

**ScotCen**

**Social Research** that works for society

# Has the Referendum Campaign Made a Difference?



---

# Summary

Scotland's voters go to the polls on 18<sup>th</sup> September in order to choose whether to stay in the United Kingdom or to leave and become an independent country. In this briefing we assess what impact the referendum has had on public attitudes towards independence, using new evidence from the 2014 Scottish Social Attitudes survey conducted earlier this summer. We examine whether support for independence has increased or decreased, whether people's views on some of the key arguments put forward in the campaign have changed, and whether or not there have been any changes in who supports independence and why.

## Introduction

This briefing examines what impact the independence referendum campaign appears to have had on the balance and character of public opinion towards how Scotland should be governed. It does so by comparing the initial results of the 2014 Scottish Social Attitudes (SSA) survey with those of previous surveys in this regular annual series that began with the advent of devolution in 1999. It thus adopts a long lens looking at how much difference has been made by the 'long campaign', a campaign that arguably began when agreement was reached in February 2013 on the wording of the question on the ballot paper. It is less concerned with the impact of particular short-term developments and events during the campaign itself.

Our 2014 data come from 1,339 interviews that were conducted face to face to a probability sample of adults aged 18 plus living in Scotland between 12 May and 17 July. The response rate for these interviews is 57%. Our results represent initial findings that have been released so that they can be published in advance of polling day on 18<sup>th</sup> September. They exclude a small number of further interviews that will be included in the final version of the data set. The data are weighted so that they reflect the known age and sex distribution of the Scottish population as well as the known pattern of non-response.

In previous years the SSA survey was conducted in the summer and early autumn. Thus when we compare the results of the 2014 survey with those of its predecessor in 2013, we are comparing it with a survey conducted between June and October, some six months or so after the long campaign began, while the 2012 survey was conducted between July and November when the referendum debate was still focused on arguments about how the independence referendum should be conducted.

## How Might Things Have Changed?

There are a variety of ways in which the referendum campaign could have made a difference to the balance and character of public attitudes towards how Scotland should be governed. The

---

most obvious is that the level of support for or opposition to independence might have changed. As a result of the campaigning, support for independence might have reached levels not previously seen – or might have fallen away to a new low. Second, there might have been a change in the kinds of people who are more or less likely to support independence. Previous research has suggested that women and older people, for example, are less inclined than men and younger people to back independence,<sup>1</sup> but perhaps the campaigning has served to erode – or exaggerate these differences.

But if public attitudes have shifted at all, why has this happened? The most obvious explanation would be that people have come to a different view of the relative merits of independence versus staying in the Union. In particular, we have previously argued that people's attitudes toward independence reflect above all their views about whether such a step would be economically advantageous or not. So perhaps the much closer consideration that the arguments for and against independence have received as a result of the referendum campaign means that the distribution of attitudes towards its consequences has changed.

However, whether or not it has changed, the distribution of attitudes is not the only question that can be asked about the impact of a campaign. In so far as a referendum campaign provides an opportunity for voters to learn more about the subject of the ballot, it might also help to crystallize their views.<sup>2</sup> By this we mean that people's support for or opposition to independence may have come to reflect more closely their views of the respective merits of independence versus staying in the Union. Such a pattern might suggest that people's views have become more consistent and firmly based, and to that extent at least the campaign might have helped people come to a more informed decision. At the same time, we might also ask people themselves how well informed they feel they are about the issues at stake, and indeed whether any continuing lack of knowledge or uncertainty about the issues at stake has any impact on their willingness to vote one way or another.

All of this is, of course, to assume that people will go and vote. The degree to which people's willingness to vote has changed during the course of the campaign is discussed in a separate briefing by Jan Eichhorn and Lindsay Paterson<sup>3</sup>. Here we focus on the choice that will be made by those who do participate.

## Has Support for Independence Risen or Fallen?

Ever since the first survey in 1999, Scottish Social Attitudes has regularly asked people their attitude towards how Scotland should be governed by asking them to choose between independence inside or outside the European Union, a devolved Scottish Parliament with or without taxation powers, or not having any parliament in Edinburgh at all. The detail of these choices may now be thought a little dated, but this is the only question that has been asked repeatedly (on the same survey) ever since the advent of devolution, and it thus enables us to assess whether attitudes have changed over the full lifetime of the Scottish Parliament. The question reads as follows:

---

<sup>1</sup> R. Ormston, *Why don't more women support independence?*, Edinburgh: ScotCen Social Research, 2013; J. Curtice, *Who supports independence and Why?*, Edinburgh: ScotCen Social Research, 2013. Both available at <http://whatscotlandthinks.org/scottish-social-attitudes-reading>

<sup>2</sup> A. Gelman and A. King, 'Why are American Presidential Election Campaign Polls so variable when Votes are so Predictable?', *British Journal of Political Science*, 23: 409-51.

