

Paradiplomacy as Nation-Building: The Politics of Scotland's International Development Policy (1999-2022)

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Abstract: Why do substate actors engage in foreign affairs even if endowed with limited formal powers? How are these activities institutionalised and legitimised? This article addresses these questions by examining a critical case: the rise of Scotland's international development cooperation. The spotlight is put on the domestic sources of foreign policy formation. Our core argument is that the politics of nation-building underpins both the ambition and the increased distinctiveness of the Scottish approach to development. This nation-building effort is mainly reflected in the emergence of an assertive narrative: 'Scotland as a good global citizen'. Another core insight is the strong articulation between domestic and international representations. The external projections of the Scottish government mirror the domestic agenda. Our article places the striking Scottish case in analytical and comparative perspective.

Keywords: Paradiplomacy; nation-building; territorial politics; international development; foreign aid; Scotland

Acknowledgments: We thank Aedan MacRae for invaluable research assistance. We thank Nicola Cogan, Carme Gual Via, Chris Law, Paul Ortega Etcheverry, Katrien de Pauw, and Sigurd Rothe for their time and for sharing their experience. We thank Karlo Basta, Julie Kaarbo, Kasia Kaczmarek, Michael Keating, and participants of the International Relations Research Group at the University of Edinburgh (25 October 2021). Funding from the Carnegie Trust ('Subnational development cooperation: A new research agenda') is gratefully acknowledged.

In May 2021, the Scottish National Party (SNP) went on to win a historic fourth term in office, consolidating a structural realignment in the territorial politics of the United Kingdom (UK). The campaign focused on the ultimate constitutional question: independence or not. An intriguing policy development went largely unnoticed: the SNP manifesto included a strong commitment towards international development. This bold party pledge was puzzling in two respects. For one thing, according to the 1998 Scotland Act, international affairs are ‘reserved’ rather than ‘devolved’ areas. And, indeed, the issue was barely mentioned in nationalist discourse at the dawn of the devolution era (SNP 1999). For another, countries’ commitment to development has been tested over the austerity decade. Although the UK was initially the outlier which bucked the trend (Mawdsley 2017), the British aid consensus collapsed post-Brexit. The demise of the Department for International Development (DFID) in 2020 and the aid cuts imposed by the Johnson government in July 2021 epitomised the growing chasm between political priorities south and north of the border.

So, what is going on here? Why is Scottish government showing commitment to international development in unlikely conditions? Why have Edinburgh and London been undertaking divergent policy pathways after a period of latent accommodation?

The observation that Scotland, a ‘stateless nation’, is engaged internationally and even pursues an independent foreign policy is not too surprising. There is an established literature on the international affairs of substate actors, a subfield known as ‘paradiplomacy’ (Aldecoa and Keating 2013; Kuznetsov 2014; Tavares 2016; Schiavon 2018). Despite these best efforts, this scholarship is still ‘work in progress’. Core questions remain: Why and when do substate actors decide to conduct foreign relations in the first place? How are international activities structured and legitimised? How do the different dimensions of paradiplomacy (e.g., trade and climate policy) interact with each other and with ‘domestic’ policy? In essence, we need to know more about the nature and implications of paradiplomacy. The area of development cooperation, in particular, remains uncharted territory (yet see Kania 2021).

Our overarching aim is to fill this knowledge gap by shedding light on the political underpinnings of Scotland’s international development. The spotlight is put on the domestic sources of foreign policy formation. Our concrete research questions are: Why does the Scottish government pursue a distinctive approach to international development? What have been the key drivers of policy change? How can we account for the shape and trajectory of the Scottish international development strategy?

To get purchase into these questions, our theoretical framework bridges two hitherto unconnected literatures: paradiplomacy and aid politics. A core insight from paradiplomacy is that the politics of nation-building can be a major domestic source of foreign policy. In turn, building the nation may involve both identity and institutional dimensions. We expect these insights to give us leverage into ‘why’ and ‘when’ questions. The aid literature, on the other hand, may offer clues into ‘how’ questions,

mainly regarding the calibration of the policy strategy. To connect these two sets of claims, we assume that political parties are the key agents of policy change. Parties in government are the actors which actually face, mediate and represent the incentive structure suggested by the paradiplomacy and aid literatures.

Our methodological approach represents the new generation of case studies. We engage in an intensive examination of a single case to gain leverage into the wider phenomenon (Gerring 2017). Specifically, we embrace the logic of a ‘heuristic’ design (George and Bennett 2005). We build on existing analytical tools to make sense of the Scottish case; concomitantly, we generate novel insights to inspire further research on paradiplomacy and substate development. Our case is ‘least-likely’ in some respects: Scotland lacks formal foreign-policy powers; austerity has not been a fertile ground for development cooperation. Following Goertz and Mahoney (2012), we exploit within-case variation to pick up the causal complexity underlying policy formation. Our case narrative is supported by observations drawn from primary sources, most notably policy documents, but also party manifestos and key speeches.

Our goal is to provide a comprehensive assessment of Scotland’s involvement in international development over the devolution era. Inspired by the leading effort of Alexander (2014), our work extends the scholarship in fundamental ways. Crucially, we expand the time frame by including the consolidation of the strategy in 2016 and its refreshment in 2021. We also integrate a wealth of additional primary material and a valuable comparative angle. Ultimately, we are contributing to three core debates. Firstly, we push the frontiers of paradiplomacy studies by examining a hitherto overlooked policy domain. Secondly, we offer a fresh perspective into subnational cooperation by developing a nuanced understanding of political motivations. Thirdly, we bring up an unknown policy angle into the topical issue of Scottish independence.

