

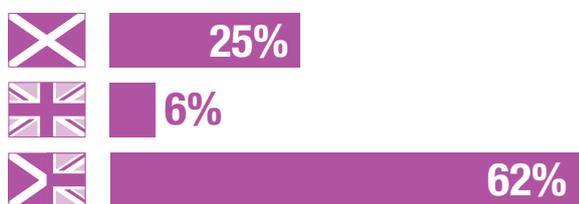
Independence referendum

A question of identity, economics or equality?

The most immediate challenge to the cohesion of the UK as currently constituted is the referendum being held in September on whether or not Scotland should become an independent country. What appears to be inclining voters to vote Yes or No? Is it simply a question of asserting their sense of being Scottish or British? Or does it depend on their view of the practical consequences of independence, such as whether they think it would enable Scotland to become a more prosperous or more equal country?

Not just a question of identity

Most people in Scotland feel a mixture of Scottish and British identity and even those with a strong Scottish identity do not necessarily support independence



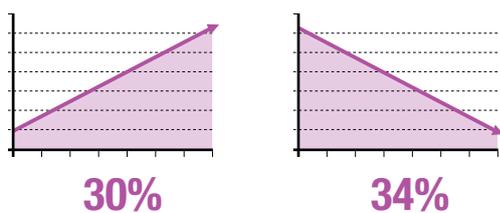
25% say they feel 'Scottish, not British', while just 6% state that they are 'British, not Scottish'. 62% acknowledge being some mixture of the two.



Even among those who say they are 'Scottish, not British' only 53% say they intend to vote Yes to independence in the referendum.

Economics matters

Opinion is divided on whether independence would result in Scotland becoming more or less prosperous. Which view a voter takes sharply discriminates between Yes and No voters.



30% think that Scotland's economy would be better under independence, while 34% believe it would be worse.



86% of those who think the economy would be 'a lot better' are inclined to vote Yes, compared with just 2% of those who think it would be 'a lot worse'.

The equality debate is less important

Few think an independent Scotland would be a more equal society, while there is still a widespread preference for benefits to be paid for out of UK wide taxation.



Only 16% think that the gap between rich and poor would be smaller in an independent Scotland.



61% believe the old age pension should be funded out of UK-wide taxes. Only 34% feel it should be paid for out of Scottish taxes alone.

Introduction

Author

John Curtice

John Curtice is Professor of Politics at the University of Strathclyde and Research Consultant at NatCen Social Research



The United Kingdom has always been a multi-national state that combines three distinct nations

On 18th September 2014, Scotland will decide whether it wishes to remain part of the United Kingdom or whether it prefers instead to become an independent state. Under the terms of the agreement between the Scottish and UK governments that paved the way for the referendum (Scottish Government, 2012) both governments have pledged to respect the outcome. That means that if a majority vote in favour of independence, the UK government is pledged to enter into talks on the terms of Scotland's exit from the UK, an outcome that the Scottish Government at least would like to achieve by March 2016. The ballot in September thus clearly represents a major challenge to the future cohesion and integrity of the United Kingdom as currently constituted.

But what underlies the choice that voters in Scotland are being asked to make? One seemingly obvious answer is national identity. Rather than being a classic European nation state, the United Kingdom has always been a multi-national state that combines three distinct nations – England, Wales and Scotland – with (since 1922) part of a fourth nation – Ireland – across all of which a common sense of Britishness has come to be forged (Colley, 2005). However, Scotland in particular can look back on a long, if far from secure, history as a separate kingdom until James VI of Scotland inherited the English crown as James I in 1603 – and as a separate 'state' until the Treaty of Union in 1707. Even thereafter, Scotland retained a distinct legal, religious and educational settlement that, together with a distinctive culture and associated iconography, would seem more than enough to sustain a separate sense of Scottish identity (Devine, 2006). So, perhaps what underlies support for independence is simply a wish amongst those who feel a strong sense of Scottish identity for their distinctive sense of nationhood to be recognised through independent statehood, much as is currently the position in much of the rest of Europe (Gellner, 1983).

This is not, though, an argument that is made explicitly by those campaigning in favour of independence. In its White Paper setting out the case for independence (Scottish Government, 2013), the Scottish Government preferred to argue that it would be more 'democratic' for Scotland to be able to choose its own governments, and not be at risk of being governed by a government in London for which relatively few in Scotland had voted – as is the case with the current Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition. However, such an argument assumes that Scotland is indeed a distinct 'demos' that thus has the right to govern itself should it so wish. That inevitably brings us back to how far people in Scotland feel a distinctive sense of identity that leads them to question whether they should be part of a Britain-wide system of governance.

There are, though, other more obviously instrumental reasons why a territorial unit such as Scotland might want to seek independence. One that comes most immediately to mind is a belief that such a step would enhance the territory's level of prosperity. It could have access to resources that it might be better off keeping to itself rather than sharing with a wider polity (Hechter, 2000; Sorens, 2005). Certainly, 'It's Scotland's oil' was a key battle cry of the pro-independence Scottish National Party (SNP) as the first oil started to flow from the North Sea in the early 1970s (Lynch, 2013). Meanwhile a territory might well feel that it would be more prosperous if it were able to run its own economy rather than being part of a larger unit for whom that particular territory's interests are not a central concern of economic management. This is certainly an argument that receives considerable emphasis in the Scottish Government's White Papers.