<sup>3</sup> J. Eichhorn and L. Paterson, *Who is Still Wavering? Turnout and the Undecided*, Edinburgh: ScotCen Social Research, 2014. Available at <http://whatscotlandthinks.org/scottish-social-attitudes-reading>.

Which of these statements comes closest to your view?

- Scotland should become independent, separate from the UK and the European Union
- Scotland should become independent, separate from the UK but part of the European Union
- Scotland should remain part of the UK, with its own elected parliament which has **some** taxation powers
- Scotland should remain part of the UK, with its own elected parliament which has **no** taxation powers
- Scotland should remain part of the UK **without** an elected parliament

In order to simplify matters, throughout this briefing we classify those who chose one or other of the first two options as supporters of independence, while those who chose either the third or fourth option are regarded as backers of devolution. Table 1 shows the distribution of responses in each year since 1999.

Table 1. Trends in Constitutional Preferences 1999-2014															
	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Independence	27	30	27	30	26	32	35	30	24	28	23	32	23	29	33
Devolution	59	55	59	52	56	45	44	54	62	56	61	58	61	55	50
No Parliament	10	12	9	13	13	17	14	9	9	8	10	6	11	9	7
Sample Size	1482	1663	1605	1665	1508	1637	1549	1594	1508	1482	1495	1197	1229	1497	1339

It would appear that opinion has swung towards independence during the course of the long campaign. Back in 2012 just 23% backed independence; now as many as 33% do so. The figure is even four points higher than it was a year ago.<sup>4</sup> To that extent those campaigning in favour of independence appear to have had the better of the campaign.

However, if we look over the longer term a more nuanced picture emerges. The latest figure of 33% is not the highest it has ever been in the SSA time series; it was 35% back in 2005. Our most recent reading is also only one point above the figure recorded immediately after the SNP won its now famous victory in the 2011 Scottish Parliament election. Rather than having clearly served to increase support for independence to unprecedented heights, the referendum campaign simply seems to have ensured that it currently stands towards the top end of the range of from a quarter and a third or so within which it has oscillated ever since 1999.

Still, although SSA's long standing question may enable us to see the long view, it does not pose the question that will face voters on the ballot paper, viz. 'Should Scotland be an independent country?'. Perhaps when faced with that more simple and straightforward question they give a different answer?

In both 2013 and in 2014 we ascertained how people intended to vote in the referendum by first of all asking them:

*If you do vote, will you vote 'Yes' or vote 'No' - or haven't you decided yet?*

<sup>4</sup> This difference is significant at the 5% level. (p=0.026).

Note this formulation quite deliberately made it relatively easy for people to say they had not fully made up their minds as yet. But those who said they were undecided were then further asked a ‘squeeze’ question:

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

<b>Table 2. Measures of Referendum Vote Intention, 2013 and 2014</b>				
2013	Unsqueezed	Waverers	After Squeezing	Excluding Undecided
Yes	20	28	30	36
No	42	34	54	64
Undecided	38	36	16	
N = 1497 Undecided includes those who say they will not vote or refused				
2014	Unsqueezed	Waverers	After Squeezing	Excluding Undecided
Yes	25	28	33	39
No	43	29	51	61
Undecided	32	43	15	
N = 1339 Undecided includes those who say they will not vote or refused				

In the first column of Table 2, labelled ‘unsqueezed’, we show (for both 2013 and 2014) how people responded to the first of these two questions. It shows that on this measure, at 25% the proportion saying they will vote Yes is five points higher than it was a year ago, while at 43%, the proportion saying they will vote No is up by just a point. Now 32% indicate that they are undecided compared with 38% in 2013, suggesting that the campaign has helped some people to come to a firm decision.

Meanwhile in the second column, headed ‘waverers’, we show the response given when those who are undecided (only) were asked the second follow-up ‘squeeze’ question. Amongst those who were willing to indicate a preference in response to this question, opinion in our latest survey was divided more or less equally between Yes and No. When, as in the third column, we bring together as Yes or No supporters those who said Yes or No in response to either of our two questions (the definition we use in the remainder of this briefing), 33% can be regarded as Yes supporters, up three points on 2013, while 51% are inclined to vote No, down three points. In the final column we exclude those who are firmly undecided from the calculation, thereby producing an implied referendum outcome amongst our sample of Yes 39%, No 61%, figures that also indicate a three point swing from No to Yes since last year.<sup>5</sup>

So on both of our measures we have registered a modest increase in support for independence of three to four points. This increase is in line with what we might anticipate from the record of the opinion polls, which between the middle of 2013 and the middle of 2014 on average also registered an increase of four points in support for a Yes vote (and a corresponding four point