The article is structured as follows. In the next section, we draw theoretical insights by integrating the literatures on paradiplomacy and aid politics. We then document the rise and ambition of Scotland’s international development cooperation. This is followed by an account of the increased policy divergence between Scotland and the UK. In the next section, we go deeper into the domestic sources of policy formation by looking at the intersection between the politics of nation-building and the politics of aid. We conclude by locating the Scottish case in comparative perspective.

Paradiplomacy, nation-building and aid politics

At a conference on the state of paradiplomacy, the leading scholar Professor Michael Keating made two fundamental observations. The first observation was that paradiplomacy refers to the external projections of substate actors aimed at supporting local agendas. Subnational governments get involved internationally to achieve domestic political goals. The second observation was that the scope of paradiplomacy expanded over the years. In the past, paradiplomacy was dominated by economic

considerations: trade, investment, tourism (Keating and Aldecoa 1999). The new generation of paradiplomacy deals with climate change, human rights, gender, international development (Paquin 2022; Reinsberg and Dellepiane 2022; Royles 2017; Setzer 2017). Paradiplomacy is now a space for social engagement, political exchange, cultural reproduction. The premise is the existence of multiple ways of imagining the territory. The two points made by Keating are central to our inquiry: the domestic sources of paradiplomacy are key; the paradiplomatic agenda is inclusive.

From a Scottish standpoint, a natural theoretical angle is the notion of protodiplomacy, the subtype of paradiplomacy aimed at promoting a secessionist project (Cornago 2018). The core argument is that national movements with strong state-building aspirations would develop an active foreign policy to advance the ‘independence cause’ abroad. At face value, the primary motivation behind protodiplomatic efforts is building an external coalition around independence. But this argument should not be overstated. As far as constructing legitimacy is concerned, the domestic audience may be as important as the international. Protodiplomacy is not just about convincing a reluctant foreign public; it is also about broadening the domestic coalition. Protodiplomacy is ultimately a form of nation-building.

In turn, nation-building should be understood as a deeply political operation involving two key dimensions. The first dimension is institutional: the creation of governance capacities to underpin the pathway towards ‘stateness’. States are not created *tabula rasa*; they are the product of decades—if not centuries—of nation-building. This is the basic motivation behind paradiplomacy and protodiplomacy in particular. Substate actors seeking to develop the institutional capacities of consolidated nation-states. They often want to secure these powers to ‘do things differently’. Which brings us to the second, cognitive dimension: the construction of a distinctive national narrative. Protodiplomacy as nation-building is also about consolidating an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 2006), or even constructing a ‘symbolic state’ (Basta 2021).

Building the nation is a historically embedded *process* which can take multiple shapes and forms. The concepts of para- and protodiplomacy are fluid categories. For example, Paquin (2018) developed the notion of ‘identity paradiplomacy’ to add nuance to the case of Quebec. Same thinking applies to the connection between nation-building and independence. De-jure independence may be (or not) the endpoint of a secessionist challenge. Yet: we can still observe consistent nation-building efforts even in the absence of an outright independence challenge. Precisely the point that Paquin made in relation to Quebec, inspired by the experience of Catalonia under *Pujolismo*. Along this continuum, various forms of paradiplomacy can emerge to accommodate claims for enhanced regional autonomy or diverse territorial identities. Again: the core motivation is the drive to secure political agency to ‘do things differently’. The politics of nation-building (independence) should be seen as a strong (extreme) manifestation of this craving for autonomy and self-representation.

Our second set of insights is drawn from the aid politics literature. International development -or development cooperation as often known- is a policy domain with specific features. A starting observation is the presence of heated debates regarding the merits of aid, which can escalate into a toxic political contestation around the competing claims of ‘aid optimists’ and ‘aid pessimists’ (Wright and Winters 2010). We expect the ‘politicisation of aid’ to be a source of policy formation by shaping the way development assistance is organised and legitimised. Given the significance of ‘donor side politics’ (Bearce and Tirone 2010), a functional alignment between the cooperation activities of advanced nations and the development needs of recipients in the Global South should not be taken for granted. In the same vein, donors are not expected to fully internalise efficiency and aid-effectiveness considerations. This may be because they lack capacity or still need to be socialised into international norms around aid—as the case of the small donors in Eastern Europe illustrates (Szent-Iványi and Lightfoot 2015; Szent-Iványi, Reinsberg, and Lightfoot 2019).

A range of domestic constraints can shape aid policies (Tingley 2000). Public preferences are a latent determinant of countries’ commitment to development (Milner 2013). Helping the poor abroad is more likely in the face of shared beliefs around equality and international solidarity. While the lack of public support can undermine the legitimacy of aid, particularly in hard times (Heinrich et al. 2015). Yet, the effects of public sentiment may not be direct. Aid politics is often mediated by the media (Van Belle 2004). Negative or positive representations of aid may affect politicians’ motivations. Or political elites may target the media to place ‘cues’ to citizens (Dur and Schlipphak 2021). The working of public-opinion and media mechanisms at the subnational level remains uncertain though.

A traditional political-economy story connects support (opposition) to aid with the material interests of a given constituency (Milner and Tingley 2010). Given the salience of downstream providers in subnational operations, we expect an ecosystem of organisations (development NGOs, universities, private firms) to have stakes in the continuity and eventual expansion of development programmes. Another key constraint on aid policymaking is bureaucratic politics (Dietrich 2021). The question is how development cooperation is structured within government. A relevant angle is the standing of international development *vis-a-vis* other foreign policy concerns, notably trade and security. The institutionalisation of a professional, well-funded ‘agency’ is often seen as a robust commitment towards development. Bureaucratic autonomy is a complex issue though. Causality goes both ways: greater autonomy can lead to enhanced capacities; the level of autonomy is in itself shaped by the deep determinants of aid. Indeed, all the above-mentioned factors--public opinion, media effects, civil society—are meant to operate in subtle ways in individual cases. Our analytic line is to consider them as potential constraints on foreign policy formation.