There is, however, another instrumental argument that is also to be found in that document. This is that an independent Scotland would be a fairer country than the UK is at present. The White Paper complains that the United Kingdom is one of the most unequal countries in the world, the result, it is suggested, of policies pursued by Labour as well as Conservative governments. The SNP is wont to argue that Scotland has a more social democratic ethos than England, and, thus, left to its own devices would be more likely to pursue policies designed to bring about a more equal society (Salmond, 2006; 2007). It has certainly been critical of many of the cuts to welfare benefits that have been implemented by the UK coalition government.

In this chapter, we assess the degree to which these possible motivations for backing independence appear to be playing a role in shaping voters' inclinations to vote Yes or No in September. Is support for independence simply rooted in a wish to see a distinctive sense of Scottish identity reflected in how the country is governed? Or do more instrumental considerations play a role too? Do people want independence because they believe it would bring either greater prosperity or more equality? We address these questions using data from the British Social Attitudes's sister survey, the Scottish Social Attitudes survey. We focus in particular on the most recent evidence gathered from a representative sample of 1,497 people interviewed between June and October 2013.

Support for independence

Throughout the chapter our analysis will focus on why people intend to vote one way or the other in the referendum. To ascertain their intentions, respondents to the 2013 Scottish Social Attitudes survey were asked:



Our analysis will focus on why people intend to vote one way or another in the referendum

In the referendum, you will be asked, 'Should Scotland be an independent country?' If you do vote, will you vote 'Yes' or vote 'No' – or haven't you decided yet?

In response, 20 per cent said that they intended to vote Yes, while 42 per cent indicated that they would vote No. However, as many as 34 per cent said that they had not decided as yet. This last set of respondents were then asked a follow-up question:

At the moment, which way do you think you are most likely to vote, Yes or No?

Of those who were asked this question, 28 per cent said that they were most likely to vote Yes, while 34 per cent stated they were most likely to vote No. A further 36 per cent indicated that they really did not know what they would do. If we combine the responses to the two questions, and classify as a Yes voter anyone who said that they would vote Yes in answer to either the first or the second question (and identify No voters similarly), this produces a final tally of 30 per cent who said they would or were most likely to vote Yes, while 56 per cent said they were inclined to vote No. The remaining 16 per cent were truly undecided. Throughout our analysis a Yes voter is someone who responded Yes to either of our two questions, while No voters are defined similarly.

34%
of men intended to vote
yes, compared with only
26% of women

As one might anticipate, those belonging to certain social groups were more likely than others to say they would vote Yes rather than No. Perhaps the most striking difference is between men and women; no less than 34 per cent of the former said that they intended to vote Yes compared with only 26 per cent of women (Ormston, 2013). At the same time, older people are less keen on independence too; as many as 62 per cent of those aged 65 or over indicated that they intended to vote No while just 21 per cent said they were inclined to vote Yes. Those in routine and semi-routine occupations (32 per cent of whom said they would vote Yes) are rather keener on independence than those in professional or managerial jobs (26 per cent) (Curtice, 2013). These differences may, of course, arise simply because of variations between these social groups in the incidence of Scottish identity or in their perceptions of the consequences of independence.

Identity

Our first task is to establish how far support for and opposition to a Yes vote is a reflection of people's sense of national identity. Are Yes voters primarily people who feel strongly Scottish and perhaps reject any sense of British identity at all? Conversely, is support for No primarily a reflection of a strong commitment to Britishness, accompanied perhaps by little or no sense of being Scottish?

To ascertain people's feelings of identity, Scottish Social Attitudes asked them the so-called Moreno question (Moreno, 1988). This invites respondents to choose between five possible descriptions of themselves:

Which, if any, of the following best describes how you see yourself?

Scottish, not British
More Scottish than British
Equally Scottish and British
More British than Scottish
British, not Scottish

There is no doubt that a sense of being Scottish is more widespread and deeply held north of the border than are any feelings of Britishness (Table 3.1). In 2013, only one in ten people say that they are either "British, not Scottish" or else "More British than Scottish". In contrast as many as a quarter (25 per cent) claim to be Scottish while denying that they are British. However, the majority of people, 62 per cent, acknowledge some combination of the two identities. In fact, the proportion of the Scottish public who deny that they are British has been rather lower in recent years: whereas between 1999 and 2006 the figure was never less than 30 per cent, since 2007 it has only been in the mid to high 20 per cents. So, in short, for many people their sense of being Scottish sits alongside a complementary sense of being British rather than in opposition to it, and if anything rather more people now acknowledge some sense of dual identity. That makes it far from immediately obvious how people's sense of identity will be reflected in their willingness to vote for independence.

Table 3.1 Trends in Moreno National Identity, Scotland, 1999–2013

	1999	2000	2001	2003	2005	2006	2007	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Scottish not British	32	37	36	31	32	33	27	27	28	29	23	25
More Scottish than British	35	31	30	34	32	32	30	31	30	33	30	29
Equally Scottish and British	22	21	24	22	22	21	28	26	26	23	30	29
More British than Scottish	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	4	4	5	5	4
British not Scottish	4	4	3	4	5	5	6	4	4	5	6	6
<i>Weighted base</i>	1482	1663	1605	1508	1549	1594	1508	1482	1495	1197	1229	1497
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1482	1663	1605	1508	1549	1594	1508	1482	1495	1197	1229	1497

Source: Scottish Social Attitudes



Nearly three quarters of those who say that they are “equally Scottish and British” are inclined to vote in favour of staying in the UK

