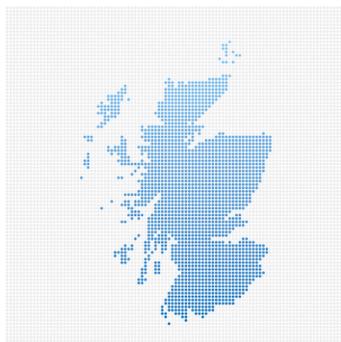


The Referendum Schools Debate

SEPTEMBER 2013

**SMALL
NATIONS**

JUSTINE BRIAN



MOTION:

**“SCOTLAND HAS
MORE IN COMMON
WITH OTHER SMALL
NATIONS THAN WITH
ITS NEIGHBOUR
ENGLAND”**



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KEY TERMS

BRIC

Commonweal

Nation

Nordic countries

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One of the key questions in the coming independence referendum is how an independent Scotland would make its way in the world as a new nation, and whether its interests are best served as a part of the well-known entity which is the United Kingdom or as a small, independent nation. Might it have more in common with other smaller nations around the world, from near neighbours such as Denmark to more distant ones such as Singapore, both of which have similar population sizes and developed economies? A newly independent Scotland would no longer have a permanent seat at the UN Security Council or the G8 like the United Kingdom. But would that be an issue for the country? Could Scottish trade compete internationally if it were no longer part of the world's sixth largest economy, or might it perhaps prosper economically without being dominated by its English neighbour to the south? Some supporters of a 'Yes' vote in the 2014 referendum argue that rather than seek centralised power either through the UK or the European Union, Scotland would be better off within an informal 'family' of smaller nations [Ref: [SNP](#)], making new strategic alliances with countries who share an independent Scotland's interests and outlook, rather than having to accept foreign policy decisions taken in London. Critics argue that the search for a new 'family' of small nations ignores what Scotland shares with its immediate geographical neighbour to the south – "history, language, landscape and culture" - and millennia old cross-border social and family ties [Ref: [Prospect](#)]. Foreign Secretary William Hague has argued that Scotland stands to lose its place on the world stage in trade, diplomacy and global influence if it chooses independence next year [Ref: [Telegraph](#)], whilst others counter that it's time to assert a new vision for Scotland as a small nation among many others with values and aspirations that are not the same as its English cousin [Ref: [Newsnet Scotland](#)].

Scotland's place internationally

Former Chancellor Kenneth Clarke, addressing an Institute of Director's conference in Aberdeen in September, said that the United Kingdom was: "...one of the very most leading countries inside the largest economic bloc in the world: the EU. We are one of five countries with a permanent seat on the Security Council of the UN. We are members of the G8 and G20. These are unprecedented opportunities to fight for the best interests of our citizens. With one throw of the dice, Scottish independence would deprive Scotland of the benefits of this collective clout" [Ref: [Scotsman](#)]. The question of what an independent Scotland would look like on the world stage separated from the larger UK is a hotly contested one. An independent Scotland would not have a seat at the UN Security Council as part of the wider UK, for example, and questions over its membership and role in the Commonwealth have also been raised. A small nation such as Scotland would struggle to influence the European Council, on which the UK is one of the main players, having a similar voting power to Germany, France and Italy. Scotland, with a small population of just 5.3 million people, would lose the collective strength of the UK and its vote weighting would be comparable to countries such as Lithuania and Slovakia [Ref: [Wikipedia](#)]. On the other hand, those in favour of an independent Scotland argue that it would be able to set its own foreign and diplomatic priorities for the first time. For example, Alex Salmond recently said that it was "inconceivable" that an independent Scotland would have taken part in the invasion of Iraq [Ref: [Herald Scotland](#)]. Others propose that, with regards to collective defence, Scotland could aim to be a member of the Partnership for Peace, along with other Nordic countries such as Sweden and