The remaining question is how to bridge the insights from the paradiplomacy and aid literatures. Our position is to recognise the centrality of political parties and hence party competition in policymaking. Parties are indeed a common concern of our two reference literatures. Party systems are at the heart of territorial politics (Caramani 2004), even explaining the survival or breakdown of federations (McKay 2004). Similarly, the aid literature pays growing attention to partisanship (Dietrich et al. 2020). In this light, it makes sense to adopt an actor-centred approach which places parties as key agents of change. In essence: we expect governing parties to arbitrate the set of incentives emerging from the dynamics of paradiplomacy and aid politics.

Our premise is that party strategy mediates the relationship between political constraints and policy choices. This idea needs refinement though. Partisan accounts of aid (Brech and Potrafke 2014; Dietrich et al. 2020) should be adapted to the subnational level, integrating the territorial dimension. In addition, we need a nuanced understanding of the interaction between preferences and policy. Political competition is about reference-accommodation, but also about preference-shaping. Nationalist parties can strategically frame policies to support territorial mobilisation and identity formation (Béland and Lecours 2005). Compelling policy ideas can act as ‘coalition magnets’ (Béland and Cox 2016). This angle is expected to resonate with our story.

In short, a set of theoretical expectations has emerged from our discussion. Paradiplomacy motivations are expected to be the key driver of policy formation and hence the window into ‘why’ questions. We expect the making of Scotland’s international development to be connected with the politics of nation-building, both symbolically and institutionally. In turn, the politics of aid is expected to give us insights into ‘how’ questions: the shape of the policy strategy and its calibration over time. In the following sections, we build on these analytical insights to shed light on the rise and trajectory of Scotland’s international development.

The rise of an assertive narrative: ‘A small nation with a strong voice’

In his review of *Scotland International*, Peter Lynch (2020: 1) observed that ‘since devolution was established in 1999, the Scottish Government has engaged in extensive paradiplomacy’. He added that Scotland has ‘taken modest steps to develop its own international development policy’. By comparative standards, the Scottish commitment to development may look ‘modest’. Yet, Scotland’s rhetoric in this policy domain is a story of growing ambition. This tension between modest means and a bold narrative is captured by a line from the 2003 SNP manifesto: ‘a small nation with a strong voice’. In this section, we document the trajectory of Scotland’s international development, from the early partnership with Malawi back in 2005, to the comprehensive strategy articulated in 2016 and refreshed in 2021.

In November 2005, the then Scottish Executive, led by First Minister Jack McConnell, signed a landmark agreement with the Republic of Malawi, represented by President Dr. Bingu Wa Mutharika. The aim was to create ‘a framework to enable both countries to work together to deliver a number of international projects’ (SG 2016). The idea was to nurture existing links between Scotland and Malawi, with focus on four key areas: civic governance and society, sustainable economic development, health and education (Alexander 2014). The institutionalisation of the Malawi Development Programme was a milestone in policy formation (Alexander 2014). The policy built on ‘the longstanding commitment of organisations and individuals in Scotland to international development’ (SG 2008). In the Malawi case, that commitment stretches back over 150 years (SG 2016). These early choices set up the parameters of the Scottish approach to development: the partnership vision. By working around traditional aid, the Scottish Government was consciously avoiding the policy dilemmas of ‘political conditionalities’ (Molenaers et al. 2015).

Scotland’s international development policy was upgraded in 2008, now under the leadership of the Scottish National Party (SNP). The commitments to ‘advancing Scotland’s place as a responsible nation’ and to ‘working together to achieve the Millennium Development Goals’ were renewed (SG 2008). The focus remained the ‘global fight against poverty’ enshrined at the Gleneagles G8 summit. The cornerstone continued to be the partnership approach aimed at respecting the ‘needs and priorities of developing countries’. The pillars of the Malawi programme were consolidated. A visible innovation was the integration of other partner countries. Scotland developed a fresh Sub-Saharan Africa Programme (Zambia, Tanzania, Rwanda and the Darfur region of Sudan) and extended operations to Asia (Pakistan). Correspondingly, financial commitments were doubled up. The Scottish International Development Fund was projected to increase by around 50%, from £6 million in 2008/09 to £9 million in 2010/11. Notwithstanding these operational upgrades, the biggest change was qualitative. A decade after devolution, Scotland was able to demonstrate a distinct international development strategy (IDS) based on a coherent articulation of aims, priorities, modalities and criteria for engaging (SG 2008).

In December 2016, the Scottish Government published a notably revamped IDS. The document ‘Global Citizenship: Scotland’s International Development Strategy’ remains the most robust articulation of Scotland’s distinctive approach. The old vision—‘our unique relationship with Malawi’, ‘our unique partnership approach’—was still there. Yet, the strategy was now framed around a new overarching theme: ‘global citizenship’. In turn, the commitments towards global citizenship and international solidarity were explicitly connected with the domestic agenda. A line in the ministerial foreword, originally from First Minister Alex Salmond, captured the essence of the emerging rhetoric: ‘Scotland cannot act with credibility overseas if we are blind to inequality here at home. And our ambitions for a Fairer Scotland are undermined without global action to tackle poverty, promote prosperity and to tackle

climate change' (SG 2016). This strategic articulation of domestic and international claims would become the focal point of the Scottish foreign policy narrative.