<sup>5</sup> Though we might note that the difference is not quite significant at the 5% level (p=0.059)

decline in support for No).<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile we might also note that, at 33%, the proportion who say that they will vote Yes is exactly the same as the proportion who were identified as Yes supporters in response to our long standing SSA question. Indeed no less than 86% of those who were identified as supporters of independence in response to that question also stated that they intended to vote Yes (while, conversely, 87% of those who say they will vote Yes also chose independence in response to our earlier question). This suggests that when we want to look at how who supports independence and why has changed over a longer time frame than the last year, our long standing measure can be regarded as a reasonably adequate proxy for likely referendum vote and thus it is this measure that is used primarily in this briefing when looking at change since before 2013.

## Have The Demographics Changed?

If support for independence has increased somewhat, does this mean that there has also been some change in then kinds of people who support the idea? For example, have women now become less disinclined to support independence? Table 3, which shows the proportion of men and women who have supported independence in each year since 1999, suggests not. In our latest survey no less than 39% of men support independence, compared with 27% of women. This gap of 12 points is in fact twice the size of the six point gap that obtained on average between 1999 and 2013. Why women continue to be less willing than men to back independence is discussed fully in a separate briefing by Rachel Ormston.<sup>7</sup>

**Table 3 Support for Independence by Gender 1999-2014**

% support independence	Men	Women
	%	%
1999	30	24
2000	34	27
2001	31	24
2002	35	25
2003	27	24
2004	35	31
2005	38	32
2006	34	27
2007	29	19
2009	31	25
2010	25	22
2011	36	29
2012	27	20
2013	32	26
2014	39	27

Equally, there is no sign that the long standing greater reluctance of older voters to back independence has become any less marked. As Table 4 shows, only 23% of those aged 65 and over now back independence, ten points lower than in our sample as a whole. Meanwhile, at four points, the increase in support for independence amongst this age group since last year is identical to that in the sample as a whole.

<sup>6</sup> Full details of the polling conducted during the referendum campaign can be found at [whatscotlandthinks.org](http://whatscotlandthinks.org).

<sup>7</sup> R. Ormston, *Minding the Gap: Women's Views of Independence in 2014*, Edinburgh: ScotCen Social Research, 2014. Available at <http://whatscotlandthinks.org/scottish-social-attitudes-reading>

<b>Table 4 Support for Independence by Age Group, 2000 and 2010-14</b>						
% support independence	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
2000	44	44	31	23	28	17
2010	29	22	24	25	27	16
2011	40	31	30	36	28	24
2012	31	27	27	25	20	14
2013	34	24	36	32	31	19
2014	33	39	35	37	32	23

Previous research has also uncovered some tendency for those in more routine ‘working class’ occupations to be a little more likely to support independence.<sup>8</sup> That pattern is still apparent in our most recent survey; 37% of this group support independence, four points above the figure in our sample as a whole. Much the same is true of those living in the most deprived parts of Scotland. At 38% support for independence amongst those living in an area that is classified by the Scottish Government as amongst the 20% most deprived in the country is markedly higher than the 25% figure amongst those living in an area that is amongst the 20% least deprived. However, this difference of 13 points is exactly the same as it was in 2013, and almost the same as the 12 point difference that was evident in 2011. There is no sign in this survey at least that the particular efforts that the Yes campaign has reportedly been making to ‘target’ those living in less affluent circumstances have secured any particular dividend.

## Have People’s Views of the Arguments For and Against Independence Changed?

There are a number of reasons why people might choose to support or oppose independence. For some it might be an affair of the heart; they either wish to remain part of the UK because they feel intensely British or else would prefer Scotland to become independent because that would provide proper recognition of their distinctive Scottish identity. For others, in contrast, some of the more practical arguments about independence and the Union might hold greater sway. They may feel that Scotland gets a raw deal out of its position in the United Kingdom. Or even if that is not the case, they may still feel that independence would bring greater benefits; certainly in its White Paper laying out the case for independence the Scottish Government argued that independence would bring greater prosperity and provide the opportunity to create a more equal society, underpinned by a more supportive welfare state.<sup>9</sup>

Scottish Social Attitudes has tracked all three of these feelings and perceptions, in some cases ever since the early days of devolution. So we will now assess whether people have come to be more likely to feel Scottish or British, more or less critical of the deal Scotland gets out of the

<sup>8</sup> J. Curtice, *Who supports independence and why?*, Edinburgh: ScotCen Social Research, 2013. Available at <http://whatscotlandthinks.org/scottish-social-attitudes-reading>

<sup>9</sup> Scottish Government, *Scotland’s Future: Your Guide to an Independent Scotland*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government, 2013. Available at <http://referendum.scot/reports/scotlands-future-your-guide-to-an-independent-scotland/>



Union, and whether they changed their view on whether independence would be practically beneficial or deleterious.

