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The Scottish National Party

11.1. Introduction

During their lifetime, political parties face a range of strategic dilemmas. Some involve the dilemma between vote, office and policy success (Strøm 1990; De Winter 1998: 238-40). Some revolve around the exact nature of party goals, policies or coalition strategies. However, in some cases, parties also face some fundamental strategic and organisational choices about whether to become parties at all in terms of standing candidates at elections, establishing distinct party platforms and operating exclusive membership through an organisation that is independent of other political parties. As will be discussed below in the case of the Scottish National Party (SNP), such strategic and organisational choices are by no means straightforward but can involve vigorous internal debate, divisions and splits. Such choices might also not be one-off events, but rather recurrent due to fluctuating levels of electoral success and occasions when alternative strategies appear attractive. Both endogenous and exogenous factors are responsible for such developments in the life of a party, as they face strategic choices and organisational challenges (McAllister 1981: 238).

To make sense of such strategic and organisational choices and their effect on party development, this chapter applies Pedersen's model of party lifespans to the SNP. It will examine the impact of passing through Pedersen's different lifespan thresholds on SNP organisation (the party on the ground, party in central office and party in public office) and party goals. It will also focus on key events in relation to the SNP's success in passing the thresholds of representation and relevance/governance, which came in 1999 in the shape of electoral reform and the establishment of the regional level of government in Scotland.In doing so, it recognises that Pedersen's model was a heuristic device (Pedersen 1982: 3), so that there will be no exact conceptual or chronological fit between the model and the SNP's political development. Indeed, the manner in which the SNP passes through the various thresholds is definitely not chronological or sequential, though it does occur at the national level of elections (1934-97) and only latterly at the regional level (1999-2007). In addition, the party's success in surpassing the various thresholds is accompanied by organisational growth and a level of institutionalisation, and without electoral alliances with other political parties, even when it formed the government in Scotland in 2007. Furthermore, in

Pedersen's human terms, the party's birth and infancy lasted a relatively long time and it faced possible death in the 1950s and from 1979-84, only to experience a dramatic resurgence in the 1990s that led the party into minority government in the Scottish Executive in 2007. These latter facts illustrate its existence as a mature, electorally successful party within the autonomist party family.

11.2. THE LIFESPAN OF THE SNP

In the absence of a regional level of government until relatively recently (1999), the lifespan of the SNP is characterised by several decades of struggling to pass the thresholds of declaration and authorisation at the state-level. Stable representation followed from the 1970s. However, it is only with the creation of the Scottish Parliament that the SNP that the SNP could complete the threshold cycle outlined by Pedersen (1982), becoming a party of regional government in 2007 (see table 11.1). The following sections consider the SNP's lifespan in more detail.

Table 11.1. *The lifespan of the SNP*

a) *Regional level*

	I	II	III	IV-A	IV-B	V
1999					SNP	
2007						SNP

b) *State level*

	I	II	III	IV-A	IV-B	V
1934		SNP				
1970			SNP			
1974					SNP	
1979-2010			SNP			

c) *European level*

	I	II	III
1979-2009			SNP[1]

Key: I) Threshold of declaration; II) Threshold of authorisation; III) Threshold of representation; IV-A) Threshold of relevance: blackmail potential; IV-B) Threshold of relevance: coalition potential; V) Threshold of governance.

Note
[1]   The SNP had a nominated MEP in the European Parliament before the first direct elections in 1979.

11.2.1. The Threshold of Declaration

Whilst the threshold of declaration sounds straightforward in theory, in the SNP's case, the exact moment of threshold-crossing is difficult to discern both in the sense of the declaration itself but also the fact that the declaration was rhetorical rather than real. For example, a range of pressure groups merged together to form the National Party of Scotland (NPS) in 1928. This party was the outcome of the failed non-electoral strategy of the Scottish Home Rule Association in the 1920s – especially the strategy of holding a constitutional convention (Keating and Bleiman 1979; Mitchell 1996). The formation of the NPS did lead to electoral contestation as it passed the threshold of declaration to contest 15 seats in the years 1929 to 1933 (Lynch 2002: 37). By contrast, when the SNP was formed in 1934, it contested relatively few elections between then and 1964 – 43 seats contested in all – with only one electoral success in the special conditions of World War Two.[1] Instead, it faced internal conflicts over electoral versus non-electoral strategies and over its political goals.

In the immediate period following its establishment, the SNP faced internal conflicts over whether it should exist as a political party or a cultural movement and then whether it should contest elections or operate as a cross-party pressure group. First, there were internal divisions and expulsions of some prominent SNP members from the party's cultural wing, who were not committed to an electoral approach but who saw the party as a cultural movement (McAllister 1981: 239). Second, a more serious challenge to the threshold of declaration came with the secession of John MacCormick and a number of SNP activists to form the cross-party Scottish Convention in 1942. This secession involved the abandonment of an electoral strategy completely, in order to create a cross-party pressure group with the aim of establishing a constitutional convention to design a self-government policy involving Scotland's political and social elites (Mitchell 1996: 123). MacCormick had attempted to convert the SNP to this strategy in the 1930s. However, having failed to convert, he led a group of nationalists out of the SNP and into the Convention.[2] The new organisation – and the subsequent Scottish National Assembly and National Covenant Association – provided an alternative route for nationalists in this period. It made life both difficult and easy for the SNP. Difficult because it created a competitor for activists, resources and political attention that lasted for ten years.

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[1]   The absence of a general election between 1935 and 1945 is part of the reason for electoral contests in this early period.

[2]   The effect on the SNP organisation is difficult to discern. Brand (1978: 243) calculated that the Scottish Convention had 743 members in March 1943, most coming from the SNP and the Liberals. However, the SNP reported 30 active branches in 1944 and had appointed a full-time organiser, with membership of 1228 by May 1946 (Lynch 2002).

Easy, because it removed opponents of the electoral strategy and of independence from the SNP, so that it became easier for the party to surpass the threshold of declaration as internal opposition was now muted. Thus, when the SNP came to write its new constitution in 1948, it was able to establish a new organisational structure that enforced an exclusive membership on the SNP for the first time (McAllister 1981).[3] The party was also now run by a younger generation of nationalists, committed to both independence and to a long-term approach to electoral politics.

