries and barriers' (Darling, 2014a). By doing so he sought to communicate the message that Scotland will continue to benefit from being a key player within the UK, particularly on areas of economic integration and social benefits through the process of redistributive wealth.

#### 4.1 Currency – contending rhetorics of legitimacy

In contrast to Salmond's narrative of a marginalised Scotland, Darling focused upon a selection of major practical consequences of independence, notably the difficulty of future currency union with the rest of the UK. A core part of Salmond's response was straightforwardly dismissive – objections to a shared currency were constructed as part of 'Project Fear', involving both distortion and mistruths in order to frighten voters about the prospect of independence. Rhetorically, this suggested the No side believed voters would instinctively be attracted to independence, thus only 'fear' could save the Union. However Salmond's approach carried the risk of failing to confront real concerns of the electorate on key issues such as the economic management, employment and social spending. Indeed when on the defensive in debate exchanges, Salmond used emotional language (pathos), again drawing on Scottish exceptionalism in opposition to the Westminster 'other', rather than using the more careful detailed argumentation of some of his set-piece speeches. However this strategy was initially hampered by Darling's rhetorical logos. Darling argued the currency is tied to the broader economy, and that uncertainty over the issue of currency threatened to curtail public sector investment and private sector confidence. Each of these would, he argued, threaten the prosperity of Scotland because of the instability it could create. Salmond sought to address this issue by arguing Scotland would continue using the 'rUK' Pound and that the currency could be used by other nations in the British Isles regardless of whether they shared political union.

Darling continually returned to this issue because he believed Salmond was rhetorically most vulnerable on these logos-driven arguments. Indeed, Darling argued ‘I assume our flag is the saltire, our capital is Edinburgh. What is our currency?’ (Darling, 2014a). By linking the issue with other seemingly self-evident issues, Darling was striving to portray Salmond’s plans for currency union as a basic point which had not been sufficiently outlined. Darling also strove to instil a sense of fiscal anxiety into the debate by saying ‘the financial markets are listening’ (Darling, 2014b) to the position Salmond articulates. Salmond’s apparent difficulty in directly answering such points appeared to pay dividends for Darling when polls after the first debate suggested most voters considered him the ‘winner’.

In the second debate Darling continued highlighting the precarious responses Salmond gave regarding the currency and that Scotland would have no fiscal control over a shared currency because the UK in effect would become a ‘foreign country’ (Darling, 2014b). He emphasised that ‘the thing about a currency union is both sides have to agree to it’ (Darling, 2014b) and that one sovereign nation could not fiscally influence another. However, in defence of his stance, Salmond maintained his belief that ‘everything would change’ (Salmond, 2014j) should Scotland opt for independence, and that Westminster would agree to currency union following a Yes vote. Salmond’s tactic in both debates was to repeatedly insist the Westminster parties were bluffing. This approach relied heavily on Salmond’s ethos, gambling that more voters would trust his assertions over those of the pro-union parties. Yet, in a minor way Salmond acknowledged a fall-back position on currency, conceding ‘there are other options for Scotland’ (Salmond, 2014j).

Salmond argued Darling's emphasis proved he was a 'one trick pony' with little confidence in Scotland (Salmond, 2014j).

#### 4.2 Contending rhetorics of social justice

Salmond sought to articulate his message around a better form of social democracy. 'My vision is for a prosperous economy but also for a just society in Scotland' (Salmond, 2014j). This, Salmond believed, trumped Darling's pragmatic arguments over the currency because it alluded to a sense of higher purpose which could be achieved outside of the Union. Despite this, the notion of 'Project Fear' fed into the idea that the Better Together campaign were attempting to manipulate the electorate through misinformation.

Salmond also argued the deficit reduction programme in Westminster had had a detrimental effect upon the most needy. To make this argument he argued 'Yes, we've got troubled economic times, but the mark of a government is when you are in difficult economic times you don't take it out on the disabled and you don't take it out on families with children' (Salmond, 2014j). This point struck a chord with Darling because of his social democratic values, who replied 'no-one could support people who need help being denied, no-one could possibly support that. We have an obligation to help people who need support' (Darling, 2014b). To turn the issue around, Darling criticised Salmond's economic strategy which, he contends, 'are cutting off opportunities for firms that generate wealth and therefore generate taxation to pay for these things' (Darling, 2014b).