The simplest way in which people in Scotland can be asked about their national identity is to invite them to choose which one of the various identities commonly associated with Britain and/or Ireland best describes themselves. In Table 5 we show how many people have chosen British or Scottish (no other identity has ever been chosen by more than a handful) when faced with that question. Note that in this instance we have readings from earlier surveys (conducted in a similar manner to SSA) from as far back as 1974.

<b>Table 5 Trends in 'Forced Choice' National Identity, 1974-2014</b>							
	1974	1979	1992	1997	1999	2000	2001
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Scottish	65	56	72	72	77	80	77
British	31	38	25	20	17	13	16
<i>Sample size</i>	<i>588</i>	<i>658</i>	<i>957</i>	<i>882</i>	<i>1,482</i>	<i>1,663</i>	<i>1,605</i>
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2009
	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Scottish	75	72	75	79	78	72	73
British	18	20	19	14	14	19	15
<i>Sample size</i>	<i>1,665</i>	<i>1,508</i>	<i>1,637</i>	<i>1,549</i>	<i>1,594</i>	<i>1,508</i>	<i>1,482</i>
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014		
Scottish	73	75	69	66	65		
British	19	15	20	24	23		
<i>Sample size</i>	<i>1,495</i>	<i>1,196</i>	<i>1,229</i>	<i>1,497</i>	<i>1,339</i>		

*Source: 1974-97: Scottish Election Studies*

Forced to choose in this way, most people say they are Scottish. Indeed that became increasingly the case in the years running up to the creation of the Scottish Parliament. But in the last three years – as the referendum began to come into view – the proportion who choose British has increased somewhat. As recently as 2011 only 15% did so; now that figure stands at 23%. Conversely, the proportion who say they are Scottish has fallen over the same period from 75% to 65%.

This apparent change is evidently not simply a product of the later stages of the referendum campaign. It first began to be apparent in 2012. However, in that year much of our survey work was conducted shortly after the London Olympic Games, and it seemed possible that people's sense of British identity had simply been briefly stimulated by that event. But the pattern persisted, and indeed became more pronounced in 2013, and it has now been confirmed by our 2014 survey. It would appear to be a longer-term development that has changed somewhat the backcloth against which this referendum has been fought.

The change is also apparent in the answers to another question about national identity, known as the 'Moreno question'. Rather than forcing people to choose a single identity, this question presents them with five different options, ranging from 'Scottish, not British' to 'British, not Scottish'. The details are to be found in Table 6. There we can see that between 1999 and 2006, typically around a third said that they were Scottish and not British. The figure had already fallen to a little below 30% between 2007 and 2011, but in the last three years it has been no more than 23-25%. At the same time, in our most recent survey the proportion who say they are more Scottish than British has dropped to an all-time low of 26%. While it remains the case that few think of themselves as being British rather than or more than they are Scottish, it seems that was

already an increased tendency to feel British as well as Scottish continued further when people began to be faced with the prospect that Scotland might actually leave the United Kingdom.

**Table 6 Trends in Moreno National Identity, 1992-2014**

	1992	1997	1999	2000	2001	2003	2005	2006	2007	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Scottish not British	19	23	32	37	36	31	32	33	27	27	28	29	23	25	23
More Scottish than British	40	38	35	31	30	34	32	32	30	31	30	33	30	29	26
Equally Scottish and British	33	27	22	21	24	22	22	21	28	26	26	23	30	29	32
More British than Scottish	3	4	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	4	4	5	5	4	5
British not Scottish	3	4	4	4	3	4	5	5	6	4	4	5	6	6	6
Sample size	957	882	1,482	1,663	1,605	1,508	1,549	1,594	1,508	1,482	1,495	1,196	1,229	1,497	1,339

Source: 1992, 1997: Scottish Election Study

Meanwhile, it might be thought that the advent of a SNP government in Edinburgh would have been accompanied by greater dissatisfaction with the deal that Scotland secures from the Union. After all, what other reason could there be for voters to vote for a party that argues that Scotland should leave the UK? But as we have noted elsewhere,<sup>10</sup> the very opposite seemed to happen after the SNP came to power – people in Scotland became less critical of the Union, seemingly because the SNP were thought more successful at defending Scotland’s interests within the framework of the UK. Nevertheless, perhaps the onset of the referendum debate and Yes Scotland’s criticisms of the Union in particular has reversed this trend?