However, though the SNP reached the threshold of declaration in 1948 in more concrete terms than it did at any time since 1934, declaration was just that. It did not mean that the SNP actually could contest elections. Indeed, the striking thing about the SNP's electoral fortunes after 1948 was that they were so poor despite passing the threshold of declaration. The period following the threshold of declaration saw the SNP contest its fewest numbers of Westminster seats, a total of 26 between 1934 and 1948 but only 13 between 1948 and 1960. The SNP was also not particularly active in local elections in this period either, meaning it contested very few local wards and gained little success – 11 contests in 1949, reaching a peak of 34 in 1957 (mostly in Glasgow) and then only 2 contests in 1959 (Lynch 2002: 83). Thus, not only was the party failing to make any progress in surpassing the threshold of declaration in general elections, it was also failing to do so at local elections. Some of the endogenous reasons for this situation will be dealt with in relation to the threshold of authorisation in the next section. However, it is also necessary to consider the political climate at the time, as an exogenous explanation for the SNP's performance in this period. The 1950s in particular can be viewed as the highpoint of two-party politics, class-voting and economic concerns, especially as the United Kingdom (UK) emerged from wartime conditions and rationing. In contrast, the late 1940s and early 1950s was a period of nationalist mobilisation in relation to the National Covenant and the retrieval of the Stone of Destiny from Westminster Abbey in London by a group of student nationalists in December 1950.[4] Both of these events attracted considerable publicity and support within Scotland. Thus the early 1950s were not a 'dead' period for Scottish nationalism in general, only for the SNP specifically, with considerable nationalist activism and prominence not feeding into electoral support for the SNP at local or general elections (Lynch 2002: 77-9).

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[3]   This change led to the resignations of Douglas Young, party chairman from 1942 to 1945 and Roland Muirhead, who left to establish the cross-party Scottish National Congress in 1950.

[4]   The Stone of Destiny was the coronation stone of the Scottish kings, taken by Edward I of England in 1296 and placed in Westminster Abbey. Its removal by a group of nationalists gained widespread publicity. The National Covenant was a highly popular petition signed by about 2 million Scots that called for a Scottish parliament.

11.2.2. Threshold of Authorisation

As noted in the Introduction to this volume, the threshold of authorisation refers to the capacity of a political party to comply with the legal and procedural requirements for contesting elections. In this sense it combines exogenous rules and requirements set by the state and administered by local government with endogenous organisational capacities within political parties (not least in relation to financial resources). In the UK, these legal regulations were fairly limited until quite recently. Before 2000, electoral rules were determined by the various Representation of the People Acts passed by the UK parliament, with implementation by local authorities. However, since 2000, a new regime has been added to this, with the creation of the Electoral Commission through the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act. This legislation gave the Electoral Commission a range of functions such as monitoring electoral law and elections, maintaining data on party donations and spending to ensure parties remain within electoral law, overseeing a formal process for party registration and reviewing parliamentary boundaries.

Before 2000, electoral rules contained details for candidate nominations, election finance and electoral deposits that had to be met if a candidate (and party) was to contest a particular constituency at elections. Candidates would require an official election agent who would be responsible in law for a variety of administrative and financial functions on behalf of the candidate (and effectively the party) – such as gathering and lodging nomination forms, organising printing and publishing of election material, completing the election expenses and so forth. Thus, organisationally (as well as financially), political parties needed a local organisational structure with a modest level of competence to stand candidates at election time.

There were several aspects to the SNP's organisational capacity in the period from 1934 to the mid-1960s that limited its ability to pass the threshold of authorisation and onto that of representation. These were closely connected to the weakness of the party in central office and on the ground. First, there is the fact that general elections in Scotland involved contests in 71 constituencies, with a first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system in single member constituencies. However, the SNP's organisation fell far short of competing in all constituencies. For example, the SNP reported having 28 branches representing 1228 members in May 1946 (Lynch 2002: 66-7), and 2460 members organised into 45 local branches and groups in May 1950 (*ibid*.: 73). In 1960, the party reported only 23 functioning local parties in Scotland and this even declined to 18 in 1962 (*ibid*.: 108). After that, party membership and local organisation rose dramatically and the SNP was capable of emerging as a credible

election-fighting machine in many areas. By 1965, the party had 140 branches, and 484 branches by 1968 (*ibid*.: 108); by the end of 1968 it also claimed to have 125,000 members. Notably, local parties were increasingly able to fight elections without financial or organisational assistance from the central party organisation. However, this had taken forty years to achieve.

Second, for general elections, from 1918 onwards – meaning the whole life of the SNP – candidates/parties were required to lodge an electoral deposit to contest a seat. This deposit was £150 and it would be forfeited if the party gained less than 12.5% of the vote. From 1985, the deposit was changed to £500 and 5% of the vote (and £1000 for European Parliamentary candidates).[5] Providing the deposit and coming up with election campaign funds was a persistent problem for the SNP, especially in the 1940s and 1950s. For example, the party had only £470 to fund the 1950 election campaign and had to subsidise local parties to fight the few seats contested (*ibid*.: 75). In 1951, the two seats contested cost £501 and £492 each, for a party constantly in debt and losing money, with an overdraft of £1457 in 1952 for the national party organisation (*ibid*.: 92). In terms of the election deposit, the SNP's share of the vote frequently fell below the 12.5% hurdle, meaning that every contest yielded few votes but generated costs that had to be met by the local party or the central organisation (see table 11.2). Throughout this period, the SNP was electorally and organisationally static and arguably in danger of dying on its feet. It lacked major sponsors to finance its elections, such as the trade unions supporting Labour and the business community for the Conservatives. It also had a small membership and organisation to sustain campaigning. One way out of such difficulties involved electoral alliances. This strategy was favoured and pursued by one party insider in the 1930s – John MacCormick (MacCormick 1955) – but not by the party. When the issue was discussed in a more serious way in the 1960s, with the proposal for the SNP and Liberals to stand down in favour of each other's candidates in some seats, both leaders and activists in the SNP were opposed (Wolfe 1973), not least because the SNP was doing so well compared to the Liberals.

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5   If, for example, a party were to contest all of the Westminster parliamentary seats in Scotland in 1983, it would cost £10,800 in deposits, with some prospect of losing this money if support in a constituency fell beneath the 12.5% threshold. In 1987, by contrast, a party needed £36,000 to contest all of the Westminster seats in Scotland, though had a greater likelihood of seeing this money back given the 5% threshold per constituency. There was no deposit system for local elections making, them, conceivably, cheap for small parties to contest, though the requirements for nomination, election agents and expenses remained in place, so some level of party organisation was required.