The 2016 strategy mentioned the fight against global poverty, but also against 'inequality, injustice' (SG 2016). The agenda of 'sustainable development' together with a commitment to 'embed human rights in all our development work' were integrated. A key tenet was 'to harness existing and in-country expertise in key areas that could benefit global development'. Areas of expertise were linked to 'the things that Scotland does best, including 'health, education, sustainable development, renewable energy, governance, water governance and management, climate change and climate justice'. Crucially, Scotland settled into working with four partners: two 'historic' (Malawi and Zambia) and two 'contemporary' (Rwanda and Pakistan). Building on 'good development practice', governance was restructured around three streams: development assistance, capacity strengthening and investment. And Scotland maintained the policy of 'not providing direct funding to the governments of our partner countries'. Funding would be channelled through an enhanced International Development Fund (IDF), which would be supported by two other schemes: the Humanitarian Aid Fund and the Climate Justice Fund.

'Global Citizenship' marked another policy-formation milestone in three respects. Firstly, virtually every aspect of the development approach got reformulated or recalibrated. Secondly, policy components were rearticulated around a holistic narrative: 'Scotland as a good global citizen'. Thirdly, old themes (e.g. the Beyond Aid agenda) received more detailed attention. While the 2008 framework had been articulated in a few paragraphs, the 2016 strategy document was 24 pages long—a good indication of the policy effort and political capital invested in the process.

In March 2021, the Scottish Government reviewed international development in light of Covid-19. Minister Jenny Gilruth presented this exercise as an opportunity 'to pause, reflect and take stock' (SG 2021a). This self-reflection led to a 'more targeted approach to improve impact'. Covid issues such as the need to support a 'sustainable economy recovery' and 'build institutional resilience' were prioritised. That said, the 'refreshment' was ambitious enough. A highlight was the 'equality' angle. As the document stated: 'our decision to include within the focus of the review the issues raised by the Black Lives Matter movement has allowed us to open conversations on what those mean within international development; in particular how we play our part in tackling systemic racism and inequality and shifting power to partner countries' (SG 2021a). This rhetoric attempted to confront 'the myth of the partnership among equals' (Alexander 2014). The concern with 'balance of power' issues was not just symbolic. It had practical implications: the creation of a new Equalities Programme and the Global South Programme Panel, 'to ensure that global south voices continue to be heard beyond this Review'. Another key operational change was to allow organisations located in the South to apply for funding without a Scottish partner.

In short: in the arch of two decades the Scottish Government has taken humble but consistent steps towards an independent development policy. This growing ambition has been mainly reflected in the rise of an assertive policy narrative. Arguably progress has been more limited in relation to institutional capacities. More a case of following the story than a case of following the money. In the process, tensions between the competing claims of Global Citizenship in Scotland and Global Britain in the UK have become apparent. This contentious issue is examined in the next section.

Forking paths: The breakdown of the UK aid consensus

Scotland's ambition to develop an independent policy in a reserved area was bound to raise questions. The core themes of the Scottish approach—equality and international solidarity—suggest an alternative way of doing development. The clash of perspectives crystallised over the Covid-19 pandemic, when the UK Government made two controversial policy choices: the demise of DFID and the imposition of aid cuts. Both moves did not sit well with the Scottish vision of an ethical foreign policy. In this section, we examine the issue of policy divergence in historical perspective.

Divergence has not always been the rule. The Malawi programme was established when both the British and Scottish parliaments were controlled by Labour (Alexander 2014). In the aftermath of the G8 at Gleneagles, the idea of Scotland engaging in the global fight against poverty proved uncontroversial. And the partnership with Malawi looked like a natural starting point. Despite these amicable origins, constructive ambiguity underpinned policy formation. For Scottish politicians, the challenge was to work around the formal devolution framework. The framing of the 2008 IDS reflected this subtle accommodation. The official statement was that: 'Although international development is a reserved issue under the Scotland Act (1998), the Scottish Government is operating in accordance with the Act by 'assisting the Crown in relation to foreign affairs... and will continue to ensure that the policy is developed within those given powers' (SG 2008). In addition, further reassurances were provided: 'The policy will complement the work of others and not duplicate effort or undermine existing initiatives or government policy'.

This rhetoric of accommodation should not be overstated though. Convergence was the outcome by default. Development discourses in Scotland and the UK were latently aligned over the Blair-Brown-Cameron consensus on aid. The Scottish Government sought a harmonious relationship with DFID and projected the belief of a cross-party consensus in Scotland. Simultaneously, Scottish policymakers were incrementally articulating an alternative policy vision. Another issue was the lack of coordination on the ground. A blunt report published in 2011 concluded that: 'In spite of the possible advantages, until now the UK's central and devolved governments have not collaborated in their African development efforts' (Anyimadu 2011). The report argued that the lack of coordination was rooted in the ad-hoc institutional framework and

mutual distrust. An intriguing line read: ‘many DFID employees are not aware that Scotland and Wales have launched independent policies on development’.

Policy divergence eventually transpired. In December 2016, the Scottish Government launched an overhauled strategy framed around the core themes of fairness and equality. A few months before, in June 2016, UK citizens had voted to leave the European Union. This huge constitutional moment structured major policy realignments. In January 2017, the UK Government unveiled a strategy which signalled a sharp break with the past. International development got subordinated to the dominant post-Brexit narrative: Global Britain. The clash between the competing metaphors of Global Citizenship and Global Britain precipitated the breakdown of the UK aid consensus and accelerated the rise of contrasting policy pathways.

To be sure, there is a latent common ground between the Scottish and UK approaches. This is reflected in the endorsement of the beyond-aid agenda and in the attempt to avoid the risks of government-to-government aid. In this context, both governments rely on partnerships to deliver aid. That said, the Scottish partnership approach rests upon different operational and symbolic logics. Operationally, the idea is to support local-to-local cooperation with an involvement of Scottish NGOs and universities and local (or subnational) actors in the Global South. The small-scale of these operations prevents the use of aid to advance trade or geopolitical interests. Symbolically, the Scottish frame is that of the ‘partnership among equals’. Over time, this framing has become embedded in an openly critical decolonisation discourse (SG 2021).