People’s sense of national identity does make some difference to the likelihood that they are inclined to vote Yes rather than No. As Table 3.2 shows, the more Scottish as opposed to being British someone feels, the more likely it is that they intend to vote Yes in September. Conversely, the more British and the less Scottish someone feels, the more they are inclined to vote No. However, the pull of the two identities seems to be asymmetric. Having *some* sense of a British identity seems to do much more to persuade people to vote No than having even a *strong* Scottish identity does to incline them to back Yes. So, even amongst those who say they are Scottish and deny that they are British, only just over half (53 per cent) say that they anticipate voting Yes. In contrast no less than 82 per cent of those who feel more British than Scottish (if they feel Scottish at all) say they will vote No. Meanwhile, nearly three quarters (73 per cent) of those who say that they are “equally Scottish and British” are inclined to vote in favour of staying in the UK.

Table 3.2 Referendum vote intention, by Moreno National Identity

	Moreno National Identity			
	Scottish, not British	More Scottish than British	Equally Scottish and British	More British than Scottish/British not Scottish*
Referendum vote intention	%	%	%	%
Yes	53	34	12	7
No	29	48	73	82
Undecided	14	14	11	5
<i>Weighted base</i>	368	435	433	151
<i>Unweighted base</i>	368	439	432	166

Source: Scottish Social Attitudes

*The two response categories are combined here due to small sample sizes

So having a sense of being Scottish is an almost ubiquitous attribute in Scotland. But on its own at least, feeling that way seems to be far from sufficient to ensure that people are willing to support independence. Many also feel a sense of British identity, and this seems to make them draw away from supporting independence. This suggests that if we are going to pin down what draws people towards backing independence, we need to look at more than identity. Perhaps the secret lies in people's expectations of what the practical consequences of independence might be?

Economics

Perceived difference that independence would make

As we noted above, the Scottish Government's first instrumental claim is that independence would enable Scotland to become a more prosperous country. To examine how far the public share this vision, we can examine the responses to the following four questions:

As a result of independence, would Scotland's economy become better, worse, or would it make no difference?

As a result of independence would the standard of living in Scotland be higher, lower, or would it make no difference?

If Scotland were to become an independent country, do you think that as a result you personally would be better off financially, worse off, or would it make no difference?

Do you think that, as a result of independence, taxes in Scotland would become higher, lower or would it make no difference?

In each case, respondents were asked to reply using a five-point scale. So, for the questions on the economy and personal finance, respondents could choose to say "a lot better", "a little better", "no difference", "a little worse" or "a lot worse". Similarly, the five response options for the other two questions ranged from "a lot higher" to "a lot lower".

So far as the jury of public opinion is concerned, it would appear that the economic case for independence remains 'not proven' (Table 3.3).[1] Roughly the same proportion of people say that Scotland's economy would be "worse" (34 per cent) under independence as claim it would be "better" (30 per cent). Likewise, the proportions of people who say that the standard of living would be higher or lower under independence were almost identical to each other (27 and 28 per cent respectively). People seem, however, rather dubious about the idea that they themselves might be better off as a result of independence – or indeed that it would make much difference to them at all. Only one in eleven (nine per cent) reckon that they would be better off, while just over half (52 per cent) reckon it would not make any difference to them either way. Meanwhile when it comes to taxes there is a widespread perception – shared by as many as 56 per cent – that these would go up.

Table 3.3 Perceptions of the economic consequences of independence

	Perceived effect of independence on			
	Scotland's economy	Living standards	Personal finances	Taxes
	%	%	%	%
Very positive (a lot better/higher/lower*)	5	5	2	5
Quite positive (a little better/higher/lower*)	24	22	7	1
No difference	26	36	52	30
Quite negative (a little worse/lower/higher)	22	20	18	40
Very negative (a lot worse/lower/higher)	12	7	11	16
<i>Weighted base</i>	1340	1340	1497	1340
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1340	1340	1497	1340

Source: Scottish Social Attitudes

*For the economy and personal finances, a positive answer is regarded as the economy being “a lot” or “a little better”; for standard of living, it is “a lot” or “a little higher”, and for taxes, it is that they would be “a lot” or “a little lower”

86%
of people who think that Scotland's economy would be “a lot better” under independence say that they intend to vote Yes

However, when it comes to identifying who is more or less likely to intend to vote Yes, some of these perceptions matter more than others. In the top left hand cell of Table 3.4 we show that, among those who think that Scotland's economy would be “a lot better” under independence, no less than 86 per cent say that they intend to vote Yes in the referendum. In contrast, as we can see from the bottom left hand cell in the same column, only two per cent of those who think the economy would be “a lot worse” state the same intention. Looking down the first column, we can see that the less optimistic that people are about the implications of independence for Scotland's economy, the less likely they are to be inclined to vote Yes. The perceived consequences of independence for the economy as a whole appear to be particularly important when it comes to whether voters are inclined to vote Yes or No.