Table 11.2. *SNP electoral contests and lost deposits at general elections, 1935-70*

Election Year	Seats Contested	Lost Deposits
1935	8	6
1945	8	6
1950	3	3
1951	2	1
1955	2	1
1959	5	3
1964	15	12
1966	22	10
1970	65	43

However, after 1960, the party entered a dramatic growth phase in relation to electoral success, organisation, membership and finance. Growth in support at a few by-elections in the early 1960s, central party reorganisation and the appointment of a full-time party organiser (self-funded) combined with more favourable political circumstances to help the SNP grow. Nevertheless, the threshold of authorisation remained a challenge (see table 11.1). For example, in 1964, the SNP contested its largest number of seats – 15 – but lost deposits in 12 of them. All seats were contested for the first time in February 1974.[6] Thus, it took 40 years for the SNP to exist as a truly *national* party, capable of contesting seats across Scotland and emerging as a genuine national force. Of course, whilst the SNP coped with the threshold of authorisation more easily as the party grew in membership and electoral support – meaning it could afford campaign costs and lost deposits – the situation was rather different when the party faced a severe downturn in its fortunes. For example, after the electoral disaster of 1979 – proposals for devolution were defeated in a referendum and the SNP lost 9 of its 11 seats in the general election held a few moths later – the party faced difficult times. Internal divisions led to a loss of electoral support and a decline in membership and money; this meant that lost deposits were more likely and less affordable. At the 1983 election, for example, support for the SNP fell to 11.8% with the loss of 54 deposits.[7] Much of the period that followed in the 1980s was taken up with recovering from this period of severe downturn in the party's fortunes.

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[6] The SNP contested all Westminster seats from this election onwards, except in 1987 when it did not contest Orkney and Shetland in order to give a free run to the Orkney and Shetland autonomy movement.

[7] The change of rules concerning election deposits in 1985 had benefits for the SNP in 1987. At that election, the party lost only one deposit (where it gained less than 5%) in the constituency of Roxburgh and Berwickshire. Had the old rules applied – which required 12.5% – the party would have lost 37 deposits.

11.2.3. Threshold of Representation

In the case of the SNP, the state level was really the only level that mattered in terms of securing representation, as Scotland did not feature regional-level elections until 1999. Whilst the party's difficulties in surpassing the thresholds of declaration and authorisation hold part of the key to the party's inability to pass through the threshold of representation, the FPTP electoral system and the nature of party competition provided further major obstacles to electoral representation. The SNP's first electoral success at a general election was in 1970, with victory in the Western Isles seat (see table 11.3). However, the SNP had won two Westminster by-elections in quite different political conditions in 1945 and 1967. The 1945 victory was at a by-election in Motherwell and Wishaw whilst the Second World War was ongoing. The SNP succeeded as the Conservatives did not contest the Labour-held seat as part of the war-time pact between the main parties not to fight by-elections. The party's second by-election success in Hamilton in 1967 came in more normal political conditions and at a time of dramatically increasing SNP support. Here the party won 46% of the vote and took the seat from Labour, which was in government. Significantly, the SNP's victory allowed it to cross the threshold of relevance as the main parties began to address the issue of Scottish self-government. However, just as with Motherwell and Wishaw in 1945, Hamilton was lost at the subsequent UK general election, so that crossing the threshold of representation was fleeting.

Table 11.3. *Election results in Scotland, 1945-2010*

Year	Conservative		Labour		Liberal Democrats		SNP	
	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats
1945	41.1	27	49.4	40	5.0	0	1.2	0
1950	44.8	32	46.2	32	6.6	2	0.4	0
1951	48.6	35	47.9	35	2.7	1	0.3	0
1955	50.1	36	46.7	34	1.9	1	0.5	0
1959	47.2	31	46.7	38	4.1	1	0.5	0
1964	40.6	24	48.7	43	7.6	4	2.4	0
1966	37.7	20	49.9	46	6.8	5	5.0	0
1970	38.0	23	44.5	44	5.5	3	11.4	1
1974 (Feb)	32.9	21	36.6	41	8.0	3	21.9	7
1974 (Oct)	24.7	16	36.3	41	8.3	3	30.4	11
1979	31.4	22	41.5	44	9.0	3	17.3	2
1983	28.4	21	35.1	41	24.5	8	11.7	2

Year	Conservative		Labour		Liberal Democrats		SNP	
	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats
1987	24.0	10	42.4	50	19.2	9	14.0	3
1992	25.7	11	39.0	49	13.1	9	21.5	3
1997	17.5	0	45.6	56	13.0	10	22.1	6
1999 (S)	16.0	18	39.0	56	14.0	17	29.0	35
2001	16.0	1	43.0	55	16.0	10	20.0	5
2003 (S)	16.5	18	35.0	50	15.0	17	24.0	27
2005[1]	16.0	1	29.0	40	23.0	11	18.0	6
2007 (S)	16.6	17	32.0	46	16.0	16	32.9	47
2010	16.7	1	42.0	41	18.9	11	19.9	6

Notes:
(S): Scottish elections, only constituency vote % is reported.
[1]   Number of Scottish seats at Westminster reduced from 72 to 59.

The limited ability of the SNP to break through the threshold of representation changed markedly in 1974 (see table 11.3). The SNP won 21.9% of the vote and 7 seats in February and then 30.4% and 11 seats in October. The October election was the SNP's electoral peak in terms of share of the vote and placed the party second to Labour. And, whilst numerical representation at Westminster was limited by the FPTP electoral system, it did result in a range of policy measures to address Scottish issues including legislation to create a regional assembly in 1978 – again crossing the threshold of relevance. Had this regional institution been established, it would have had a transformational effect on the political opportunity structure of the SNP. However, it was not to be. The Yes vote was 51.6% but the devolution proposal failed as less than 40% of the registered electorate voted Yes. Though the SNP declined dramatically at the 1979 and 1983 general elections, retaining two seats on each occasion, the party did not disappear. Indeed, whilst these were the party's worst years in recent times, a slow recovery was evident from the mid-1980s and especially at the 1992 and 1997 general elections as support for the party sat at just over 20%.