<sup>10</sup> R. Ormston and J. Curtice, ‘Resentment or Contentment: Attitudes to the Union 10 years on’, in A. Park, J. Curtice, E. Clery and C. Bryson (eds), *British Social Attitudes: the 27<sup>th</sup> report: Exploring Labour’s Legacy*, London: Sage, 2010.

**Table 7 Trends In Attitudes Towards Scotland's Share of Public Spending, 2000-14**

	2000	2001	2003	2005	2007	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
More than fair share of government spending	10	10	11	10	16	14	14	11	13	12	12
Pretty much its fair share of government spending	27	36	34	32	37	39	41	39	39	42	37
Less than fair share of government spending	59	48	47	49	36	38	38	42	42	40	43
<i>Sample Size</i>	<i>1663</i>	<i>1605</i>	<i>1508</i>	<i>1549</i>	<i>1508</i>	<i>1482</i>	<i>1495</i>	<i>1197</i>	<i>1229</i>	<i>1497</i>	<i>1339</i>

So far as attitudes towards Scotland's share of public spending are concerned, there are no more than marginal signs that this might have happened (see Table 7). The proportion who think that Scotland secures less than its fair share is, at 43%, higher now than at any time since 2007, but it is not significantly different from the 42% figure obtained in 2011 and 2012. However, a stronger trend towards a more critical outlook is apparent in the pattern of responses to a question that asks people which nation's economy – Scotland's or England's – benefits most (sic) from Scotland being part of the Union. As Table 8 shows, by 2007-10 the proportion who thought that England's economy benefits more had fallen to such an extent that the group was now more or less no more numerous than those who felt that Scotland's economy benefitted more. But more recently the feeling that England's economy benefits more has become more common once again. Now, at 33%, that group is almost twice as big as the body of people who think Scotland's economy benefits more (18%). However, apart whatever impact the referendum campaign may have had, this development may also be a consequence of the fact that London in particular has emerged more rapidly out of the financial crisis of 2008.

**Table 8 Trend in Attitudes Towards Whose Economy Benefits Most from the Union, 1999-2014**

	1999	2000	2001	2003	2005	2007	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
England benefits more	36	42	38	30	36	27	28	23	29	28	32	33
Equal	36	36	39	40	34	39	40	45	44	45	41	41
Scotland benefits more	22	16	18	24	21	25	24	26	22	22	20	18
<i>Sample Size</i>	<i>1482</i>	<i>1663</i>	<i>1605</i>	<i>1508</i>	<i>1549</i>	<i>1508</i>	<i>1482</i>	<i>1495</i>	<i>1197</i>	<i>1229</i>	<i>1497</i>	<i>1339</i>

Meanwhile, according to the Better Together campaign, one of the key advantages to Scotland of remaining in the Union is that it has access to a welfare state that is underpinned by the tax revenues of the UK as a whole, and not, as would be the case under independence, those of Scotland alone. The 2013 survey suggested that this argument was relatively attractive to many

people in Scotland. As many as 58% felt that the benefits paid to unemployed people in Scotland should be funded out of UK-wide tax revenues, while only 36% believed that they should be funded out of Scottish revenues alone. Now opinion is even more clearly in favour of UK-wide funding, with 64% in favour while just 26% believe funding should come specifically from Scottish revenues. Much the same trend can be seen in respect of pensions. In 2013 people favoured UK-wide funding by 61% to 34%. Now they do so by 69% to 22%. Scotland may have its doubts about whether it secures its fair share of the UK public spending cake, but a majority would apparently still prefer the prospect of access to a slice of that cake rather than having one of their own, and in this respect at least attitudes towards the Union seem to have become more favourable during the last twelve months.

But irrespective of whatever views people might have of the Union, have they changed their minds about whether or not independence itself would improve their country's lot? In recent years SSA has repeatedly asked its respondents what they think the consequences of independence would be. Would Scotland's economy be better or worse? Would its voice in the world be stronger or weaker? Would the gap between rich and poor be bigger or smaller? In Table 9 we summarise the pattern of responses to these and similar questions that were included on our 2014 survey, and show how the figures have changed compared with those obtained when the same questions were asked in 2012 and 2013.

<b>Table 9 Expectations of Independence, 2012-14</b>						
	2012		2013		2014	
	More/Better	Less/Worse	More/Better	Less/Worse	More/Better	Less/Worse
Pride in country	55	3	51	4	47	6
Voice in the world	42	22	38	25	33	38
Economy	34	34	30	34	25	44
Gap 'tween rich & poor	19	25	16	25	17	30
Ability to protect bank deposits	-	-	5	41	14	53
Personal Finances	-	-	9	29	10	39

Note: Those saying independence would not make any difference not shown.