Table 3.4 Intention to vote Yes in the referendum, by perceptions of the economic consequences of independence^[2]

% intending to vote Yes	Perceived effect of independence on			
	Scotland's economy	Living standards	Personal finances	Taxes
A lot better/higher/lower*	86	74	89	**
A little better/higher/lower*	67	65	82	(53)
No difference	23	26	35	37
A little worse/lower/higher	5	5	7	33
A lot worse/lower/higher	2	3	3	6

Source: Scottish Social Attitudes

*For the economy and personal finances, a positive answer is regarded as the economy being “a lot” or “a little better”; for standard of living, it is “a lot” or “a little higher”, and for taxes, it is that they would be “a lot” or “a little lower”

**Too few cases on which to base an estimate. Figure in brackets in the cell below is for all those who think taxes would be better (i.e. lower)

None of our other three questions on people's perceptions of what would happen economically under independence is more effective than the question on the Scottish economy at discriminating between those who intend to vote Yes and those who are inclined to back No. True, nearly everyone who thinks that their personal finances would be better is inclined to vote Yes, while few who think that they would be worse under independence appear likely to do so. But here we have to remember that relatively few think independence will make much difference either way. Meanwhile, we can see from the table that although those who are optimistic about the impact of independence on Scottish standards of living are far more likely than are those who are pessimistic to back the idea, the gap is rather narrower than for perceptions of the impact on the economy as a whole. At the same time, we can see that perceptions of what independence might do for levels of taxation apparently do not make a great deal of difference at all.

One other feature of Table 3.4 should also be noted. Those who think that independence would not make much difference either way are largely disinclined to vote Yes. In particular less than a quarter (23 per cent) who think that independence would make no difference to Scotland's economy say that they will do so; roughly twice as many (55 per cent) say that they will vote No (data not shown). It appears that unless people in Scotland are positively convinced of the case for independence, they are largely inclined to stick with the existing constitutional arrangements.

Meanwhile, the link between perceptions of the economic consequences of independence and voting intentions in the referendum is clearly stronger than the equivalent link with national identity. As we noted earlier, even amongst those who say they are Scottish and not British, only just over half are inclined to vote Yes, far less than the equivalent proportion of 86 per cent amongst those who say Scotland's economy would be a lot better under independence. It appears that people's perceptions of the economic consequences of independence matter more in shaping their propensity to vote Yes or No than does their sense of national identity.

Who benefits from the Union?

The choice between a Yes and a No vote may, however, not just simply be a question of the perceived merits of independence. Voters might also be asking themselves how well they think Scotland does out of being part of the Union at present. If voters think that Scotland does rather well out of the Union they might be less inclined to vote for independence than if they feel it gets a bad deal. Ever since the advent of devolution, Scottish Social Attitudes has regularly asked its respondents:

On the whole, do you think that England's economy benefits more from having Scotland in the UK, or that Scotland's economy benefits more from being part of the UK, or is it about equal?

In the early years of devolution, people in Scotland were much more likely to say that England's economy benefited more from the Union than did Scotland's. In 2000, for example, as many as 42 per cent said that England's economy benefited more, whereas just 16 per cent reckoned that Scotland's did. True, the group that felt that England's economy benefited more was still only a minority, but it was a far from inconsiderable one. However, in the years immediately after the SNP first came to power as a minority Scottish Government in 2007,



In the early years of devolution, people in Scotland were much more likely to say that England's economy benefited more from the Union

the proportion who felt that England's economy benefited more was much the same as the proportion who reckoned that Scotland's economy secured most advantage. At the same time, up to 45 per cent felt that the two economies benefited equally. It appeared as though having the SNP in power, and thus a government that was widely reckoned to be effective at advocating Scotland's interests helped persuade some voters that their country was getting quite a good deal out of the Union after all (Curtice and Ormston, 2011). More recently the proportion who believe that England's economy benefits most has again increased somewhat, but it remains rather lower than it typically was in the early years of devolution.

Table 3.5 Whose economy benefits more from the Union? 1999–2013

	1999	2000	2001	2003	2005	2007	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
England benefits more	36	42	38	30	36	27	28	23	29	28	32
Scotland benefits more	22	16	18	24	21	25	24	26	22	22	20
Equal	36	36	39	40	34	39	40	45	44	45	41
<i>Weighted base</i>	1482	1663	1605	1508	1549	1508	1482	1495	1197	1229	1497
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1482	1663	1605	1508	1549	1508	1482	1495	1197	1229	1497

Source: Scottish Social Attitudes

60%
of those who think that
England's economy
benefits more are
inclined to vote Yes

Those who think that England derives more benefit from the Union are markedly more likely to say they will vote Yes in the referendum on Scottish independence than are those who think the two countries profit equally from the relationship, let alone those who think that it is actually Scotland's economy that benefits the more (see Table 3.6). No fewer than 60 per cent of those who think that England's economy benefits more are inclined to vote Yes, as compared with just 18 per cent of those who think the two countries benefit equally and only seven per cent of those who think Scotland is the principal beneficiary. It would appear that the fact that a smaller proportion of people now than a decade ago think that England gets more benefit has served to undermine somewhat the force of one of the potential reasons as to why people in Scotland might want to leave the UK.

Table 3.6 Referendum vote intention, by perceptions of whose economy benefits most from the Union

	England's benefits more	Both equally	Scotland's benefits more
Referendum vote intention	%	%	%
Yes	60	18	7
No	25	66	81
Undecided	12	11	9
<i>Weighted base</i>	476	615	295
<i>Unweighted base</i>	454	618	310

Source: Scottish Social Attitudes

It seems then that people's views of the economic consequences of independence – and of the benefit or otherwise that Scotland currently derives from the Union – are playing a key role in shaping people's inclinations to vote Yes or No in the independence referendum. Indeed, further evidence to that effect comes from the answers that people gave when they were asked whether they would support or oppose independence if they thought that, on average, people would be £500 a year better off. They were asked:

Say it was clear that if Scotland became an independent country (separate from the rest of the UK) the standard of living would be higher and people would on average be £500 a year better off. In those circumstances would you be in favour or against Scotland becoming an independent country?