The SNP also developed a profile at the European level by winning a seat at the European elections in 1979 and retaining representation within the European Parliament continuously since then. The real effect in 1979 was to give a boost to party morale following the devolution debacle and the loss of 9 Westminster seats. However, the result also gave the party a third full-time elected politician, as well a resources and research-support during a time of severe contraction. However, real advances in relation to the threshold of representation came in 1999 with the first elections to the new Scottish Parliament, which employed an Additional Member System. This combined FPTP and regional top-up lists (allocated on a proportional

basis) and provided the SNP with 35 seats out of 129, second place at the election and a role as the main opposition party in the parliament. This situation continued in 2003 in spite of a considerable loss of support and seats for the SNP – the first constituency vote fell to 24% and the party lost 8 seats – before a resurgence in 2007. In the latter election, the SNP became the largest party in the Scottish Parliament in terms of seats (47), first constituency vote (32.9%) and second regional vote (31%) – the first time it has come first at any election in its history – and established a minority government in Edinburgh.

11.2.4. Threshold of Relevance

Pedersen's notion of the threshold of relevance offers a key question for autonomist parties such as the SNP, namely what difference to they make to politics and policy in their region or in the wider state?The impact of the SNP has been felt through politicising the national question and mobilising it into Scottish and UK politics. In this way the SNP has been policy-relevant. As regional government has only been in existence in Scotland since 1999, governmental opportunities have been limited. However, the SNP has exhibited both blackmail and coalition potential in relation to the party system (Sartori 1976), with coalition potential occurring in two distinct formats at Westminster and then in Edinburgh since 1999. Blackmail potential was evident in both the late 1960s and in the mid-1970s as the party crossed the threshold of representation. The SNP's rise in by-elections in the second half of the 1960s – and winning Hamilton in 1967 – created a political impetus for the party's opponents to address Scottish issues. Plaid Cymru's performance in Carmarthen in 1966 (see Elias, this volume) also influenced both Labour and the Conservatives to address the devolution issue. Labour announced it was to create the Royal Commission on the Constitution to examine the issue of devolution in 1968 as a means to head off the rise of the nationalists (HMSO 1973). The Conservatives responded with their Declaration of Perth, which committed the party to establish a legislative assembly for Scotland. This proposal was examined by an internal constitutional committee from 1968 onwards, leading to the publication of Scotland's Government in March 1970 (Mitchell 1991: 58). The committee proposed a directly-elected Scottish Convention, with powers similar to the Scottish committees already in existence at Westminster, but the issue was not pursued with any great conviction when in government from 1970-74.

Whilst such limited accommodations with nationalism aided the main parties at the 1970 election, renewed support for the SNP at by-elections and at the two general elections of 1974 brought clear examples of blackmail potential and policy responses by the main parties. Of the two parties, Labour was the most forthcoming in relation to accommodating nationa-

lism. Not only had the Royal Commission on the Constitution reported in favour of legislative devolution in 1973, but also Labour stood to lose considerable seats and votes to the SNP unless it addressed the devolution issue. Though it was the Conservatives who lost most seats to the SNP in 1974, it was Labour that stood to lose support in its electoral heartlands and, along with it, the seats needed to form a majority in the House of Commons. Thus, the minority Labour government formed in February 1974 announced its intention to bring forward proposals for devolution in the government's legislative programme in March, followed by a government paper on alternatives for devolution in June 1974 (Lynch 2002: 129). This document was followed by the commitment to create a Scottish Assembly in the Labour manifesto for the October 1974 general election (Labour Party 1974). Labour's support for devolution helped the party to retain support and seats in Scotland; electoral support was down only -0.3% compared to February and the party actually gained one seat. However, the SNP was close behind Labour in share of the vote and in many seats, meaning that the devolution issue required follow-through by Labour in government. Labour dealt with devolution as legislation in two different ways. Initially, Labour introduced a joint devolution bill for Scotland and Wales in 1975, which was rejected and withdrawn in the House of Commons in 1976. Separate bills for Scottish and Welsh devolution were then created in 1977 and the Scotland Act was passed in 1978 – albeit subject to a referendum.

Whilst the devolution referendum failed in 1979, the devolution issue did not disappear entirely from the political agenda. The SNP's blackmail potential was tamed for a time, not least as the party descended into internal conflict over strategy and ideology. However, the devolution issue returned after the 1987 general election, with pressure on Labour to make bolder commitments to a Scottish assembly. Following the SNP's by-election victory in Glasgow Govan in November 1988, there was renewed pressure on Labour to promote devolution. This led to its participation in the Scottish Constitutional Convention during 1989-95, which designed a compromise devolution policy amongst political parties, trade unions, local authorities and a range of civic organisations. Much of the Convention's scheme was instituted in the Scotland Act 1998, following the devolution referendum of 1997. Thus, in 1999, the SNP's blackmail potential manifested itself in the creation of a devolved Scottish Parliament. This constitutes the party's most obvious institutional impact on Scottish and UK politics to date.

Whilst the SNP has manifested blackmail potential on several occasions since the 1960s – and seen some policy success as a consequence – coalition potential has been more elusive. The SNP was able to exhibit some coalition potential in the 1974-9 period, when it was involved in sustaining Labour in government after it lost its majority. However, the real coalition

potential here was exhibited by the Liberals, who established a formal pact with Labour to sustain it in government in exchange for limited policy concessions. However, this pact did not involve government office or Ministers for the Liberals, just an agreement that the party would provide Labour with a parliamentary majority when necessary. This situation was quite exceptional in post-war UK politics and has not been seen since.