We uncover what might be thought to be a surprising finding. In every case the proportion who think that independence would be beneficial has fallen and/or the proportion who think it would be harmful has increased. There were already some signs of this happening between 2012 and 2013, but over the last twelve months the trend has become even clearer and more consistent. For example, having fallen from 34% to 30% between 2012 and 2013, the proportion that think Scotland's economy would be better under independence has now dropped further to 25%. Meanwhile having edged up slightly from 22% to 25% between 2012 and 2013, the proportion who think that Scotland's voice in the world would be weaker under independence has increased to as much as 38%. Indeed whereas two years ago people were almost twice as likely to think that Scotland's voice would be stronger as they were to think it would be weaker, now slightly more (38%) think it would be weaker than believe it would be stronger (33%).

It would seem that the referendum campaign has indeed served to change the balance of opinion on the merits or otherwise of independence. But far from proving to be a period during which the

---

advocates of independence have succeeded in persuading more of their citizens of the potential practical benefits of changing Scotland's constitutional status, it appears that on balance voters have become more sceptical about the idea. This was doubtless not what the Yes Scotland campaign anticipated would happen.

However, this finding leaves us with something of a paradox. On the one hand we have identified a small but discernible increase in support for independence during the last twelve months. On the other hand, fewer people are apparently convinced of the practical arguments in favour of the idea. How can these two things have happened at the same time? We evidently need to examine whether there has been a change in the considerations that shape people's decisions to vote Yes or No in order to see whether doing so helps us unravel this apparent contradiction.

## Have Opinions Crystallised?

In fact at first glance, relatively little appears to have changed so far as which considerations matter most to people is concerned. If we undertake a statistical analysis (a logistic regression, not shown) of the relationship between whether people proposed to vote Yes rather than No and the responses they have given to all of the various questions we have examined so far in this briefing (together with a variety of other questions that we do not have the space to consider here) we find that, as in previous years,<sup>11</sup> the issue that above all distinguishes those who propose to vote Yes from those who say they will vote No is whether or not they think the economy would be better or worse under independence. Beyond that whether or not people think that Scotland would have a stronger or weaker voice in the world also appears to be relatively important, just indeed as it has been in previous years.

On the other hand, this analysis suggests that some things have now changed. It appears that whether or not people think independence would result in a smaller gap between rich and poor has now come to play a role that was largely absent twelve months ago. In contrast, people's views of the Union now seem to be less prominent in their minds than they were; this is true both of whether or not people would prefer their pensions to be funded out of a UK-wide or a Scottish only tax pool and whether or not they think Scotland secures its fair share of UK public spending. In short, people's views about independence appear to have taken centre stage in their referendum decision-making, an initial indication, perhaps, that public opinion has come to be crystallised around the central proposition on the ballot paper, 'Should Scotland be an independent country?'.

Indeed, although it was already relatively strong, even the link between whether people think Scotland's economy would be better or worse and attitudes towards independence seems to have strengthened. As Table 10 shows, back in 2012 only 73% of those who felt that Scotland's economy would be 'a lot better' under independence actually supported the idea, while the same was true of just 45% of those who reckoned it would 'a little better'. Those figures had already increased to 88% and 62% respectively in 2013, but now the latter figure has increased further to 81%. In other words almost everyone who thinks that the economy would be better under independence now supports the idea, something that was far from true just two years ago. In

---

<sup>11</sup> J. Curtice and R. Ormston, 'The state of the Union: Public opinion and the Scottish question', in A. Park, E. Clery, J. Curtice, M. Phillips and D. Utting (eds), *British Social Attitudes: the 29<sup>th</sup> report*, London: NatCen Social Research. Available at <http://www.bsa-29.natcen.ac.uk/read-the-report/scottish-independence/introduction.aspx>. J. Curtice, 'Independence Referendum: A question of identity, economics or equality', in A. Park, J. Curtice and C. Bryson (eds), *British Social Attitudes: the 31<sup>st</sup> report*, London: NatCen Social Research, 2014). Available at <http://www.bsa-31.natcen.ac.uk/read-the-report/independence-referendum/introduction.aspx>

contrast, support for independence remains more or less as minimal as it has ever been amongst those who think the economy would be worse if Scotland left the UK.<sup>12</sup>

**Table 10 Support for Independence by Evaluations of the Economic Consequences of Independence 2011-14.**

Independence would make Scotland's economy	2011	2012	2013	2014
	% support independence			
A lot better	78	73	88	88
A little better	46	45	62	81
No difference	32	20	23	35
A little worse	10	4	7	11
A lot worse	4	3	5	3

So here we have clear evidence that people's views of the consequences of independence and their willingness to support the idea have become more closely aligned during the course of the referendum campaign. Moreover this evidence helps us to explain why overall levels of support for independence have increased at a time when fewer people think that independence would be beneficial. The pot of people who think that independence would produce a better economy might have diminished in size, but this has been counteracted by the fact that more of the occupants of that pot now back the idea.