This rhetoric of divergence can hardly be overstated. The Scottish and UK strategy documents did not only map out alternative policy approaches, but also represented contrasting global visions. And these competing development narratives were underpinned by clear political motivations. The boldness of Global Citizenship was rooted in the intense drive towards Scottish independence, while the UK rethinking was firmly anchored to Brexit claims. The opening line from the then UK Secretary for International Development, Priti Patel, was clear enough: ‘Britain is redefining and reinforcing its place in the world’ (DFID 2017). On the UK side, the framing of Global Britain became dominant. The reformed strategy prescribed ‘harnessing the potential of new trade relationships, creating jobs and channelling investment in the world’s poorest countries’ (DFID 2017). ‘Sustained, job-creating growth’ was represented as the solution to global poverty. The document mentioned inclusion and diversity, and proclaimed that Britain would be ‘more outward-looking than ever’. Yet: trade was the dominant theme. The rhetoric even signalled a power shift: ‘DFID’s ambition will be at the heart of the Government’s emerging agenda on trade and investment, led by the Department for International Trade’.

Eventually the tale of two contrasting development narratives got aligned with the dynamics of post-Brexit politics. The 2019 Conservative manifesto said little about development beyond this conventional line: ‘We will proudly maintain our

commitment to spend 0.7 percent of GNI on development, and do more to help countries receiving aid become self-sufficient'. Aid was explicitly subordinated to other agendas: 'we will open new markets and support free trade and global growth'. DFID's achievements were not even mentioned. The narrative was openly partisan: 'Unlike Jeremy Corbyn, we believe that free markets, innovation and prosperity can protect the planet'. The core themes of Global Britain were there: 'we are immensely proud of the UK's history and its standing in the world'; 'we view our country as a force for good'. In stark contrast, the SNP manifesto put the emphasis on 'poverty, injustice and inequality'. A core claim was that 'the SNP will continue to demand that the Government keeps the UK commitment to spend 0.7% of GNI on overseas development assistance, and that this money is concentrated in the hands of DFID and not spent on projects other than humanitarian aid'. In addition, the SNP made the strongest commitment to 'climate justice'. The Global Citizenship narrative was as expected represented: 'we place great importance on being a good global citizen'.

Strikingly, the policy gap widened over the Covid-19 pandemic. In June 2020, the UK Government announced the 'merger' between DFID and the Foreign Office. In July 2021, PM Boris Johnson cut aid spending to 0.5% of GNI, dropping a key manifesto commitment. These moves were not entirely surprising. The seeds were in the 2017 strategy, the 2019 manifesto and the 2020 UK's Government Integrated Review of Defence, Security, Development and Foreign Policy. Surprising or not, both moves were vehemently contested in Scotland. On DFID, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon (2020) called it a 'regrettable move' which 'puts commercial and political ambition ahead of the needs of the world's poorest and most vulnerable communities at a time of global crisis'. On the aid cuts, Chris Law (2021a), the SNP Spokesperson for International Development at Westminster, stated: 'it is with the deepest regret that this UK Government's callous cut to the aid budget is not only jeopardising those efforts, but will mean that the poorest and most vulnerable people in the world will pay the ultimate price. Make no mistake: these cuts will cost lives'.

In hindsight, it seems that Scotland and the UK were always on collision course. Patterns of continuity and change have been more nuanced though. Not so long ago, the UK was an outlier because of its commitment to aid under austerity (Mawdsley 2017; Dietrich et al. 2020). Yet, even that not-so-distant past looks like a foreign country. Following the critical juncture of 2014/2016, both governments have pursued forking policy paths as they embarked on alternative national journeys. UK's International Development Strategy has become subordinated to post-Brexit imperatives (UK 2022). Scotland's Global Affairs Framework has been anchored to the claims of a second independence referendum (SG 2022). The intersection between the politics of nation-building and policy formation is explored in the next section.

Building the Nation: ‘Scotland as a good global citizen’

What explains the rise of a distinctive Scottish approach to international development? The politics of nation-building has been the key driver of policy change. First Minister Nicola Sturgeon tends to frame her policy speeches around two existential questions: ‘who we are as a nation’ and ‘what country we would like to become’ (Davidson 2021). This is a conscious attempt to structure policymaking around the ultimate domestic project: building the nation. According to Sturgeon’s worldview, policy reform should underpin ‘our national journey’. And these reforms, in turn, require a compelling narrative and enhanced capacities. A remarkable speech on taxation, given to The Royal Society of Edinburgh in November 2017, may illustrate this point. In that speech, Sturgeon developed a fresh vision on taxes encompassing a bold narrative (higher taxes to support social investment and inclusive growth) and an incremental institutional framework (a tax agency). A similar political framing has informed the formation of international development policy.

From this perspective, it is tempting to associate the ascendancy of an independent foreign policy in Scotland with ‘the extraordinary rise of the SNP’ (Johns and Mitchell 2016). This explanation seems to have purchase to explain both the growing ambition and the increased distinctiveness of the Scottish approach. Yet: the actual story has been more nuanced. As shown by Jackson (2020), ‘the case for Scottish independence’ has actually evolved. From a ‘moderate’ national narrative constructed around the claims of third-way social democracy and supply-side growth to a more ‘radical’ project with a strong focus on equality and social justice. This ideational and programmatic adaptation of the SNP may be the proper setting to understanding the enhanced commitment towards international development in Scotland.