The creation of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 increased the SNP's coalition potential as coalition government became the norm in the new regional multi-party system. However, the SNP did not enter into coalition discussions after either the 1999 or 2003 Scottish elections, nor was it in a position to do so as secure deals were made between Labour and the Liberal Democrats without reference to other parties. The situation was quite different in 2007, however. The SNP was the leading party after the Scottish election, winning marginally more votes and seats compared to Labour for the first time ever. This placed it in pole position to form a government. However, attempts at forming a coalition administration failed when the Liberal Democrats refused coalition talks. The outcome was an SNP minority government, established with the acquiescence of the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats as well as the active support of the Greens.The new government proceeded to deal with policy and legislation on an issue-by-issue basis, negotiating with opposition parties in the parliament on legislation and budgets. And, of course, this development meant that the SNP passed through the threshold of relevance in relation to blackmail potential and coalition potential, whilst also crossing the threshold of governance – though not in a majoritarian or coalition situation. The minority government was relatively popular in opinion polls in Scotland from 2007 to the autumn of 2009, by which time support for the SNP had eroded. Incumbency was made difficult by the economic situation from 2009, as well as the shift in political focus to the UK level of political action due to the 2010 UK general election, at which the gap between the SNP's popularity at the UK and Scottish levels was even more apparent (the party scored 32.9% in 2007 but only 19.9% in 2010). These incumbency effects also had some effect on the party on the ground, with many party activists drawn into local government and the Scottish Parliament in 2007, making for a rather muted campaign at the UK election in 2010.

However, government status was a key development for the SNP, not merely in historic terms as its first time in government since its establishment in 1934, but also in relation to its attempts to build a credible position as a governing party as well as to lead the constitutional debate on independence and more powers for the Scottish Parliament. The SNP government hosted a National Conversation on constitutional change from 2007-2009. This involved consultation events on further devolution and independence across Scotland, as well as discussions with a variety of pres-

sure groups and the publication of a wide range of government policy documents related to constitutional change, the economic powers available under devolution, media and broadcasting policy, and so forth (Harvey and Lynch 2010). Around the same time, the Unionist parties in the Scottish Parliament and at the UK level agreed to establish the Commission on Scottish Devolution to examine the case for more devolved powers for Scotland. The Commission report in 2009 proposed a range of minor legislative powers be transferred to Scotland in addition to the creation of a controversial new tax-sharing arrangement (Commission on Scottish Devolution 2009). Implementation of these proposals was promised by the UK coalition government of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats after the 2010 UK election, with a new Scotland bill to be published in autumn 2010.

11.3. Changes in Party Organisation

Changes in the SNP's organisation during its lifespan are summarised in table 11.4. For the SNP, passing the thresholds of declaration, authorisation and representation were rather drawn out affairs; they were in fact processes rather than events. However, the period that preceded the party's electoral growth and its arrival in electoral politics as a serious force in 1974 involved extensive organisational growth and membership expansion in the 1960s; these changes were necessary precursors to the crossing of the threshold of representation.

The SNP's organisation had fluctuated at a relatively low level from 1934 into the mid-1960s. The party had a functioning central office for some of this time, but very limited membership, finance and organisational capacity. In the 1960s, that all changed dramatically as both the party on the ground and the party in central office expanded rapidly. Firstly, the party organisation was overhauled following an internal report in 1963, with a restructuring of office-bearers and elected positions within the party. The intention was to make party structures more concerned with policy and strategy rather than with routine administrative matters (Lynch 2002: 106). Secondly, a full-time national organiser was appointed (and self-funded) to oversee organisational growth and this individual adopted a hands-on approach to growing the party's membership and building branches across Scotland.

However, what was key to these two organisational developments was the level of popularity for the SNP and for Scottish autonomy in the changed economic and political circumstances of the 1960s. For example, competing organisations to the SNP in the national movement had declined and disappeared by the 1960s, leaving the SNP as the sole surviving organisation of a national movement that had its origins in the 1920s (Brand 1978). Moreover, the SNP focused on contesting by-elections and gained

new levels of support as a more attractive third party alternative to Labour or the Conservatives. It did so through addressing socio-economic concerns at a time when the condition of the Scottish economy was an important issue; it was especially important in Labour constituencies in a period of Labour government from 1964 on. Therefore internal and external developments combined to produce a positive political opportunity structure for the SNP.

Organisational growth at this stage was dramatic. As noted above, the number of party branches grew rapidly during the 1960s (Lynch 2002: 109). The impact of this on party organisation was threefold. Firstly, it improved the party's election-fighting capacity across Scotland, meaning that it allowed the party to contest some seats for the first time, fulfilling the threshold of declaration in concrete terms. Secondly, the influx of members provided funds for fighting elections, campaigning between elections and also expanding the party's central organisational capacity, in the form of central offices compromised of policy and communications staff rather than purely administrators. Resources were spent on developing and communicating policy (Müller-Rommel 2002), with the production and distribution of party literature across Scotland; the SNP's professionalisation even eclipsed the capacity of the other parties in some areas. Thirdly, these developments helped the party to cross the threshold of representation at the Hamilton by-election in 1967, local council elections in 1968 then the general election in 1970 when the SNP won its first seat outside of a by-election (and continuous electoral representation at Westminster ever since). Though membership, local organisation and finance all dipped after the late 1960s growth spurt, the party was on an entirely different footing after this period and experienced a second growth period in the mid-1970s as the party won 7 then 11 seats in 1974 and the issue of Scottish devolution made the SNP policy relevant in the 1974-9 period.

Of course, the SNP's electoral peak in the 1970s was not without its downside. Organisationally, the 1974 election victories created competing leaderships in the SNP at Westminster and in Scotland, with limited communication between them. This meant that internal party life became dominated by conflicts between the party in central office and in public office, which spilled over to include the party on the ground after 1979. These debates involved the relationship between the party and the Labour government, attitudes to devolution and in time, the ideological positioning of the SNP. On the one hand, a group of Members of Parliament (MPs) in London was dealing with life at Westminster for the first time, sustaining or opposing a weak Labour government to help bring about legislation to create a Scottish assembly. The voting behaviour of the group on legislation at Westminster was under the spotlight, with divisions within the group about devolution and whether to support Labour policy in other are-

as.[8] On the other hand, there were the party's elected office-bearers and National Executive members in Scotland, the central organisation. These had to deal with issues in Scotland, had limited contact with the parliamentary group and sought to see the party advance against Labour by adopting centre-left positions that the MPs might have opposed in votes at Westminster.