Much the same pattern is evident in respect of the link between whether or not people think independence would strengthen Scotland's voice in the world and support for independence. As Table 11 shows, in 2012 just 64% of those who thought that voice would be a lot stronger said that Scotland should become independent. That figure had increased to 74% last year and stands at 86% now. A similar trend can also be identified amongst those who think the nation's voice would be a little stronger. There has even been some increase in support for independence amongst those who think leaving the UK would not have any impact on Scotland's voice in the world, although support among that group still remains well below a half. It appears that those who think that independence would not make much difference remain more inclined to stick with the Union.

**Table 11 Support for Independence by Evaluations of Its Impact on Scotland's Voice in the World, 2011-14**

Independence would make Scotland's voice in the world	2011	2012	2013	2014
	% support independence			
A lot stronger	64	64	74	86
A little stronger	37	31	47	58
No difference	18	17	19	27
A little weaker	9	8	12	13
A lot weaker	8	1	5	3

As we noted earlier, one of the key arguments in favour of independence put forward in the Scottish Government's White Paper on independence is that it would enable Scotland to create a

<sup>12</sup> The figures in this and subsequent tables are based on the proportion who said that they supported independence in response to our long standing SSA question. As we would anticipate from our earlier comments, in each case the figures for the proportion who said that they would vote Yes are very similar both in 2013 and in 2014 and do not lead us to come any different conclusions.

more equal society, a change that the Government believes would be more in keeping with the country's values. When SSA first addressed this issue in 2012, it appeared that relatively few people reckoned that this prospect was an important reason to back the idea. As Table 12 shows, at that time less than half of those who thought that the gap between rich and poor would be reduced under independence backed the idea. At the same time as many as one on five of those who thought the gap might be a little bigger said that nevertheless they still supported independence.

**Table 12 Support for Independence by Evaluations of its Impact on Inequality, 2012-14**

Under independence the gap between rich and poor would be	2012	2013	2014
	% support independence		
A lot smaller	46	74	78
A little smaller	37	53	79
No difference	22	27	35
A little bigger	20	23	13
A lot bigger	11	17	5

However, the pursuit of this argument by those campaigning in favour of independence seems to have ensured that there is now more of a link in voters' minds between independence and the reduction of inequality. Over three-quarters of those who think the gap between rich and poor would be smaller under independence now favour the idea. In contrast, support for independence is actually lower now than it was two years ago amongst those who think the gap between rich and poor would be bigger. The link between evaluations of the impact of independence on inequality and support for the proposition is still not as strong as in the equivalent link for evaluations of the economic consequences of independence (compare Table 12 with Table 10), but it is undoubtedly much stronger than it once was. Here again it seems that the referendum has helped to crystallise people's views.

But if people's willingness to back independence is now more clearly aligned with their views of its likely consequences, as we have already intimated the same cannot be said so clearly of their evaluations of how good or bad a deal that Scotland currently secures from the Union. True, as Table 13 shows, those who think that England's economy benefits more from the Union are much more likely to back independence than those who think that Scotland's economy does – by a margin of 63% to 14%. But that margin (of 49 points) is little different from the equivalent for last year (46 points) or that for as long ago as 2011 (44 points).

**Table 13 Support for Independence by Evaluations of Whose Economy Benefits Most from the Union, 2011-14**

Whose economy benefits most from the Union?	2011	2012	2013	2014
	% support independence			
England's	54	48	56	63
Equal	31	17	19	18
Scotland's	10	6	10	14

Much the same is true of people's attitudes towards whether pensions paid to people in Scotland should be funded out of a UK-wide pool of revenues or a Scotland only one. In 2013 (when SSA first addressed this issue) just 14% of those who felt that pensions should be paid out of a UK-wide pool indicated that they were inclined to vote Yes in the referendum, while as many as 58% of those believed they should be paid out of Scottish taxes alone were supporters of the Yes cause. However, now that former figure has increased from 14% to 26%, while the latter has

actually fallen slightly (if insignificantly) from 58% to 56%. On this issue the link with people's willingness to support independence has actually weakened.

So it appears that the referendum campaign has focused voters' minds on the arguments for and against independence rather than on the merits or otherwise of the Union. At the same time, the issue has not come to be much more a matter of identity than it was already. True, as Table 14 shows, support for independence has increased during the course of the last two years amongst those who say they are either 'Scottish, not British' or 'More Scottish than British', while it has been relatively stable amongst those who say that they are at least as British as they are Scottish. (The increase in support between 2013 and 2014 from 6% to 18% amongst those who say they are 'British, not Scottish' is, as is evident from Table 6, based on just 6% of our sample and is thus subject to a potentially large sampling error.) But even so, the link between identity and attitudes towards independence remains, as it always has been, noticeably weaker than that with evaluations of the economic consequences of changing Scotland's constitutional status.