Finland, as well as Ireland, who cooperate on defence matters with NATO but aren't a formal part of that body [Ref: [NATO](#)]. In the EU, Scotland's loss of wider influence via the UK could be balanced by being able to bargain more effectively on issues which affect Scotland, as is the case where the SNP have accused the UK government of neglecting Scottish fisherman when making deals with the EU [Ref: [SNP](#)]. An independent Scotland could also enhance its diplomatic power by forming alliances with other smaller nations, such as exist with the Nordic Council, where Iceland, Sweden, Finland, Norway and Denmark share common diplomatic and trade agreements [Ref: [The Nordic Council](#)]. Small nations, often without obvious strategic interests in conflicts or disputes between larger nations, can play a more neutral diplomatic role and wield cultural diplomacy more effectively. Examples include the historic 'Edinburgh Conversations' which, some argue, helped played a crucial role in helping to thaw Cold War tensions between the world's superpowers [Ref: [Scotsman](#)]. And others argue that projects such as the European Union, which sought to unite many nation-states in shared economic and social policies, are failing, and that it's now time to consider looking beyond the nation-state into smaller "habitat-nations" [Ref: [openDemocracy](#)].

The Scottish economy

"In many ways, Scotland is the southern, fertile end of the Nordic empire" argues broadcaster and journalist Leslie Riddoch [Ref: [BBC News](#)]. Riddoch, co-founder of think tank Nordic Horizons [Ref: [Nordic Horizons](#)], argues, along with other proponents of closer ties with Scotland's Nordic neighbours, that the Scots have much to learn about being a small independent nation

from other small nations with similar population sizes and resource rich economies. Some commentators argue that the UK's economic clout and global influence is also overstated [Ref: [New Statesman](#)]. As power shifts away from the west towards Asia and the BRIC countries, the UK's past authority and ability to push for the best trade deals is increasingly diminished. But others counter that: "When other small nations are choosing to sacrifice independence for economic security inside the eurozone, what makes Scotland so sure it can travel in the opposite direction?" [Ref: [Observer](#)]. Some argue the choice for Scotland is to stay within the UK and experience continued austerity and social division, or go it alone and aim to begin to reflect a more socially democratic outlook [Ref: [Herald Scotland](#)]. For many supporters of an independent Scotland, it would be an opportunity for the country to take a new approach to taxation, labour relations and welfare, separate from the ideas of a currently dominant Westminster. The idea of a 'common weal' is advocated, drawing lessons and inspiration from Nordic countries and promoting "a high-wage, high-value economy, powered by an active and thoroughgoing democracy" [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. But critics say that this 'common weal' approach to reimagining Scotland may be asking the right questions but is often wishful thinking rather than a real plan or vision for the future [Ref: [BBC News](#)].

Seeking a new 'family'?

"Let's borrow from inspiring examples from our neighbours: the Norwegian Sovereign Wealth Fund gives a percentage of its funds to address international conflicts; we could do the same with an Oil Fund for the Mind at home and abroad. The

Finns...saw their government launch 'Mission for Finland 2030', an imaginative exercise on the future, which they handed over to others. And the Icelanders have just crowd-sourced their new constitution, showing that you don't need to continually invoke the memory of the Scottish Constitutional Convention to realise a participatory democracy" argues commentator Gerry Hassan [Ref: [Newsnet Scotland](#)]. But does forcing Scotland to choose an "exclusive and separate identity" in an independence referendum, as Cumbrian MP Rory Stewart argues, diminish and tear apart the already existing family of nations that makes up the UK? Does looking elsewhere for new connections mean that the shared: "History, language, landscape and culture are strangely absent in the debate about the Union" [Ref: [Prospect](#)]. There is also the broader question, relating to the people of the UK as a whole, that a UK without Scotland would be a diminished nation itself, less powerful on the world stage. Some argue there's nothing wrong with political unions, which is what the United Kingdom currently is: "We know from our history that political unions, properly managed, do not destroy the identities of small nations, and indeed allow them to prosper" [Ref: [University of Edinburgh Institute of Governance](#)]. So is Scotland better off as a small nation, freed from the historical ties to the United Kingdom and free to form new alliances? Or is the UK an umbrella under which all its member nations can work together and prosper?

ESSENTIAL READING

FOR

A New Scottish Democracy: A Small Nation with Big Ideas

Gerry Hassan *Newsnet Scotland* 5 January 2013

Look north, Scotland

Lesley Riddoch *Guardian* 5 December 2011

Scottish independence will reinforce our social union

Angus Robertson *Guardian* 10 October 2011

AGAINST

Why Scotland should stay a partner in the United Kingdom

Alistair Darling *Guardian* 27 June 2012

Loyalty of the Borderlands

Rory Stewart *Prospect* 22 February 2012

Is Scotland a Nordic country?