In these circumstances, no less than 52 per cent said that they would be in favour and just 29 per cent opposed. (In contrast when asked how they would feel if everyone would on average be £500 worse off, just 16 per cent said they would support the idea, while 70 per cent indicated they would be opposed.) However, at the time of the 2013 survey at least, most people in Scotland had yet to be persuaded that independence would be economically beneficial. And in the absence of that positive perception of what independence might bring there seems to be a marked reluctance to leave the UK.

Equality

We now turn to the Scottish Government's second principal argument of an instrumental character as to why Scotland should become an independent country: that it would be better able to respond to the more social democratic ethos that is thought to pervade Scottish society, and create a more equal society than the UK is at present.

One way of approaching how far this argument appears to be persuasive in the eyes of the Scottish public is to take much the same approach as we did in respect of the economy: we can examine whether or not people expect independence to result in more or less inequality within Scotland. Respondents were asked to answer the following question using a five-point scale from "a lot bigger" to "a lot smaller":

As a result of independence, would the gap between rich and poor in Scotland be bigger, smaller or would it make no difference?

As many as 49 per cent say that independence would not make any difference. As many as a quarter say that the gap would become bigger, while only 16 per cent believe it would be smaller (Table 3.7).[3] This does not immediately suggest that the argument has a strong resonance.

Table 3.7 Perceptions of the effect of independence on inequality and public services

	Perceived effect of independence on	
	Gap between rich and poor	Amount of money to spend on public services
	%	%
Very positive (a lot smaller/more*)	2	5
Quite positive (a little smaller/more*)	14	27
No difference	49	28
Quite negative (a little smaller/more)	17	20
Very negative (a lot smaller/more)	8	10
<i>Weighted base</i>	1340	1340
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1340	1340

Source: Scottish Social Attitudes

*In the case of the gap between rich and poor a positive response is regarded as “smaller”; in the case of money to spend on public services it is “more”

One of the ways in which the goal of a more equal society might be pursued is through the provision of better public services. Here public opinion in Scotland is rather more optimistic. Scottish Social Attitudes respondents were asked:

As a result of independence, do you think the Scottish Government would have more money available to spend on public services, less money, or would it make no difference?

As many as 32 per cent think that an independent Scotland would have more money to spend on public services, slightly more than the 30 per cent who feel it would have less. The balance of opinion in response to this question looks much the same as it did in respect of the economy, a picture that makes sense given that the amount of money any independent Scottish government would have to spend would depend on the buoyancy of the nation’s economy.

However, in addition to looking at people’s expectations of what independence might or might not bring in respect of greater equality, we might also ask how far there is support in Scotland for some of the kinds of public policy that might be thought to be commensurate with the pursuit of a more equal society. One such policy is the relatively generous provision of welfare benefits, such as for the unemployed. However, as Table 3.8 shows, echoing a pattern that has been evident for some time across Britain as a whole (as shown in the Benefits and the cost of living chapter, by Ben Baumberg), people in Scotland have become less generous in their attitudes towards the provision of benefits for the unemployed when they are posed the question:

Which of these two statements comes closest to your own view?

Benefits for unemployed people are too low and cause hardship
Benefits for unemployed people are too high and discourage them from finding jobs



People in Scotland have become less generous in their attitudes towards the provision of benefits for the unemployed

Now only 26 per cent feel that “benefits for the unemployed are too low and cause hardship” compared with 45 per cent in 2001. Conversely, over the same period the proportion who think unemployment benefits are too high and discourage people from finding jobs has doubled from 26 per cent to 52 per cent. This does not particularly suggest that, in the immediate future at least, the government of an independent Scotland would be facing public pressure to develop a more generous welfare system, at least so far as benefits for the unemployed are concerned.

Table 3.8 Attitudes towards benefits for unemployed people, 1999–2013

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2006	2009	2010	2013
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Benefits for unemployed people are too low and cause hardship	36	43	45	41	41	33	31	30	26
Benefits for unemployed people are too high and discourage them from finding jobs	33	28	26	31	32	39	42	43	52
(Neither)	22	17	16	12	16	18	17	15	15
<i>Weighted base</i>	1482	1663	1605	1665	1508	1594	1482	1495	1497
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1482	1663	1605	1665	1508	1594	1482	1495	1497

Source: Scottish Social Attitudes

Note: The response “neither” was not offered as a possible answer to respondents but was accepted and recorded when it was given

Equally – and again mirroring wider trends across the UK – enthusiasm for more ‘tax and spend’ appears to have diminished from what it was in the early days of the last Labour government, before that government began to embark on a substantial expansion of public expenditure (Table 3.9). This becomes apparent in the responses given to the question:

Suppose the government had to choose between the three options on this card. Which do you think it should choose?

- Reduce taxes and spend less on health, education and social benefits*
- Keep taxes and spending on these services at the same level as now*
- Increase taxes and spend more on health, education and social benefits*

Back in 2001 as many as 63 per cent of people in Scotland said that taxes should increase and more should be spent on “health, education and social benefits”. But just five years later, in 2006, that figure had fallen to 41 per cent, and it has remained at more or less that level ever since. Once again, it is not immediately obvious that there would be marked public pressure in the early years of an independent Scotland for a much bigger role for the state.



