**Dominant Idea #4: Law and Order**

The SNP Scottish Government has taken many steps to ensure Scotland is a safe place to live. Police recorded crime has fallen by 41% between 2006-07 and 2019-20 and is at one of the lowest levels seen since 1974.

Scotland has 1,000 more police officers than were in place in 2007; while the Tories presided over a cut of 20,000.

Despite constraints on Scotland’s public services through a decade of UK austerity, the Scottish Government has increased the policing budget for 21/22 by £75 million which will deliver a sustainable budget position.

The SNP has ended automatic early release, meaning that long-term prisoners who pose an unacceptable risk to public safety will serve their sentence in full. And thanks to tough community sentences, the reconviction rate has been reduced to its lowest level in 21 years.

The SNP has also invested £75 million in support for victims over the past five years.

Supporting the police system in Scotland to protect vulnerable people, tackle crime, and work with communities for a safe, protected and resilient Scotland is one of the SNP’s key priorities. The party claims it will protect the police resource budget in real terms for the entirety of the next parliament.

The SNP aims to work with leaders and partners in the police and wider society to improve the diversity of Police Scotland and enhance the quality of data across the justice system, to better understand and serve the needs of all communities.

**The impact of this dominant idea on the support of and electoral performance of the SNP.**

The Scottish Crime and Justice Survey (SCJS 2018-19) of more than 5,500 adults – which includes incidents not reported to the police – shows that people are less likely to experience crime than in 2008-09 and they feel safer in their communities.

One-in-eight (12.4%) adults in Scotland experienced crime in 2018-19, compared to one-in-five (20.4%) in 2008-09 – a rate that remains lower than England and Wales with an equivalent figure of 14.9%. The proportion of adults experiencing violence has fallen from 4.1% in 2008/09 to 2.2%.

Former Justice Secretary Humza Yousaf said:

“While it is encouraging that Scotland remains a safer place than a decade ago, with fewer victims of crime, there is no room for complacency.

Our firm focus on early intervention and prevention, including through widely-recognised anti-violence initiatives such as the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit, No Knives Better Lives and Medics Against Violence, have been, and continue to be, critical to our efforts to keep crime down and communities safe.

It could be the case that this track record on law and order contributed to the successful electoral performance of the SNP in the May 2021 election. When people feel and can see that funding has been allocated to essential public services, such as the police, they may feel safer and this may have an impact on their voting behaviour.

The SCJS results suggested the public was generally fairly confident about the operation of the justice system, with 78% sure it allows for a fair trial.

However, less than half (47%) were confident about its efficiency and just 39% thought appropriate punishments were given to offenders.

A majority (58%) said the police were doing a good or excellent job in their local area, a percentage which has remained unchanged since 2014/15 but has fallen from 61% in 2012/13.

Crime is a crucial issue and there is a widespread belief that law and order policies have a significant impact on voting behaviour. It could be said that a political party with a strong track record on reducing crime nationally is likely to be regarded as a party representing stability and security.

High crime rates suggest an unsafe community, which impacts people’s quality of life and may deter public and private investment or improvements and reduce the residential desirability of an area.

The results of the May 2021 election show that support for the SNP had grown since the 2016 election. The Edinburgh Central and Ayr constituencies swung from Conservative to SNP. These constituencies represent the extremes of the most and least deprived areas of Scotland, according the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020 (SIMD).

The swing from the Conservative Party in both constituencies (Ayr had been a Conservative strong hold since 2000 and Edinburgh Central from 2016. Edinburgh Central was Ruth Davidson’s (former Scottish Conservative leader) constituency) could have been attributable to the SNP’s commitment to reducing reoffending rates, improving diversity in Police Scotland and real reduction in violent crime.

**TASKS**

1. Summarise the SNP’s dominant idea surrounding law and order.
2. Give a detailed example of an SNP policy that relates to this dominant idea.
3. How significant was this dominant idea in the electoral performance of the SNP in the May 2021 Scottish Parliament election? You should use data to support your argument.
4. Are there other interpretations (excluding the law and order dominant idea) of the reasons for the electoral success of the SNP?