

The Referendum
Schools Debate

FEBRUARY 2014

**THE
REFERENDUM
QUESTION**

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MOTION:

**“SHOULD SCOTLAND
BE AN INDEPENDENT
COUNTRY?”**

(UPDATED)



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INTRODUCTION

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In May 2011 the Scottish National Party (SNP) won a majority vote in the Scottish parliamentary elections [Ref: [STV](#)]. The vote gave First Minister Alex a mandate to hold a referendum on Scottish independence, a long-held manifesto pledge [Ref: SNP]. Three years earlier, 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 300 years since the treaty of Union came into effect, merging the Kingdom of Scotland and the Kingdom of England into Great Britain, later becoming the United Kingdom [Ref: [Wikipedia](#)]. These developments were the latest in the history of nationalism which, although there was opposition to the Treaty and some clamour for Home Rule in the 19th century, only-re-emerged as an organised political force in 1934 with the founding of the Scottish National Party. The party briefly secured its first Member of Parliament in 1945 but did not hold a seat again until Winnie Ewing's historic victory in the 1967 Hamilton by-election, a political upset which gave Scottish nationalism its most prominent platform so far and prompted the Labour government of the day to establish a royal commission, the Kilbrandon Commission, to examine the case for constitutional change. The resulting report set the wheels in motion for the 1979 referendum on a devolved Scottish Assembly, a vote which returned a Yes result, but which did not meet the additional requirement that 40% of registered electors support the proposal. Scottish home rule receded temporarily from the political agenda during the ideological struggles of the 1980s, only to re-emerge in the 1990s with a second Referendum and the establishment of a Scottish Parliament by the then Labour Government.

Democratic deficit and devolution

The Scottish Parliament, which reconvened on May 12th 1999 after almost three centuries, was hailed as a victory for Home Rule by supporters. In fact it was a solution to a political problem, the apparent 'democratic deficit' which, during the 1980s and 1990s, saw Conservative governments elected at Westminster despite Scots voting overwhelmingly for Labour. Margaret Thatcher won three consecutive elections while presiding over the electoral decline of her party in Scotland. Her programme of government, a set of market-oriented policies dubbed 'Thatcherism' which upturned the post-war social democratic consensus, proved largely unpopular north of the Border. Labour won the 1997 general election, pledging to hold a referendum on a devolved Scottish Parliament [Ref: [Labour](#)], and the plebiscite later that year saw Scots cast a 'Yes-Yes' vote; Yes to a devolved legislature and Yes to it having tax-varying powers. The first elections to the new body were held on May 6th 1999 and saw the formation of a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition, with Donald Dewar as the inaugural First Minister. Although the senior Labour politician George Robertson had famously proclaimed that "devolution will kill nationalism stone dead" [Ref: [Guardian](#)], Dewar took a more flexible view: "[T]he debate should not stop when the doors of the Scottish Parliament open. What we have done in Scotland may be a catalyst for further change" [Ref: [Holyrood](#)].

Referendum

On 15 October 2013, David Cameron and Alex Salmond signed the Edinburgh Agreement, transferring the power to hold a referendum from the UK Government to its Scottish counterpart [Ref: [UK Government](#)]. The First Minister announced the referendum date of 18 September 2014 earlier this year [Ref: [BBC News](#)]. While negotiations

over the terms of the referendum were in Progress, Reform Scotland, a public policy institute or 'think tank', argued that voters should be allowed to choose between the status quo, full independence and a third option, popularly known as Devo Max, that would see the Scottish Parliament "become accountable for 'raising the majority of its revenue" while the UK Government would provide "equalisation support" from UK-wide revenue [Ref: [Devo Plus](#)]. However, the Scottish Government, following consultation with the Electoral Commission, resolved that voters should simply be asked: "Should Scotland be an independent country? Yes/No" [Ref: [STV](#)]. For the first time in the UK, 16- and 17-year-olds would also be allowed to vote [Ref: [Scottish Government](#)]. Two campaigns emerged to argue for each side of the referendum debate. On 25 May 2012, Alex Salmond launched Yes Scotland, a cross-party campaign for a Yes vote in 2014 [Ref: [STV](#)]. The group would be headed by former television executive Blair Jenkins [Ref: [BBC News](#)]. It is seeking to secure one million signatures for its declaration [Ref: [BBC News](#)], the opening line of which summed up the rationale for independence: "It is fundamentally better for all of us if decisions about Scotland's future are taken by the people who care most about Scotland - that is by the people of Scotland" [Ref: [Yes Scotland](#)]. The launch of Yes Scotland was followed one month later by the unveiling of the campaign for a No vote, Better Together [Ref: [STV](#)]. In a speech on 25 June, former Chancellor of the Exchequer Alistair Darling, chair of the new organisation, maintained that the Union offered "the best of both worlds: a strong Scottish Parliament and a key role in a strong and secure United Kingdom" [Ref: [Better Together](#)]. Like Yes Scotland, Better Together has also brought together a range of parties and civil society actors to make its case to the voters, and both campaigns have since rolled out sectional sub-groups such as Yes LGBT [Ref: [Yes LGBT](#)] and LGBT Together [Ref: [LGBT Together](#)].