Enthusiasm for more ‘tax and spend’ appears to have diminished

Table 3.9 Attitudes towards taxation and spending, 1999–2013

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2006	2009	2010	2013
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Reduce taxes and spend less	3	4	3	3	3	5	6	5	7	6
Keep taxes and spending at the same level as now	38	39	30	32	34	35	45	53	49	48
Increase taxes and spend more	55	54	63	60	58	56	41	37	40	42
<i>Weighted base</i>	1482	1663	1605	1665	1508	1637	1594	1482	1495	1497
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1482	1663	1605	1665	1508	1637	1594	1482	1495	1497

Source: *Scottish Social Attitudes*

Still, what we see here does not necessarily mean that support for the idea of a more equal Scotland – and a belief that independence would help bring that about – is not one of the features of the referendum debate that inclines people to vote in one way rather than the other. Indeed, as Table 3.10 shows, those who think that, as a result of independence, the gap between rich and poor would be smaller, and that there would be more money to spend on public services are more likely to say they will vote Yes than are those of the opposite view.

However, we should remember that very few people (just two per cent of our sample) think that the gap between rich and poor would be “a lot” smaller. On this issue the vast majority of people are in one of the three middle rows, and the difference between the level of Yes support amongst those who think the gap would be a *little* smaller (53 per cent) and those who think it would be a *little* bigger (25 per cent) is, at 28 percentage points, much lower than for any of the equivalent responses about economic issues (bar taxes) as seen in Table 3.4. In short, people’s views on whether inequality would or would not be reduced in an independent Scotland make relatively little difference to their chances of being a Yes or a No voter.

True, how much money people think there might be to spend on public services seems to matter rather more, but even here we should note, for example, that at 77 per cent, the level of support for independence amongst those who think that there would be a *lot* more money to spend is less than the figure of 86 per cent amongst those who think the economy would be a *lot* better.

Table 3.10 Intention to vote Yes in the referendum, by perceptions of the effect of independence on equality and public services^[4]

% intending to vote Yes	Perceived effect of independence on	
	Gap between rich and poor	Amount of money to spend on public services
A lot smaller/more*	81**	77
A little smaller/more*	53	60
No difference	29	27
A little bigger/less	25	7
A lot bigger/less	9	2

Source: *Scottish Social Attitudes*

*In the case of the gap between rich and poor a positive response is regarded as “smaller”; in the case of money to spend on public services it is “more”

**Figures based on just 31 (weighted) cases



People's views about specific welfare policies do not seem to distinguish Yes from No voters very well at all

Meanwhile, people's views about specific welfare policies do not seem to distinguish Yes from No voters very well at all. At 33 per cent, the proportion of those who would like more tax and spend who are inclined to vote Yes is only a little higher than the equivalent proportion amongst those who are either content for taxes and spending to remain as they are, or maybe even think they should be reduced (26 per cent). The picture is only a little different when it comes to people's views about benefits for the unemployed. Just 37 per cent of those who think that these benefits are too low reckon they will vote Yes, a figure not markedly different from the 26 per cent figure for those who think benefits are too high.

However, there is another side to the referendum debate about welfare that we should also address. If Scotland were to become independent, it would mean that benefits such as those for the unemployed and those above retirement age would have to be funded out of tax revenues raised in Scotland. On the other hand, if Scotland remains part of the UK, then so long as responsibility for those is not transferred to the Scottish Parliament, such benefits will continue to be funded out of the UK-wide pool of taxation. Some of those arguing against independence suggest that such an arrangement makes it more likely that Scotland would be able to afford the kinds of benefits that help ensure a more equal society in which people are insured against some of the social risks that occur in everyday life (Scottish Labour Devolution Commission, 2014).

There seems to be not inconsiderable sympathy for that view, as is evident when respondents to Scottish Social Attitudes were asked:

What about the cost of paying benefits to people in Scotland who lose their job through no fault of their own? Regardless of what happens at present, should the money to pay this come from the taxes collected across the UK as a whole, or from those collected in Scotland only?

No less than 58 per cent of people in Scotland believe that the benefits paid to unemployed people in Scotland should be funded out of taxes collected from across the UK as a whole; only 36 per cent reckon they should be financed solely out of revenues raised north of the border. Equally, when asked an equivalent question about the "government old age pension", as many as 61 per cent said that it should be funded out of UK-wide taxation, while only 34 per cent felt it should be paid for out of Scottish revenues, as can be seen in Table 2.9 of the chapter on Scotland, also by John Curtice. Moreover, these views do appear to be quite strongly related to whether someone is inclined to vote Yes or No (Table 3.11). For example, amongst those who think that pensions should be funded out of UK taxes as a whole, nearly three-quarters (71 per cent) are inclined to vote No, while just one in seven (14 per cent) say they will vote Yes. Conversely, amongst those who think that pensions should be funded out of Scotland's taxes, just a little under a quarter (24 per cent) are minded to vote No while well over half (58 per cent) state they will vote Yes. The picture is almost exactly the same in respect of unemployment benefit.