When the SNP faced this situation again after 1999 – when it again had a substantial body of elected members – the difficulties of a dual leadership were avoided as most of the existing party office-bearers and National Executive members became Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs). Moreover, having the parliament in Edinburgh made contact with the rest of the party much easier as did the need to keep party activists onside to gain prominent positions on the regional electoral lists. The overlap of the party in central and public office was successful in avoiding conflict, until after the 2003 Scottish election, when a downturn in electoral support for the SNP undermined the party leader, John Swinney, leading to the return of former leader, Alex Salmond. Though Swinney resigned as leader in 2004, he was instrumental in making organisational changes to the SNP. Swinney orchestrated reforms in internal party democracy that replaced delegate-voting with the one-member-one-vote procedure to select party leaders and parliamentary candidates. Before the 2003 Scottish election, several prominent SNP MSPs had been effectively deselected by the actions of local parties with small numbers of members, giving them a disproportionate impact on selecting MSPs. The 'one-member-one-vote' policy was seen to remove this problem. Swinney also altered the SNP's rules to make it more difficult to challenge the party leader, in order to prevent the destabilisation of the leadership. When Swinney was challenged as SNP leader in 2003, the challenge came from an ordinary party member (not an MSP) who only needed the nomination of one local party organisation to stand. From 2004, any candidate for the SNP leadership or deputy leadership would require the support of 100 members from at least 20 local branches to be nominated.

In addition, whilst the SNP's organisational expansion preceded electoral representation in the 1960s and 1970s, the party's electoral decline (along with the fall in importance of the devolution issue in 1979) saw organisational losses and something of a battle for survival for the SNP as the party declined at all levels. The party's central office shrank to the bare bones – losing communications and policy staff – and saw its branch organisation collapse from around 500 in 1980 to a much more concrete 281 branches by

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8   The minutes of meetings of the parliamentary group at Westminster were kept private to avoid leaks to the media, as many votes were 6 to 5, which would have demonstrated how divided the MPs were.

1988.[9] Membership also dropped, from 28,558 in 1980 to 12,060 in 1985, and fundraising was a problem until the 1990s, with the party losing most of its staff and had few funds for organisational modernisation or campaigning. Election of an MEP in 1979, rising to 2 MEPs in 1994, did provide some research and office resources related to the European Parliament, though insufficient to compensate for the loss of MPs and central office capacity. By the late 1990s, the SNP had recovered from the post-1979 crisis, with increased levels of electoral support, more stable membership, increased finances and also a rebuilt central office – comprised of research and communications staff rather than simply administrators. Moreover, much of this organisational capacity was maintained from 1999 to 2007, with more focus on campaign activity through the SNP's call centre, and enhanced policy capacity through the creation of a central research unit of 7 staff in the Scottish Parliament as well as MSPs' researchers.

Whilst the 1990s saw gradual organisational and electoral improvements for the SNP, it was the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 that transformed the SNP's political status, electoral fortunes, financial resources and organisational capacity. In this sense, access to this new institutional level had a radical effect on the party unlike anything seen at the state-wide and European levels. Three things are worth pointing out about the post-1999 development of the SNP.

Firstly, the party's electoral success produced the highest number of full-time elected members, provided them with prominent positions in the parliament and media, and also generated parliamentary resources for local offices and research and administrative staff. The party had 6 MPs and 2 MEPs before devolution; after devolution it also had 35 MSPs and a lot more staff.[10] The SNP suddenly looked bigger and more of a force across Scotland. This phenomenon was even more pronounced after the 2007 election, when the SNP won FPTP seats in some areas for the first time and had a total of 47 MSPs elected to the Scottish Parliament.

Secondly, the party's electoral strength coupled with changes to arrangements for state funding for parties ensured a significant growth in resources for the SNP as a result of devolution. Under existing funding rules, the SNP received public funds to support its MPs at Westminster (known as Short money). This scheme became operational in the Scottish Parliament after 1999 and was accompanied by new money to support policy development. These changes transformed the resource base of a party that had previously relied on individual donations and found itself unable to compete with

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[9]   105 of these branches had less than 30 members and 15 were single constituency branches (Lynch 2002: 163).

[10]   There was 336 full and part-time MSP staff on the Scottish Parliament's payroll on 31 March 2000 (Scottish Parliament 2000). How many worked for the SNP was difficult to determine, though the party had 35 of the 129 MSPs.

Labour and the Conservatives in general election campaigning as a result. For example, from March 2001 to March 2007, the combined income from public funds totalled £1,688,961.49 (total registered donations to the SNP were £3,152,255.58 in this period). Public funding plus increased individual donations helped the SNP to outspend Labour at the 2007 Scottish election by £1,383,462 to £1,102,866. The improvement in finances was especially important because SNP membership actually declined in this period to 8,209 (at the time of the 2004 leadership election), before recovering to 13,236 in 2007 after a central membership scheme was instituted. In January 2010, the SNP announced its membership had risen to 15,644.

Thirdly, as discussed briefly above, the post-devolution period saw two shifts in power within the SNP. Leadership and policy influence passed to the MSPs after 1999, though these were tightly integrated in the pre-1999 leadership and National Executive. Then in 2007, such powers passed to the party in public office much more directly as the SNP formed a minority government in the Scottish Executive. Because of the overlap and integration of the MSPs within existing party structures, there was little conflict compared to the 1970s,[11] and government office has not really altered this situation. Despite problems in governing, there has been little internal conflict within the SNP, perhaps aided by a minority government that has not involved fundamental policy trade-offs with coalition partners. This situation contrasted very dramatically with the period of internal conflict that ripped through the party after the failed devolution referendum and the 1979 UK election. In any case, the party in central office is now less important than it was before 1999. The shift of power from the party on the ground and in central office was well-managed by the party's political elites.

Table 11.4. *Pressure for organisational change upon crossing thresholds*

Threshold	Regional level	State level	European level
V	**Medium** - Shift of power to the party in government		
IV-B			
IV-A			
III	**Strong** - New staff and resources - Shift of power to the party in public office	**Medium** - Increase of staff and resources - Conflict between central office and public office	**Medium** - Increase of staff and resources

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[11] Despite the relative peace within the party at large, 3 different MSPs left the party or were expelled due to indiscipline and sat in the Parliament as independents.

Threshold	Regional level	State level	European level
II	**Medium** - Candidate selection and policy-making procedures	**Strong** - Creation of local and central organisation and resources	
I		**Strong** - Creation of local and central organisation and resources	

Key: I) Threshold of declaration; II) Threshold of authorisation; III) Threshold of representation; IV-A) Threshold of relevance: blackmail potential; IV-B) Threshold of relevance: coalition potential; V) Threshold of governance.