What's at stake?

Thus far in the referendum debate, policy issues have dominated in much the same way as a general election, with politicians on both sides claiming their preferred constitutional arrangements would make the country more prosperous, more secure, and more socially just [Ref: [Scottish Government](#) and [Scotsman](#)]. Practical considerations have also played a central role. These include, but are not limited to: the currency of an independent Scotland; membership of NATO; nuclear weapons and power; membership of the EU; the position of Queen Elizabeth II; border controls between the Scotland and the rest of the UK and between Scotland and the EU and the rest of the world; and pension provision. There has also been widespread speculation on both sides about the future of an independent Scottish economy, the extent of oil reserves in the North Sea and continental shelf, inward investment and host of other factors. However persuasive these visions may be, they remain, as with all predictions about the future, speculation rather than fact.

The White Paper

The Scottish Government has published a White Paper, Scotland's Future, outlining its vision for an independent Scotland [Ref: [Scottish Government](#)]. The blueprint sets out post-independence policies on key areas such as education, health, defence, foreign affairs and currency. Headline proposals include free-at-the-point-of-use childcare for under-fours, an inflation-linked minimum wage, and a triple lock on the state pension, meaning it would rise by inflation, earnings or 2.5%. An independent Scotland, the document argues, would remove the Trident nuclear defence system from its shores, seek membership of the European Union and Nato, and set up a Scottish defence force of 15,000 regular and 5000 reserve personnel. There

would be corporation tax cuts, help for businesses and the abolition of air passenger duty. In the foreword to the White Paper, First Minister Alex Salmond writes: "Scots have been at the forefront of the great moral, political and economic debates of our times as humanity has searched for progress in the modern age. It is in that spirit of progress that you will be asked on 18 September 2014." However, the pro-Union campaign dismissed the White Paper as a "work of fiction" and "a wish-list of promises without any answers". Former Chancellor of the Exchequer Alistair Darling said: "It is a fantasy to say we can leave the UK but still keep all the benefits of UK membership." He urged Scots to vote No, saying: "We can have the best of both worlds – a strong Scottish Parliament with the strength and opportunity of being part of a bigger United Kingdom". It should be remembered that the White Paper represents the position of the Scottish Government, which is run by the SNP. Other figures and organisations within the broader Yes campaign have their own views on currency, Nato membership and tax cuts. The next section considers the different ideological strands within the pro-independence and pro-Union movements.

Different visions

Neither side of the debate can be easily categorised into a collective set of viewpoints. The Yes campaign, although commonly associated with the SNP, also includes the Scottish Greens, the Scottish Socialist Party and other civil society groups. Although Yes Scotland does not advocate post-independence policy prescriptions, the wider Yes movement continues to debate what kind of country Scotland should be in the event of a Yes vote. Better Together is a cross-party group and contains a wide range of voices, from the federalist Liberal Democrats [Ref: [Liberal Democrats](#)] to Labour [Ref: [STV](#)] and the Conservatives [Ref: [STV](#)], who have floated the possibility of further devolution within

the existing constitutional framework. The No campaign has, however, rejected the involvement of UKIP, which argues that the independence of the UK from the European Union is the chief political priority [Ref: [Daily Record](#)]. It too has no post referendum policy options, preferring to promote the virtues of the status quo. However other groups have taken the opportunity to float alternative visions of the future. The Common Weal project, an initiative of the left-wing Jimmy Reid Foundation, argues that independence presents an opportunity for “the economic and social transformation of Scotland” through wealth redistribution, social inclusion and democratic decision-making “ [Ref: [Common Weal Project](#)]. On the other end of the Yes spectrum is Business for Scotland, which envisages an independent Scotland as one in which “business and economic policies will be tailored to improving productivity and growth, within the distinct Scottish business and economic landscape” [Ref: [Business for Scotland](#)]. Commentators have challenged the assumption that Scotland’s ideological character is fundamentally different to that of England [Ref: [Spectator](#)], while academics have asserted that “the differences are modest at best” and that both countries have “become less – not more – social democratic since the start of devolution” [Ref: [Nuffield Foundation](#)].