The politics of independence structured an extraordinary ‘protodiplomacy moment’. Between the Edinburgh Agreement (October 2012) and the Independence Referendum (September 2014), the SNP enjoyed a unique opportunity to ‘imagine’ the Scottish nation beyond constitutional boundaries. In the spirit of Béland and Lecours (2005), nationalist leaders strategically framed policies to support territorial mobilisation and identity formation. This ingenuity marked the so-called Battle for Scotland (Devine 2016). The independence prospectus (‘Scotland’s Future’) articulated an ambitious development vision based on the claim to ‘build a country that reflects our priorities as a society and our values as a people’ (SG 2013). The storyline was that ‘Scotland will seek to be a global leader in the field of international development’. With a caveat: ‘Being a global leader in international development is not necessarily just about the size of aid given in absolute terms, but the impact that can be made across government policy’. The commitment was that ‘an independent Scotland would enshrine a legislative commitment to spending 0.7% of GNI on ODA’. The document confirmed the merits of the partnership approach. In addition, there were references to ‘more and better aid’, ‘debt relief’, ‘gender equality’, ‘do no harm’. ‘Climate justice’ was another

core theme. Finally, there was an intriguing line on policy coherence: ‘we will not allow commercial or other considerations, including military considerations, to influence our approach improperly’.

The protodiplomacy moment was a key turning point. Policy formation gained traction in the context of the drive towards independence. The transformation of the ‘imagined community’ can be observed by comparing the 2011 and 2016 SNP manifestos. The 2011 programme was still anchored to the ‘old’ nationalist agenda: ‘we have ambitious plans for international activity, with a particular focus on increasing exports, tourism and economic growth’. Scotland was represented as a ‘responsible government’, not as a ‘good global citizen’. ‘Climate change’ was not yet ‘climate justice’. Around 2016, the framing became more assertive and openly political. Scotland was portrayed as ‘a diverse, welcoming and outward-looking nation, with compassion and a drive for fairness sitting at the heart of our values’. The 2016 manifesto was the bridge between the ingenuity of the independence narrative and the policy strategy articulated in Global Citizenship. By then, the old defensive line about ‘assisting the Crown in global affairs’ was history. Moreover, the core message was that a proud Scottish nation had the right, the expertise and the vision to make a positive, distinctive contribution to global development (SG 2016).

Regarding the domestic sources of foreign policy, a key pattern is the strong domestic and international intersections underpinning SNP discourse. The domestic angles of the external projections are not only visible, but also carefully articulated around a coherent narrative. The idea of a ‘Fair Scotland in a Fair World’ epitomised the discursive core of the 2016 IDS. This cognitive frame had been articulated by Alex Salmond (2014) at the opening of the Glasgow Caledonian University campus in New York. Salmond’s speech, given in April 2014, was precisely titled ‘a good global citizen’. The punchline was: ‘I will outline our intention to be a good global citizen, working in partnership with countries across the planet’. The ‘good global citizen’ story was anchored in the claim that ‘the global economy was not a race’. In that speech, Salmond made full use of domestic-international metaphors: ‘By helping others, we help ourselves’. One particular line connected domestic and international representations: ‘I’ve said that in terms of domestic policy, Scotland could be a progressive beacon, setting a positive example as a country which combines fairness and prosperity. Those progressive aspirations also hold true internationally’.

The strong intersections across foreign policy domains are another key pattern. The salience of the environment within the wider narrative on international development is an evident case in point. And this is also a case of an incrementally assertive rhetoric. The 2008 IDS only made a timid reference to climate issues (SG 2008). The 2011 manifesto framed climate change in the tentative language of ‘adaptation’ (SNP 2011). As the process of nation-building intensified, ‘climate justice’ became a focal point of external projections (SNP 2016; SG 2016). This rhetoric was matched with actions. In

2012, Scotland introduced the first Climate Justice Fund in the world. Again: this is an area with manifest domestic and international interactions. The focus on climate justice abroad connects with a core domestic agenda, the Just Transition.

Protodiplomacy has been a driver of policy divergence, but in subtle ways. SNP party strategy has not been about diverging with the UK in all areas and at every point in time. Another complexity is that the Yes-coalition in 2014 sought to run a largely 'positive' campaign. At times, divergence got to be read between lines. For example, the reference to 'the choice between two futures' or the line connecting policy (in)coherence and 'military considerations' (SG 2013). Eventually a big moment of policy divergence crystallised around 2016/17, underpinned by alternative national projects in both Scotland and the UK. Following that critical juncture, the clash between Global Citizenship and Global Britain became a focal point for identity building and territorial contestation. As Chris Law once remarked: 'it is clearer than ever that Scotland is on a completely different trajectory to that of the UK, and it is time we had the full powers of independence to reach our full potential in bringing our progressive, humanitarian approach to the global stage'.

At this stage, we shall clarify our causal story. Brexit should not be seen as the formative moment. The pillars of Scotland's international development had been already established by June 2016. The narrative of Scotland as a good global citizen had emerged out of the ingenuity of the Yes campaign (2012-2014) and crystallised around the 2015 General Election. That historic SNP victory, under the fresh leadership of Nicola Sturgeon, gave momentum to the national-building project. As far as international development was concerned, the post-Brexit policy break has been largely on the UK side; Scotland's trajectory has been much more path-dependent. Yet Brexit replaced austerity as the focal point of antagonism in the SNP's rhetoric of divergence. References to 'the UK Government's chaotic and disastrous Brexit' and the commitments to 'maintaining the closest possible relationship with the European Union' and 'rejoining the EU at the earliest opportunity as an independent country' have become cognitive anchors of the Scottish international story (SG 2022).