Table 3.11 Referendum vote intention, by views on how welfare benefits should be funded

Referendum vote intention	Benefits for unemployed should be funded out of		Old age pension should be funded out of	
	UK-wide taxes	Scotland only taxes	UK-wide taxes	Scotland only taxes
	%	%	%	%
Yes	13	58	14	58
No	71	27	71	24
Undecided	11	13	11	14
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>873</i>	<i>545</i>	<i>911</i>	<i>508</i>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>910</i>	<i>505</i>	<i>946</i>	<i>476</i>

Source: Scottish Social Attitudes



There seems to be an inclination to retain a UK-wide system of funding welfare

So the second instrumental debate about whether independence would herald a more equal society, underpinned by a social democratic orientation to policy, appears to be less important in voters' minds than the debate about the possible economic consequences of independence. Relatively few believe that the gap between rich and poor would be smaller in an independent Scotland, while it is far from clear that, in the short term at least, public opinion in Scotland would be pushing for more tax and spend or a more generous welfare system than it has at present. Rather there seems to be an inclination to retain a UK-wide system of funding welfare. Above all, apart from the question of how welfare should be funded, these perceptions and beliefs about equality and welfare seem to be less effective at distinguishing between Yes and No voters than are voters' views about the economic consequences of leaving the UK. So far as the practical consequences of independence at least are concerned, it would seem that that economics matters more to voters than equality.

Putting it all together

So far we have looked separately at the degree to which people's sense of identity, their perceptions of the economics of independence, and their views about equality and the welfare state appear to help us to identify who is more or less likely to vote Yes or No. However, it could well be the case that those with a strong sense of Scottish identity are also more likely to think that independence would be beneficial economically and also that it would help to make Scotland a more equal society. This makes it less than straightforward to identify which of these possible considerations does actually matter most to voters. To obtain a clearer picture we need to undertake a multivariate statistical analysis that identifies which of all the possible considerations we have examined in this chapter are most strongly linked to whether people say they are going to vote Yes or No after taking into account the apparent influence of all the other considerations. (See the Technical details chapter for more details on multivariate statistical analysis).

Full details of the results are given in the Appendix.[5] But they are relatively straightforward. Of all of the issues examined in this chapter, the one that is most clearly linked to whether people are inclined to vote Yes rather than No is whether they think that the economy would be better or worse under



Few seem willing to vote Yes unless they are convinced that independence would be economically beneficial

independence. Also of particular importance seems to be whether people feel that pensions should be funded out of a UK-wide pool or whether people are content for them to be paid for out of Scottish taxes alone. Thereafter two further financial indicators prove to be moderately important – whose economy is thought to benefit more from the Union and whether or not people think they would personally be better off if Scotland were to become independent. National identity does still play some role even when all of these more instrumental considerations are taken into account, indicating that for some if not most voters voting Yes or No is simply a question of affirming their Scottish or British identity. Finally, those who think that unemployment benefits are too low are marginally more likely to back independence. Otherwise the debate about equality does not appear to play much of a role in voters' minds at all.

So it seems that for most voters the debate about the economic consequences of independence together with their perceptions of how good a deal Scotland gets currently out of the Union appears to be key to the decision they are inclined to take. Few seem willing to vote Yes unless they are convinced that independence would be economically beneficial. At the same time, people's views about how welfare should be funded in Scotland also play a role, but on the other hand the quest for a more equal society that perhaps enjoys a bigger welfare state has little or no traction. People's sense of national identity sits there in the background, and indeed for some it is sufficient to account for which way they are inclined to vote, but it appears that is not the case for most voters. They need practical reasons to persuade them to vote one way or the other too.

Conclusions

The debate about Scotland's future is partly about people's perceptions about who they feel they are: their sense of national identity. Those who feel a Scottish identity and little, if any, sense of being British are much more likely to say they will vote Yes than are those whose primary sense of belonging is to Britain as a whole. To that extent, it is clear some people in Scotland at least have relatively little affective commitment to the maintenance of the United Kingdom as currently constituted.

However, the debate is not just about identity. Even those who feel strongly Scottish are not universally inclined to vote Yes. Meanwhile many feel a dual sense of identity, that they are both Scottish and British, leaving it far from clear how they might express their sense of belonging in a referendum that would seem to ask them to choose between the two. In these circumstances, it perhaps should not surprise us that the practical consequences of independence are apparently playing an important role in people's minds when it comes to deciding whether to vote Yes or No. They would seem to need to bring other considerations to bear in order to make their choice one way or another. And of those possible considerations, it appears to be the perceived economic consequences of leaving or staying in the UK that matter most in voters' minds.



It appears to be the perceived economic consequences of leaving or staying in the UK that matter most in voters' minds

That suggests that whichever way Scotland eventually votes, the outcome will need to be interpreted with caution. Doubtless the victors will be inclined to claim either that Scotland has shown its commitment to the future of the Union, or that it has proven that it wants to govern itself just like any other nation does. The reality is likely to be more prosaic – the outcome will represent voters' best judgement as to which way prosperity appears to lie. Consequently, if Scotland

votes Yes and independence proves to be economically disadvantageous, many a voter may well come to regret their decision. But equally if Scotland votes No, it will have signalled that it is willing to stay in the Union in the expectation that the United Kingdom will look after and promote its material interests; the future cohesion of the Union will then depend on whether that expectation is fulfilled.