**Table 14 Support for Independence by Moreno National Identity, 2011-14.**

Moreno National Identity	2011	2012	2013	2014
	% support independence			
Scottish, not British	53	46	51	60
More Scottish than British	32	23	34	43
Equally Scottish and British	12	11	14	11
More British than Scottish	11	12	8	11
British, not Scottish	9	4	6	18

The referendum campaign would appear then to have helped people form a more consistent and coherent judgement of the merits of the proposition being put before them. In particular, people's views of the consequences of independence and their willingness to support the idea are more closely aligned than they ever were before. Of course, we should not assume that this has happened simply because those who have always thought that independence would be beneficial have increasingly come to support the idea. Most likely in some cases those who have always supported independence have convinced themselves (or been convinced by others) that an idea for which they have always had sympathy does in fact make practical sense. But whatever the direction of causation, it appears that the referendum campaign has served to ensure that the vote that people cast on 18<sup>th</sup> September is more clearly a reflection of their view of the arguments for and against independence than would have been the case in any ballot that had been held two or three years ago. To that extent at least the referendum seems to have helped voters cast a more 'informed' vote.

## Knowledge and Certainty

Not, however, that people necessarily feel this to be the case subjectively. Last year just 22% felt that they knew 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' about independence. That proportion has only increased to 27% now, still somewhat lower than the 34% who reckon they know 'nothing' or at least 'not very much'. So the campaign has apparently only had a marginal impact on voters' self-confidence about the decision they have to take. This may well in part at least be because many of them are still unsure of what independence would in fact mean. As Table 15 shows, at 32% the proportion who feel either 'very' or 'quite' sure about what independence would bring is no higher now than the 34% who were of that view two years ago.

**Table 15 Certainty and Uncertainty about the Consequences of Independence? 2012-14**

	2012	2013	2014
--	------	------	------



	%	%	%
Very sure	8	7	7
Quite sure	26	22	25
Quite unsure	45	47	39
Very unsure	13	17	21
<i>Sample size</i>	<i>1229</i>	<i>1497</i>	<i>1339</i>

Such an outlook might be regarded as no more than rational. After all, who can predict what the future will bring, irrespective of Scotland’s constitutional status? But the continuing air of uncertainty about the consequences of independence does serve to depress the Yes vote somewhat. For example, amongst those who say that Scotland’s economy would be better under independence and who also say they are sure (either ‘very’ or ‘quite’) about its consequences, as many as 96% say that they will vote Yes. In contrast, amongst those who say they are optimistic about the economic consequences of independence, but who also say they are unsure of the consequences, only 72% are currently Yes supporters. A similar gap can also be found amongst those who reckon that independence would not make much difference. It seems that the air of uncertainty that surrounds independence continues to make it feel like more of a risk than some voters appear inclined to take.

## Conclusion

It appears that the last two years or so of campaigning, including the last twelve months, has indeed made a difference to public attitudes towards how Scotland should be governed. On the one hand it appears that fewer people are now convinced that independence would be good for Scotland, while the last two or three years appear to have been graced by something of a revival in adherence to British identity. Yet, at the same time support for independence has increased somewhat and the idea is now more or less as popular as it has been at any time in the last fifteen years – if not necessarily more so. Whether or not these seemingly divergent trends are a good or a bad thing obviously lies in the eye of the beholder, but evidently they at least suggest that campaigners have not been wasting their time talking to an electorate whose mind was wholly made up many years ago.

What however those who are concerned about the quality of the referendum process might all be willing to applaud is that it also appears to be the case that the campaign has helped ensure that the votes that people cast on 18<sup>th</sup> September will more clearly reflect their views of the merits of the arguments for and against leaving the UK. In so far as that is the case, the campaign will have helped make it more likely that the eventual outcome represents the nation’s collective judgement on the substantive issues at stake. As it happens, it is this sharpening of people’s views that helps explain why support for independence has increased even though people are now less likely to be enamoured of the arguments in favour of it. Although many of Scotland’s voters are not finding the choice before them an easy one to make, it seems that somehow many of them will in the end make a reasonably well informed decision.

**Funding for this paper was provided by the Economic and Social Research Council as part of its research initiative on The Future of the UK and Scotland. The views expressed here are entirely the responsibility of the author.**

ScotCen Social Research  
 73 Lothian Road  
 Edinburgh EH3 9AW  
 T 0131 228 2167  
[www.scotcen.org.uk](http://www.scotcen.org.uk)