The politics of nation-building has been the fundamental source of policy formation, explaining both the rise and distinctiveness of the Scottish approach to development. The politics of aid also played out, shaping the policy framework. From the outset, the Scottish Government framed development as more than foreign aid (SG 2008). That critical choice defined the parameters of the Scottish model. As explained in 'Global Citizenship': 'The Beyond Aid agenda takes a holistic approach to sustainable development... a large variety of development challenges need to be addressed outside the traditional development cooperation sphere' (SG 2016). Scotland had limited capacity to play the aid game, so monetary commitments could not be the policy lever. But there was a deeper motivation. By working around traditional aid, Scottish

policymakers hoped to escape the toxic politics of aid, including the sensitive issues of government-to-government funding and policy conditionalities.

Aid politics can shed light on other ‘how’ questions. In alignment with the aid-effectiveness debate, Scotland has adopted a targeted approach with focus on a reduced set of countries (SG 2008, 2016). The choice of partners meets some expectations of the aid-allocation literature. On Malawi, government documents stated: ‘Scotland has special and historical links with Malawi, stretching back over 150 years to Dr David Livingstone and the Scottish missionaries’ (SG 2016). On Zambia: ‘Scotland also has a long and historical connection to Zambia, again through Dr Livingstone and Scottish missionaries’. The Rwanda case is justified as follows: ‘Scotland has a contemporary relationship with Rwanda, with alliances having been built and cemented over the last 20 years’. Regarding Pakistan, policymakers are candid about the motivation: ‘Scotland today is home to a large and vibrant Pakistani diaspora, many of whom maintain close links with communities there’.

How about other sources of aid policy? The civil-society angle is certainly relevant. The Scottish partnership approach assumes an involvement of downstream providers at both ends of the relationship. And there is indeed evidence of healthy civil-society engagement. Focal points of these societal efforts are the Scotland Malawi Partnership (founded in 2004) and the Scotland’s International Development Alliance (established in 2006). Scotland’s international development is underpinned by a vibrant ecosystem, notably the Network of International Development Organisations in Scotland (NIDOS). The International Development Alliance’s 2019-2020 Annual Review listed 170 organisational members. Civil-society organisations, both in Scotland and the Global South, have been actively engaged in consultation processes (SG 2016, 2021). Even a Scottish Council on Global Affairs, led by academics across Scottish universities, has emerged to ‘marshal Scotland’s formidable expertise on international affairs to support the formulation of public policy’ (SCGA 2022).

Public opinion is another potential constraint on aid policy. The question is whether Scotland’s international development has legitimacy beyond governing and party elites. The electoral success of the SNP suggests latent support among citizens. Yet, given the absence of reliable surveys on aid attitudes at substate level, we cannot establish a direct opinion-policy link. What we know though is that macro studies showed that the ‘Scottish policy mood’ shifted to the left over the austerity decade (McGann et al. 2019). We also know that attitudes in Scotland have become more egalitarian and pro social justice than in England (Deeming 2021). These macro patterns could have provided a fertile ground for the rise of a substate foreign policy underpinned by the values of equality and international solidarity.

National movements can frame domestic policies to support territorial mobilisation and identity formation (Béland and Lecours 2005). We have shown that the same logic applies to foreign policy. The rise of a distinctive international development strategy in

Scotland has been driven by the politics of national-building. The consolidation of an assertive narrative and the incremental growth of institutional capacities have gained traction under an intense protodiplomacy moment. The politics of foreign aid, in turn, has shaped the parameters of the policy framework. In the next section, we discuss these issues from a comparative perspective.

Scotland's international development in comparative perspective

How does the Scottish case compare with relevant international experiences? At face value, Scotland's financial contribution to development looks modest. The size of the Scottish International Development Fund (£10m; £13m including the Climate Justice Fund) sits humbly with the €38 million committed by the Basque Agency for Development Cooperation (eLankidetza), arguably the largest substate aid budget in the world. Yet, we should be cautious about international comparisons against the backdrop of divergent fiscal and constitutional regimes. The 2007 Cooperation Law of the Basque Country obliges the government to spend 0.7% of regional GDP in development. And the Basque Country famously operates under a highly decentralised fiscal framework, the so-called *Regimen Foral*.

It is equally misleading to compare the Scottish IDF with the multi-billion UK aid programme. Scotland's effort goes 'beyond and above' the contribution of Scottish taxpayers to the UK aid budget. Indeed, the framing that Scotland's contribution to global development goes beyond monetary commitments is a common theme in SNP discourse (SG 2013). The claim is that the phenomenon of subnational cooperation should not be understood from the narrow perspective of aid budgets and ODA commitments. The motivation behind the international engagements of substate governments is the attempt to do development differently (Reinsberg and Dellepiane 2022). And Scotland seems to be fully aligned with this ethos.

Institutional capacity is a more suitable entry point to international comparisons. Key indicators of institutionalisation are the presence of an autonomous agency or unit, a high level of professionalization, a healthy allocation of human resources. Cooperation activities in the Basque Country and Catalonia are supported by fairly institutionalised agencies with workforces of around 40 and 50 respectively. Other Spanish regions, including "poor" Andalucía and Extremadura, have specialised agencies. Flemish cooperation is delivered by a professionalised unit within Flanders' powerful Department of Foreign Affairs. Bavaria has robust governance capacities, including a representation in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. By these standards, Scotland's international development still shows a low degree of institutionalisation.

