

AUGUST 2011

**SCOTTISH
INDEPENDENCE**

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DEBATING MATTERS
TOPIC
GUIDES

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MOTION:

**“WE SHOULD
MAINTAIN THE
UNION”**

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KEY TERMS

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INTRODUCTION

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In May 2011 the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) won a surprise majority vote in the Scottish parliamentary elections [Ref: [STV](#)], something those who established the devolved Scottish system of government back in 1998 believed would be prevented from happening, instead encouraging coalition government between Scotland’s political parties. The new SNP majority means it can pursue its own political agendas, including the party’s long-held manifesto pledge to hold a referendum on a fully independent Scotland [Ref: [SNP](#)], unhindered by opposition parties or the need to work in coalition, with the necessary compromises to manifesto pledges that entails [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. In 2007 the SNP had already formed a minority government in the Scottish Parliament as the then largest party, and Alex Salmond became the first nationalist politician to hold the post of First Minister [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. That same year also marked the 300th anniversary of the 1707 Acts of Union between England and Scotland. The two parliamentary acts (one passed in England on 1706 and the other in Scotland in 1707) saw the union of the two separate kingdoms, creating a new kingdom of Great Britain [Ref: [Wikipedia](#)]. The rise of the SNP to power has prompted a new wave of discussions about the future of Scotland, and a referendum on Scottish independence in the next few years appears to be a real possibility. But the discussion about Scottish independence affects more than just the Scottish electorate - it calls into question the very union which formed the nation we have today.



Time for Scotland to rise again?

The new Labour government of 1997 put the issue of devolution for Scotland and Wales at the heart of its election manifesto. Devolved regional assemblies and parliaments were intended to both recognise a demand for more regional control, whilst maintaining political and fiscal union between all the countries of the union. The last national referendum on Scottish and Welsh devolution in 1979 failed [Ref: [BBC Scotland](#)], and the SNP's increased influence in Scottish politics in the intervening period can be explained, some argue, by the 'Democratic Deficit', which saw Scotland vote overwhelming for a Labour government between 1979 and 1994, but had a Conservative government return each time [Ref: [Telegraph](#)]. Those in favour of increased devolution, or complete independence, argue it's time to review the union, which was a product of its time, and is now due a rethink three hundred years on [Ref: [Huffington Post](#)]. What may have been practical reasons at the time for ceding sovereignty to Westminster, such as the Scottish crown's bankruptcy, shouldn't be the basis for a modern democratic Union in the twenty first century, which should surely be able to cope with the separate political ambitions of each of its component parts [Ref: [Guardian](#)]? Is there not the capacity to have a Scottish parliament which makes decisions concerning its people, whilst contributing to a union of federal states which look after the shared interests of its respective nations, much as the European Union aims to do? The nation state, supporters of devolution argue, is in decline around the world, and is being increasingly replaced by autonomous states working in economic and defence federations [Ref: [openDemocracy](#)].

Stronger together than apart?

One of the consequences of the discussion about Scottish and Welsh devolution was the formation of English campaign groups asking whether England might not be better outside of the Union too [Ref: [Campaign for an English Parliament](#)]. At the heart of this discussion was the 'West Lothian question', a constitutional anomaly created by devolution whereby Scottish MP's sit and vote in the Westminster parliament, but English and Welsh MP's cannot vote on Scottish matters at Holyrood [Ref: [Telegraph](#)]. Similarly, the perceived unfairness of the Barnett Formula [Ref: [Parliament](#)], whereby Scotland receives 10% of available government money is, argue its critics, primarily unfair to English taxpayers who generate the larger tax revenue to the Treasury. Others question the economics of Scotland 'going it alone', and ask, for example, how shared UK resources (such as North Sea oil and gas) and defence could possibly be divided up. Some also question where this 'balkanisation' of the UK might stop, with recent campaigns for Cornish independence [Ref: [Telegraph](#)] and suggestions of a devolved Yorkshire parliament [Ref: [BBC News](#)] used as examples of a tendency to fragment if we begin to break up the Union. Beyond the practicalities, some argue the UK was the first modern society based not on ethnicity or race, but of shared purposes and beliefs, not 'formed at the end of a bayonet' as so many other states were in the same period, but as a product of Enlightenment thinking which recognised shared economic and political values, and an intricately linked history [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. The nationalist's idea of Scotland being an independent state within the context of a broader European Union is also called into question in light of recent EU economic troubles, and the uncertainty surrounding the support smaller

states can expect to receive.

Sleepwalking into a breakup of the union?

Whilst many commentators are discussing the issue of Scottish independence in light of the recent SNP Holyrood victory, opinion polls taken after the May elections suggested that there was little appetite on the part of Scottish voters for breaking away from the UK [Ref: [UK Polling Report](#)]. Indeed, some commentators suggest that disillusionment with the old political parties, and the collapse of the Labour vote in Scotland, did more to thrust the SNP to power than the issue of an independent Scotland [Ref: [spiked](#)]. If the demand for Scottish independence is a minority one, but no defence of maintaining the union is made, might the UK run the risk of sleep walking into a breakup of the union [Ref: [Spectator](#)]? Can those in favour of the union make a valid case today for maintaining it? Or is the growth of competing nationalisms the next inevitable shift in the islands history? In a Britain already concerned about social cohesion, what effect will the breakup of the union have? As the notion of nation states is increasingly being called into question, what it means to be British, or indeed Scottish, becomes a valid discussion [Ref: [Guardian](#)].