11.4. Changes in Party Goals

Party goal change within the SNP has been limited in recent years. Debate over party goals was most pronounced in the period from the 1930s to 1940s, when there was strategic differences within the SNP over contesting elections versus focusing on cross-party initiatives. Both goals and strategy became clearer after the split in the party in 1942, when a group of activists left to form the Scottish Convention (see above). After this departure, the SNP became more party-oriented in terms of trying to focus on elections to combine a vote-seeking and policy-seeking approach, with the goal being independence for Scotland. This situation lasted until the 1970s, when the SNP was caught up in debates on devolution and, most notably, in supporting devolution (not independence) in the House of Commons from 1974-78 and at the devolution referendum of 1979. This development did not involve goal change as such – as the SNP still supported independence – but caused strategic disputes within the party over how to respond to intermediate institutional reforms short of independence. The problem here was the party losing support and internal coherence from becoming involved in another party's constitutional goals, as opposed to independence. These disputes were deep and damaging, especially after the 1979 referendum debacle. After this, the SNP entered a period of internal fighting over attitudes to devolution versus independence; gradualists who supported devolution as a first step to independence were opposed by fundamentalists who adopted an 'independence nothing less' attitude. In the short-term, the fundamentalists were victorious after 1979, before the gradualists reasserted themselves. This division was accompanied by ideological factionalism over the extent of the SNP's centre-left identity from 1979-84, which was linked to but not synonymous with the gradualist-fundamentalist divide in the party. However, the effect was that the party's internal life and external political status became contaminated by conflict over goals and ideologies. As a consequence, the party lost both members and voters.

The votes versus policy dilemma is a useful means of understanding the SNP's problems during these years. The party had gained electoral support as a result of popular support for Scottish autonomy in the broad sense, rather than independence. In that sense votes translated into policy, but not influence over the exact contents of policy (a not dissimilar situation occurred from 2007-10). After the 1974 elections, SNP MPs at Westminster, and the party at large, found itself caught up in debates about the details of Labour's devolution legislation in 1976 and 1978 as well as tangled up in the referendum campaign in 1978-9.The party was unable to play a decisive role in shaping devolution policy from 1974-9. Moreover, it was left with the choice of supporting a Labour minority government in delivering a flawed devolution policy or, alternatively, defeating the government and losing the prospect of a Scottish assembly altogether.However, after 4 years of debate on devolution and a government troubled by economic and political crises, the momentum behind constitutional change had receded by 1979, though there was an expectation that devolution would actually be delivered at the referendum. The SNP's subsequent losses at the 1979 general election cannot be understood in relation to the trade-off between policy and votes as the context of the 1979 general election was so different from 1974. The devolution agenda had run its course by 1979, with voters using the SNP as a vehicle for constitutional change in 1974 then switching back to their partisan preferences on other issues in 1979, especially government performance and the state of the economy.

History did not repeat itself in subsequent years. The SNP altered its independence policy in the late 1980s in favour of an explicit policy of independence within the European Union. The goal of independence was thus Europeanised at a time of important advances in supranational integration (Lynch 1996). This policy change was popular and was part of the reason for increased SNP support in the late 1980s. The party also resisted becoming involved with its opponents in designing a common policy for devolution in the shape of the Scottish Constitutional Convention (1989-1995). Staying away from the Convention cost the SNP popularity in the short-term, but it meant that its independence in Europe policy remained pure, thus avoiding the post-1979 difficulty of being co-opted into supporting devolution rather than independence. The party retained this position until after the publication of the Labour government's white paper on a Scottish parliament in July 1997. This meant the SNP could campaign for independence in Europe at the 1992 and 1997 general elections, and maximise the pressure on Labour over devolution and its delivery after 1997. The SNP did come to support devolution at the 1997 referendum, and participated in cross-party campaigning in support of the Yes vote. Crucially, in

contrast to 1979, the referendum was a success, with the Scottish Parliament established in 1999.

Institutional change in the shape of the Scottish Parliament radically altered the political opportunity structure for the SNP. Devolution meant that Scotland had a regional level of government for the first time and a context in which the SNP was set to do well. Not only did devolution allow the SNP the best forum in which to campaign on Scottish issues and the constitution, but the electoral system for the parliament (using a combination of FPTP and PR) was also likely to deliver many more seats for the SNP compared to the FPTP system used in general elections. This development affected the SNP in two ways in relation to party goals. First, the parliament provided an institutional mechanism with which to hold an independence referendum – a democratic mandate and trigger for independence. SNP policy goals were therefore strategically softened to promise an independence referendum rather than immediate independence. This was an attempt to appeal to soft nationalist voters concerned about the rush to independence, allowing voters to support the SNP as the main opposition party knowing that they would have a future opportunity to decide on Scotland's constitutional future. Second, this approach dovetailed with the SNP's attempts to cast itself as a party of government. The party adopted a range of policies and personnel with the explicit goal of entering the Scottish Executive.

These new goals required the SNP to mature as a party, be less oppositional and more focused on policy and institutions rather than the constitutional issue alone. This focus on office success did not work in 1999 or most obviously in 2003, but succeeded in 2007 when the SNP overtook Labour as the leading party for the first time ever. This reality increased the primacy of the regional level of government over the UK-level and notably, the SNP did not see any electoral benefits from regional office at the UK election in 2010. In addition, the SNP contributed to advancing the issue of regional autonomy whilst in government but failed to hold an independence referendum due to lack of support in the Scottish Parliament. There was also no evidence of increased support for independence amongst Scottish voters during the SNP's time in regional office. The party did not change its fundamental goal of independence, instead it used regional office to attempt to steer the debate on greater autonomy for the devolved institutions and took a consensual approach to change through its three-year National Conversation consultation.

11.5. The Policy Impact of the SNP

In terms of policy impact, there are three interconnected areas that merit consideration. Firstly, there is the general issue of territorial/constitutional politics that the SNP elevated onto the political agenda. Whilst there was a

national movement in Scotland before the 1960s, the constitutional issue was rarely prominent and issues such as the economy and employment, were seldom viewed through a distinctive Scottish lens. However, this began to change from the 1960s onwards. Constitutional politics came to the fore – though fluctuating in intensity and importance – whilst Scottish issues or a Scottish variant of UK issues came to be addressed by the other political parties. Indeed, the other political parties began to stress their Scottish identity in this period, producing distinctive Scottish manifestos (Labour only did this for the first time in October 1974), changing party names, symbols and organisations to reflect the Scottish dimension. Thus the SNP helped to bring about changes in the nature of party competition as well as the party system itself.