Alex Massie *Spectator* 12 December 2011

IN DEPTH

Scotland splits on the economic benefits of freedom

Phillip Iman *Observer* 22 September 2013

How small countries can save the European project: the rise of the habitat-nation

Ignasi Ribo *openDemocracy* 6 November 2012

Small nations: crisis and confrontation in the 20th century

Dr. Ismee Tames and Dr. Madelon de Keizer *NIOD* 2008

Scotland Small? Making sense of Nations in the 21st Century

David McCrone *University of Edinburgh Institute of Governance*
18 October 2002

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BACKGROUNDEERS

Scotland can provide secure forum for global disputes

Dr John Sturrock *Scotsman* 18 September 2013

Why Scotland works best inside the union

Alistair Darling *Channel 4 News* 17 September 2013

Despite its election result, Norway is still a beacon of hope for a new Scotland

Robin McAlpine *Herald Scotland* 15 September 2013

Scotland's campaign for independence must be Gandhian in its ambition

Pat Kane *Guardian* 15 September 2013

Small independent nations are the world's happiest

Yes Scotland 14 September 2013

Scottish independence: Willie Sullivan and Alex Massie

BBC News 13 September 2013

Time to think big on independence

Alex Massie *Scotsman* 12 July 2013

Scotland doesn't benefit from British economic 'strength'

James Maxwell *New Statesman* 1 May 2013

Scottish independence and the new Enlightenment

Gordon MacIntyre-Kemp *Business for Scotland* 20 March 2013

Salmond's arc of prosperity melted

Alf Young *Scotsman* 9 February 2013

How small countries make a big impact: Alex Salmond at TEDGlobal 2012

Ben Lillie *TedX Blog* 27 June 2012

Scottish Independence: It'll cost you

Economist 14 April 2012

Scotland cannot afford to leave Nato

Jim Murphy *Guardian* 2 March 2012

Scotland and Norway: a special relationship?

Andrew Boyle *Guardian* 4 October 2011

Scotland can Join Europe's Arc of Prosperity

SNP 11 August 2006

Scotland Decides: Foreign Affairs

Michael Settle *Herald Scotland*

ORGANISATIONS

Better Together

Beyond Borders Scotland

Partnership for Peace

Scottish National Party (SNP)

The Jimmy Reid Foundation

The Nordic Council

Yes

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IN THE NEWS

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Scottish independence: the cost of borrowing and of transition

BBC News 18 September 2013

Scottish independence: “collective clout” warning

Scotsman 17 September 2013

SNP councillors unanimously back Common Weal blueprint for a fairer Scotland

Herald Scotland 8 September 2013

SNP minister looks to strengthen Scotland’s links with Sweden and Denmark

Herald Scotland 19 August 2013

William Hague: Scottish independence would ‘diminish’ Britain on world stage

Telegraph 20 June 2013

Michael Moore tells US: Independent Scotland ‘bit player’ on world stage

Telegraph 10 December 2012

Alex Salmond abandons ‘absurd’ SNP economic strategy

Telegraph 14 September 2011

Scotland can Join Europe’s Arc of Prosperity

SNP 11 August 2006

ABOUT THE STV/DEBATING MATTERS REFERENDUM SCHOOLS DEBATE

Debating Matters has teamed up with STV to give secondary school pupils across Scotland the opportunity to debate the big issues in the run up to the referendum on Scottish independence in 2014. The Scotland wide competition will give school pupils, many of who will be eligible to vote in the referendum on independence, the chance to research and discuss issues which will affect the future of Scotland. STV will provide a platform for debates and cover the competition on air and online. Debating Matters has produced these special editions of our acclaimed Topic Guides on the motions for debate.

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FIND OUT MORE

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
- I am interested in becoming a Debating Matters judge
- I am interested in sponsoring/supporting Debating Matters
- Other (please specify)

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Surname

School/company/
organisation

Professional role
(if applicable)

Address

Postcode

Email address

School/work phone

Mobile phone



**“DEBATING MATTERS
TEACHES A WAY
OF THINKING.
INTELLECTUAL
ARCHITECTURE
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ENGAGING WITH
IDEAS”**

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