Whilst an essentially social democratic argument, Salmond responded by attacking Darling for 'being in bed with the Tories' (Salmond, 2014i). He also phrased questions designed to draw out that connection, such as 'do you agree with David Cameron that Scotland could be a successful, independent country?' (Salmond, 2014i). Paradoxically Salmond used a similar line developed by George Osborne to attack Darling: 'you were in charge of financial regulation when the banks went bust' (Salmond, 2014i). This line was consistent with the Conservative narrative of Labour's so called economic imprudence causing the financial crisis of 2008, despite the fact it was produced by a schism in free market liberalism, triggered by a credit crunch in the United States. Darling defended his record, saying 'I was there in 2008 and I can tell you that when these banks were collapsing no other country in the world were rushing to bail them out' (Darling, 2014a).

On reflection, although the two debates were on occasion rather unedifying affairs in which the protagonists would shout over one another, the key arguments were reflective of decisive issues within the campaign. Doubts over the future of Scotland's economy under independence were a great concern for many voters, and Darling articulated these against a defensive Salmond. Under pressure and time constraints Salmond appeared less able to use the logos-centred approach. The lack of a more positive pro-union message was exposed in Salmond's success in the second debate, with Salmond pathos-driven emphasis on social injustice within a Tory-led Britain leaving Darling's case emphasising cross-border solidarity look flat and tarnished by its loyalty to Westminster politics. Yet as John Curtice observed, 'winning the prize for rhetorical style is one thing, persuading voters to change their minds potentially quite another' (Curtice, 2014).

## **5. Conclusion**

It has quickly become conventional wisdom that whilst the Yes campaign lost the referendum vote, they effectively 'won' the campaign. A vote of 45% for independence indicated a Scottish nation with substantial desire for more autonomy and a deep sense of disaffection with Westminster politics. It should be recalled that pro-union political forces had already been in decline for an extended period, and in some respects the No campaign was attempting to overcome years of complacent neglect. The rhetoric of Salmond and the Yes campaign exploited these weaknesses, making a positive case for a civic nationalism contrasted with the apparent long-standing indifference or contempt of Westminster political elites.

To the extent that Salmond's rhetoric was successful, the foundations of this success were built firstly upon providing constant rebuttals to allegations that the independence cause was bound up with any kind of isolationist, narrow or Anglo-phobic nationalism. Using both his own status as a re-elected First Minister (ethos) and drawing on a range of authoritative sources, he constructed detailed narratives as to how the transition to an independent Scotland could be comfortably managed (logos). Salmond would emphasise the distinctiveness of Scottish identity with a mix of emotive/romantic emphases on the democratic and creative character of Scottish culture (pathos) combined with a more specific set of political complaints concerning the policy and economic marginalisation of Scottish interests (logos). Westminster, and particularly Westminster Toryism are

constructed by Salmond as anathema to the preferences of Scottish people. Though this rhetoric was ultimately insufficient to overcome the preference of many Scots against independence, in many ways it did set the terms of debate and left the No side in the limited situation of having to primarily oppose change based upon concerns about the practicalities of independence. Thus despite losing the referendum, and subsequently resigning as SNP leader, Salmond bequeathed a golden political legacy to his successor, Nicola Sturgeon.

His claim that Scottish politics had been ‘changed, changed utterly’ by the referendum did not appear absurdly excessive as the SNP multiplied in size in the months in the referendum before going on to win all but three MPs in Scotland in the 2015 UK General Election. Moreover it emphasised Holyrood as the key site of democracy in Scotland, placing the issue of further devolution high on the national UK political agenda. Whilst these developments should also be seen as part of wider historical trends, it is important to recognise that these events were far from inevitable. Considerable political skill was required to take advantage of the strategic opportunities afforded by the referendum despite the powerful forces lined up to oppose independence. Formation of a vibrant grassroots movement was crucial in this, but the role of leading figures was also significant in establishing the idea that a Yes vote was a credible and potentially attractive option to previously unpersuaded voters. Salmond’s rhetoric was thus an important part of shaping a debate which has had historic political consequences.

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