ESSENTIAL READING

SNP Party Manifesto 2011

SNP 2011

Scottish Independence

Guardian

FOR

Let's all vote to stick together

Simon Moss *Guardian* 20 May 2011

If Scotland does secede, I won't be alone in mourning for my country

David Mitchell *Guardian* 15 May 2011

We must fight to preserve the Union

Alan Chochrane *Spectator* 5 August 2009

Torn asunder

Ruaridh Nicoll *Guardian* 7 January 2007

AGAINST

Defining Scotland's Independence - the Referendum and the Negotiations

Peter Curran *Hufington Post* 18 August 2011

It is time for England's first empire to get independence

Simon Jenkins *The Times* 10 May 2011

Scottish independence would open the way for constitutional reform

David Rickard *openDemocracy* 9 May 2011

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With a shrug of the shoulders, England is becoming a nation once again

Matthew Parris *Spectator* 18 September 2010

IN DEPTH

Why Alex Salmond is not Braveheart

Craig Fairington *spiked* 10 May 2011

Stunning SNP election victory throws spotlight on Scottish independence

Severin Carrell *Guardian* 6 May 2011

Scotland should hold an independence referendum

Daniel Hannan *Telegraph* 6 May 2011

Scotland's politics of evasion

Tom Gallagher *openDemocracy* 11 December 2009

When the Scottish Labour tail wagged the English Tory dog – the concrete facts

Gerald Warner *Telegraph* 13 November 2009

Salmond's bold new era of progressive nationalism

Iain MacWhirter *Herald Scotland* 22 December 2007

BACKGROUNDEERS

The Eurocrisis Squeezes the SNP

Alex Massie *Spectator* 25 August 2011

The Scottish diaspora: Migrant tales

Economist 20 August 2011

What does Scottish independence really mean?

ESRC 21 July 2011

Q&A: Scottish independence referendum

BBC News 29 May 2011

UK Polling Report

YouGov 12 May 2011

Your Scotland, Your Voice: A National Conversation

The Scottish Government 2009

Nation-state politics can only fail the problems of the modern world

Ulrich Beck *Guardian* 15 January 2008

The West Lothian Question

Telegraph 28 October 2007

How black gold was hijacked: North sea oil and the betrayal of Scotland

Ben Russell and Paul Kelbie *Independent* 9 December 2005

300th anniversary of the Act of Union

STV Scotland

The 1979 Referendums

BBC Scotland

Barnett Formula

Parliament

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RECOMMENDS:

'Braveheart' (15), 1995

Find out more about our partnership with the education charity FILMCLUB, how you can bring the power of films into your school debates, and this autumn's recommendations from the FILMCLUB team for Debating Matters!

ORGANISATIONS

Plaid Cymru

SNP

The Campaign for an English Parliament

IN THE NEWS

Scottish Conservative Party set to disband

Telegraph 3 September 2011

Alex Salmond told SNP plans will 'damage economy'

Scotsman 2 September 2011

A deeply divided kingdom: Scots each get £1,600 more state cash a year spent on them than the English

Daily Mail 30 August 2011

Scots also seek control of corporation tax

Financial Times 21 August 2011

Nearly half of English oppose Scottish independence - poll

BBC News 4 July 2011

Independence referendum: Scots to have trio of choices

Scotsman 10 June 2011

Sun poll finds we want Scots independence more than they do

Sun 12 May 2011

UK 'will not block' Scottish independence referendum

BBC News 8 May 2011

Scottish National Party uses new-found power to demand that

David Cameron grants Scotland more...

Daily Mail 7 May 2011

Salmond hails 'historic' victory as SNP secures Holyrood's first ever majority

Guardian 6 May 2011

Scottish Elections: SNP wins historic victory

STV 6 May 2011

Scottish election: SNP wins election

BBC News 6 May 2011

David Blunkett MP suggests "Yorkshire Parliament"

BBC News 27 October 2010

Scottish independence referendum plans published

BBC News 25 February 2010

Scottish independence referendum: Lib Dem leader Clegg says vote would be 'wrong'

Scotsman 21 September 2009

Cornish independence is back on the menu

Telegraph 15 June 2007

Salmond prepares for SNP minority government

Guardian 8 May 2007

SNP prepares for minority government after Lib Dems rule out coalition deals

Independent 7 May 2007

Union in poor state on 300th anniversary

Telegraph 16 January 2007

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ABOUT DEBATING MATTERS

Debating Matters because ideas matter. This is the premise of the Institute of Ideas & Pfizer Debating Matters Competition for sixth form students which emphasises substance, not just style, and the importance of taking ideas seriously. Debating Matters presents schools with an innovative and engaging approach to debating, where the real-world debates and a challenging format, including panel judges who engage with the students, appeal to students from a wide range of backgrounds, including schools with a long tradition of debating and those with none.

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Debating Matters engages a wide range of individuals, from the students who take part in the debates, the diverse group of professionals who judge for us, the teachers who train and support their debaters, and the young people who go on to become Debating Matters Alumni after school and help us to continue to expand and develop the competition. If you enjoyed using this Topic Guide, and are interested in finding out more about Debating Matters and how you can be involved, please complete this form and return it to us at the address below.

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- I am a sixth form student and would like further details about events in my area
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- I am interested in sponsoring/supporting Debating Matters
- Other (please specify)

First name

Surname

School/company/
organisation

Professional role
(if applicable)

Address

Postcode

Email address

School/work phone

Mobile phone

**“TEENAGE CITIZENS
THINKING DEEPLY
ABOUT...SOCIAL
ISSUES”**

IAN GRANT, CEO, BRITANNICA