This apparent institutional gap can be attributed to the dynamics of nation-building. Quebec's paradiplomacy goes back to the 1960s (Paquin 2018). The Spanish decentralised model is rooted in the 1978 constitutional settlement, which established the Autonomous Communities and gave special status to the Basque Country,

Catalonia, Galicia. This legal framework was further strengthened by the 1998 Development Cooperation Law. In Flanders and Wallonia, policymakers are empowered by the strongest legal mandate (Criekemans 2010). As the head of the Flemish development unit told us: ‘we don’t do “paradiplomacy”; we do fully-fledged foreign policy’. She was referring to the core tenet of the 1993 reforms: ‘*in foro interno, in foro esterno*’. German Landers operate under a consolidated federalist system. One of the hallmarks of Bavaria’s development framework is the strong coordination among regional, federal and European levels.

On the other hand, Scottish devolution is a more recent, unsettled process. Given that the 1998 Act did not devolve foreign policy, Scotland’s first steps into international development were tentative. Even the idea of a Scottish ‘Government’, inspired by the experience of the Catalan *Govern*, was introduced in 2007 (Devine 2016). The intense wave of protodiplomacy in Scotland, understood as the attempt to use external projections to support the domestic pathway towards independence, only started a decade ago. The international narrative was not forcefully articulated in the 2011 SNP manifesto. Locating Scotland in comparative perspective adds external validity to our core argument: the politics of nation-building is key.

The story is more nuanced: the comparative perspective tempers explanations around nationalism. The protodiplomacy moment played a pivotal role in Scotland. Scottish nationalists have articulated a bold foreign policy vision within the grand independence narrative. Yet, paradiplomacy and protodiplomacy are fluid realities. Scotland made the first steps into international development before the independence drive, and indeed under a Labour government. And the cases of Quebec, the Basque Country, Catalonia, Flanders, Bavaria show the limits of reductionist accounts. The Catalan Agency for Development Cooperation was created in 2003, when secession was a taboo among nationalists. The common ground underpinning the ambitions of substate actors is the commitment to a different way of doing things. But this commitment can be driven by diverse motivations. The agenda can gain traction under protodiplomacy; yet an explicit secessionist project is not a defining factor.

A fair inference is that Scotland’s institutional capacities remain underdeveloped. What stands out though is the sense of purpose and direction of travel, even in a less than propitious constitutional (financial) environment. The most remarkable outcome is the rise of an assertive policy narrative. The external projection of Scotland as a good global citizen is anchored in the territory. The metaphor of a Fair Scotland in a Fair World resonates with the domestic agenda on health, education, equality. In addition, the development story is well-connected with other core external framings such as the commitment towards an ethical, rights-based and feminist foreign policy. Moreover, Scotland is showing international leadership in key matters. As a case in point, First Minister Sturgeon used the unique stage of the COP26 summit to showcase Scotland’s green credentials and promote ‘climate justice’ (SG 2021b).

It can be reasonably asked whether Scotland's external projections are 'cheap talk' or a reflection of 'the symbolic state'. We are persuaded that Scottish paradiplomacy is not epiphenomenal. The international story has been integrated into party manifestos (SNP 2019, SNP 2021). A good global citizen has become a focal point of the national narrative (SG 2013, SG 2022). The external activities of the Scottish Government are reported by the media, sometimes with an explicit proto-diplomacy angle (The National 2022). An analysis conducted by the authors suggests that the media coverage of aid and development matters in Scottish-based newspapers has increased over the past decade. And references to key framings like 'solidarity' or 'global citizen' seem to correlate with the intensity of national-building. Policy and institutional capacities have developed incrementally. Even monetary commitments, however modest, have tended to grow. In short: we have observed a determination to invest political and symbolic resources in the building of Scotland's foreign policy.

That said, questions remain about the mechanisms at work. Our intuition is that this is not a case of political elites using 'cues' to prime the public in a low-information environment (*a la* Dur and Schlipphak 2021). The scope and intensity of nation-building is the key source of policy formation (*a la* Beland and Lecours 2005). The essence of our story is captured by two claims structuring the rhetoric of Scotland's 'global affairs framework' (SG 2022). Firstly, the claim is that 'our international work seeks to mirror our domestic priorities and values'. Secondly, the claim that Scotland's global contributions 'would be significantly enhanced with the powers of independence rather than devolution'. The storytelling is bold, even hyperbolic. Any public opinion or media analysis of citizens' reception of Scotland's international development should be placed in the proper context. 'A good global citizen' is simply one among a constellation of stories underpinning the Scottish national journey.

We conclude with two observations regarding the subtle intersection between politics and policy. The first observation concerns bureaucratic autonomy. Our conversations with international experts reveal a potential tension. On the one hand, subnational policymakers are aware that a robust policy framework depends on a firm political commitment. On the other hand, these technocrats are proud of their expertise and autonomy. Building state capacity involves a balancing act between political commitment and professionalization. The second observation is about legitimacy. Carme Gual, the director of the Catalan Agency, made an intriguing remark: 'subnational cooperation should never be taken for granted'. Internationally, the challenge is to fence-off critiques around aid effectiveness and fragmentation. The riposte is to construct a counternarrative around the distinctive values of subnational efforts: people-oriented, local-to-local. An example of this approach is the agenda on localising SDGs. Domestically, the issue is how to justify a commitment towards international development in turbulent economic and political times.

The issue of legitimacy invites questions regarding the future of Scotland's international development. We expect the policy pathway to be shaped by the clash between the intensity of nation-building and the politicisation of aid. Party strategy is expected to play a key part as well. The narrative is that the Scottish approach enjoys cross-party and public support. Yet, this assumption is likely to be tested. Besides, there are existential questions concerning policy coherence and institutionalisation. How would the claim of an ethical foreign policy be reconciled with the imperatives of trade and security? Will institutional capacities be enhanced and experts gain bureaucratic autonomy? Will international development consolidate as a state policy underpinned by a broad societal consensus? We hope these questions can inspire further research into this fascinating though largely overlooked area.

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