Notes

1. Much the same pattern of response was obtained when three of the four questions (on the economy, the standard of living and taxes) were previously asked on the 2011 and 2012 surveys.
2. Bases for Table 3.4 are as follows:

Weighted bases

% intending to vote Yes	Perceived effect of independence on			
	Scotland's economy	Living standards	Personal finances	Taxes
A lot better/higher/lower*	74	66	27	–
A little better/higher/lower*	323	293	106	(78)
No difference	349	488	782	393
A little worse/lower/higher	295	274	271	532
A lot worse/lower/higher	131	96	158	217

Unweighted bases

% intending to vote Yes	Perceived effect of independence on			
	Scotland's economy	Living standards	Personal finances	Taxes
A lot better/higher/lower*	65	58	26	–
A little better/higher/lower*	322	305	108	(63)
No difference	357	485	767	401
A little worse/lower/higher	291	271	270	515
A lot worse/lower/higher	132	98	170	243

3. The picture was much the same when the question was also asked in 2012: then 47 per cent said it would not make any difference, 25 per cent that the gap would be bigger and just 19 per cent that it would be smaller.
4. Bases for Table 3.10 are as follows:

Weighted bases

% intending to vote Yes	Perceived effect of independence on	
	Gap between rich and poor	Amount of money to spend on public services
A lot smaller/more*	31	71
A little smaller/more*	193	361
No difference	660	376
A little bigger/less	228	275
A lot bigger/less	107	137

% intending to vote Yes	Perceived effect of independence on	
	Gap between rich and poor	Amount of money to spend on public services
A lot smaller/more*	26	70
A little smaller/more*	182	335
No difference	637	392
A little bigger/less	252	278
A lot bigger/less	1015	140

5. Note that neither sex, age or social class proved to be significant independently of the considerations that were included in the model. So the gender, age and class differences identified earlier in the chapter simply reflect differences between these groups in the incidence of identity and/or perceptions of the consequences of independence.

References

- Colley, L. (2005), *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press
- Curtice, J. (2013), *Who Supports and Opposes Independence – and Why?*, Edinburgh: ScotCen Social Research, available at: www.scotcen.org.uk/media/176046/2012-who-supports-and-opposes-independence-and-why.pdf
- Curtice, J. and Ormston, R. (2011), 'So who is winning the debate? Constitutional preferences in Scotland after four years of Nationalist rule', *Scottish Affairs*, **74**: 24–44
- Devine, T. (2006), *The Scottish Nation 1700 to 2000*, London: Penguin
- Gellner, E. (1983), *Nations and Nationalism*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press
- Hechter, M. (2000), *Containing Nationalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Lynch, P. (2013), *SNP: The History of the Scottish National Party*, Cardiff: Welsh Academic Press
- Moreno, L. (1988), 'Scotland and Catalonia: The path to home rule', in McCrone D. and Brown A. (eds.) *The Scottish Government Yearbook 1988*, Edinburgh: Unit for the Study of Government in Scotland
- Ormston, R. (2013), *Why Don't More Women Support Independence?*, Edinburgh: ScotCen Social Research, available at: www.scotcen.org.uk/media/176043/gender-and-indep-paper-final-2012.pdf
- Salmond, A. (2006), Speech to SNP Conference, 13 October 2006, available at: www.scotsindependent.org/features/alex_salmond_perth_06.htm
- Salmond, A. (2007), Speech to SNP Conference, 18 March 2007, available at: www.scotsindependent.org/features/alex_salmond_glasgow_07.htm
- Scottish Government (2012), *Agreement between the United Kingdom Government and the Scottish Government on a referendum on independence for Scotland*, available at: www.scotland.gov.uk/About/Government/concordats/Referendum-on-independence
- Scottish Government (2013), *Scotland's Future: Your Guide to an independent Scotland*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government

Scottish Labour Devolution Commission (2014), *Powers for a Purpose – Strengthening Accountability and Empowering People*, Glasgow: Scottish Labour Party, available at: www.scottishlabour.org.uk/campaigns/entry/devolution-commission

Sorens, J. (2005), 'The Cross-Sectional Determinants of Secessionism in Advanced Democracies', *Comparative Political Studies*, **38**: 304–26

Acknowledgements

The research reported in this chapter was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council as part of its research initiative on The Future of the UK and Scotland (ES/K007149/1 to NatCen and ES/K006460/1 to AqMen). The author would like to acknowledge the advice and support of fellow participants in that research, Jan Eichhorn, Rachel Ormston and Lindsay Paterson as well as of the Scottish Social Attitudes teams. Responsibility for the views expressed here lies solely with the author.

Appendix

The following table shows the results of a logistic regression analysis of whether people are inclined to vote Yes rather than No in the referendum. All variables examined in the chapter were available for inclusion in the model, but only those that were statistically significant at the 5% level are actually included. People's age, sex and social class were also available for inclusion but none proved to be independently significant after taking account of the variables that are included in the model. People's views of the economic consequences of independence, its implications for their personal finance and their Moreno national identity were all regarded as interval level variables, with "don't know" responses assigned to the middle category. Other variables were regarded as categorical variables and each coefficient measures the impact of being in that category as opposed to the one shown in brackets.

Table A.1 Logistic regression of referendum vote intention

	Coefficient	Standard error	Wald score	p value
Economy better under independence	1.23	.14	76.8	.00
Pensions paid from (Scottish taxes)				
UK taxes	-2.00	.23	78.8	.00
Depends	-0.88	.51	2.9	.09
Economy benefits from Union (equal)				
England's	1.53	.24	42.0	.00
Scotland's	-0.60	.35	3.0	.09
Personal finances better under independence	1.21	.22	30.4	.00
Scottish rather than British identity	0.54	.12	21.8	.00
Unemployment benefits (too low)				
Too high	-0.71	.25	8.0	.01
Neither etc.	-0.77	.33	5.6	.02

Nagelkerke R-squared = 73%
Sample size = 1067