Secondly, although the SNP sought to get the issue of independence onto the political agenda, its real success was getting devolution onto the agenda, as the other parties responded to the SNP's electoral success by formulating their own policy on Scottish self-government. In the case of Labour, this meant legislating for devolution in government in 1978 and 1998, with the Scottish Parliament established in 1999. Thus the SNP's success saw two waves of institutional development in favour of Scottish autonomy. Since then, the SNP helped to advance the debate for greater policy autonomy for the devolved parliament. The SNP proposed fiscal autonomy from 2002, whilst the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats also moved to support greater powers for the Scottish Parliament (Scottish Liberal Democrats 2006). After the 2007 Scottish election, all of the main parties proposed institutional change to the Scottish government and parliament, with the SNP holding its National Conversation during 2007-9 and the Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats publishing the results of their Commission on Scottish Devolution in 2009.

Third, there is the impact of the SNP in government in Scotland for the first time since May 2007.Most importantly for the party is the constitutional issue, with the SNP looking to advance independence through using the government machine to produce a draft white paper on independence and an independence referendum. The party also sought to cooperate with other political parties to gain more policy powers for the parliament. Some progress on the independence would thus seem to be essential during the SNP's period in government; if office success means no policy success in this key area, then activist and voter dissatisfaction would be the likely result, even if soft nationalist voters like some of the SNP's policy success in other areas of government. The SNP's performance here was mixed, with no referendum being held during the 2007-2011 legislature.

The SNP has also tried to advance Scottish interests and make Scotland appear more state-like. There was intergovernmental cooperation with other devolved institutions in the UK, such as collaboration with Northern

Ireland in pursuit of taxation powers, and Wales in an effort to seek more legislative powers. The SNP also sought more Scottish input into EU policy and tried to develop more formal mechanisms for interacting with the UK government. This was the first time in which the SNP governed Scotland and it spanned two different UK governments. Relations between the SNP government and UK government under Labour were relatively poor at the public level but more positive in the early period of the UK Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition in 2010.

Third, there is the 'good government' dimension, meaning producing a situation in which the SNP is seen as a success in office in domestic policy areas such as education, policing, environment and health, in addition to the economy (Scottish Government 2007, SNP 2007).[12] Improving Scotland's economic performance was not just an important aspect of the SNP's plan for government, but also intrinsic to promoting independence itself: with Scotland strong enough economically to succeed as an independent state. However, some of the policy performance began to be undermined with the onset of economic recession, as proposals that required public investment (such as increased police numbers, a local council tax freeze, free prescription charges, free personal care for the elderly and so forth) came under financial pressure. The SNP government had to alter its expansive approach to public services and the economy from 2007 to a more defensive strategy to manage recession in 2008-9 (Scottish Government 2009). However, one significant area of success for the SNP government was in the area of renewable energy. Not only did the government assist in levering investment into this area to expand renewable energy in Scotland, but it also arguably came to control part of a policy area – energy – even though it was reserved to the UK government under the Scotland Act 1998.

11.6. Conclusion

This chapter has examined the SNP's lifespan since its formation, focusing on key internal and external events and developments that have assisted – and at times prevented – passage through different thresholds towards electoral success and relevance as a political party. Passing through the different thresholds has also been connected to organisational changes and changes in party goals. Key to such developments have been the relatively late transformation of the SNP's political opportunity structure in the shape of the creation of a Scottish level of government in 1999, using an electoral system that facilitated effective vote-gathering. At the same time,

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[12] The Scottish Executive established a Council of Economic Advisors in June 2007 to advise on economic policy, chaired by the former head of the Royal Bank of Scotland, George Mathewson. This initiative became controversial due to the cost of the organisation.

this institutional change boosted the party's coalition potential and its prospects of obtaining government office. This was achieved for the first time in 2007:a grand total of seventy-three years after the party was founded in 1934 (a long time to wait for office success compared to many other autonomist parties). However, the effect of government office on party organisation and goals remains to be seen.

There are a number of specific concluding points to be made about the SNP's development and its ability to cross Pedersen's thresholds within the lifecycle of political parties. First, whilst the threshold of declaration appeared as the most simple of thresholds to cross, the level of strategic contestation within the Scottish national movement made this threshold highly problematic for the SNP. For example, the threshold of declaration was highly contested in the national movement and then within the SNP after 1934. The SNP only passed the threshold in 1948. Even then, it did not become a reality until the 1960s and the SNP fought all Scottish seats for the first time in February 1974. Thus it effectively took 40 years for the threshold of declaration to become organisationally complete. Second, the threshold of authorisation was legally straightforward with few legal obstacles to the SNP in participating in elections. However, organisational obstacles stood in the SNP's way here – meaning lack of members, limited local party organisation, financial costs of election campaigning and the need to fund an election deposit for each party candidate. These internal factors were responsible for the SNP's weak capacity to contest elections and also for the fact that its ability to cross the threshold of declaration was solely rhetorical and acted as a blockage to surpassing the thresholds of representation and relevance.

In relation to the threshold of representation, the electoral system as well as party organisation and finance placed limits on the SNP's development and performance. Representation was achieved sporadically at by-elections in 1945 and 1967, before the party was able to secure electoral representation at a general election in 1970. Since then, the SNP has had continuous state-level representation, peaking in 1974. Moreover, the party's best performances saw it cross the threshold of relevance in relation to blackmail potential in the late 1960s and mid-1970s. Devolution itself in 1999 was also an example of the SNP's blackmail potential being fulfilled. Moreover, the new institution increased the SNP's relevance as the electoral system for the Scottish Parliament made single party majoritarian government highly unlikely; coalition or minority government became the norm, as the SNP discovered in 2007. In this context, the SNP succeeded in becoming a party of government at the regional level. However, crossing this threshold had limited effects on the SNP. It brought about little internal organisational change or tensions and had modest effects on policy change and performance. Support for the party has fluctuated in govern-

ment although has remained relatively strong. Office allowed the party to help build support for greater autonomy but not independence. Public support for independence has remained low and no independence referendum has been held. In this respect, the SNP has to date been unable to use government office to deliver on its key territorial goal.

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