ESSENTIAL READING

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NOTES

FOR

[Why Scotland should embrace independence](#)

Pat Kane *Channel 4 News* 17 September 2013

[Building a Better Nation](#)

Nicola Sturgeon *Scottish Government* 3 December 2012

[Voting yes will create a new Scotland](#)

Alex Salmond *Guardian* 16 October 2012

[Independence is having no one else to blame](#)

Fintan O'Toole *The Times* 5 June 2012

AGAINST

[We Scots have a clear moral duty this year – to stay British](#)

Chris Deerin *Guardian* 13 January 2014

[Two nations, two cultures? Britain is divided by the Trent, not the Tweed](#)

Alex Massie *Spectator* 19 September 2013

[Why Scottish independence matters beyond its borders](#)

Margaret Curran *Guardian* 21 March 2013

[Full transcript of the launch event speech by Alistair Darling](#)

Better Together 25 June 2012

IN DEPTH

[Scotland's Future: Your guide to an independent Scotland](#)

Scottish Government 26 November 2013

[The devolution journey](#)

Henry McLeish *Holyrood* 18 June 2013

[ScotReferendum](#)

Scottish Government

ORGANISATIONS

[Better Together](#)

[Common Weal](#)

[Devoplus](#)

[Reform Scotland](#)

[Scotland September 18](#)

[Scottish Conservatives](#)

[Scottish Government](#)

[Scottish Labour](#)

[Scottish Liberal Democrats](#)

[Scottish National Party \(SNP\)](#)

[UK Government](#)

[Yes](#)

BACKGROUNDEERS

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Scottish Government unveils White Paper outlining vision for independent Scotland

STV 22 November 2013

Scotland Tonight: Nicola Sturgeon and Alistair Carmichael debate independence

STV November 2013

Alex Salmond's independence white paper shifts to November

Severin Carrell *Guardian* 11 September 2013

Scotland's Future - The Referendum

YoungScot 30 August 2013

Gordon Brown's pro-Union speech in full

Scotsman 3 November 2012

16 and 17 year-olds to have Referendum vote

Scottish Government 20 October 2012

AGREEMENT between the United Kingdom Government and the Scottish Government on a referendum

UK Government 15 October 2012

Unionism – a very Scottish idea

Colin Kidd *IPPR* 16 May 2012

Scotland and England: A Priceless Relationship

Tim Stanley *History Today* May 2012

Are we about to witness the end of Britain?

Dominic Sandbrook *Daily Mail* 29 January 2012

Is Scotland more left-wing than England?

John Curtice and Rachel Ormston *Nuffield Foundation* 5 December 2011

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

David Mitchell *Guardian* 15 May 2011

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

Simon Jenkins *The Times* 10 May 2011

Tony Blair's Scottish nightmare comes true as Alex Salmond trounces Labour

Wintour and Watt *Guardian* 6 May 2011

Labour Party Manifesto 1997

Labour Party 1997

Yes LGBT

LGBT Together

The Business for Scotland Declaration

Business for Scotland

IN THE NEWS

Cameron appeals to Olympic spirit in plea to keep Scotland in UK
STV 7 February 2014

Call for Britons to join hands along wall to show love for Scotland
STV 6 February 2014

Experts weigh in on Scottish Government's referendum White Paper
STV 26 November 2013

Scottish independence: SNP's literary white paper
Scotsman 16 July 2013

Can Ruth Davidson win over the Conservative party on devolution?
STV 7 June 2013

Better Together campaign refuse to work with UKIP in bid to keep Scotland part of union
Daily Record 5 May 2013

Would Labour's plans for further devolution strengthen Scotland?
STV 19 April 2013

Scottish independence: Referendum to be held on 18 September 2014
BBC News 21 March 2013

Referendum question chosen: 'Should Scotland be an independent country?'
STV 30 January 2013

Scottish independence: Blair Jenkins names Yes Scotland chief
BBC News 28 June 2012

Alistair Darling warns ending Union 'irrevocable' at Better Together launch
STV 25 June 2012

Scottish independence: One million Scots urged to sign 'yes' declaration
BBC News 25 May 2012

Alex Salmond launches campaign for a 'Yes' vote on Scottish independence
STV 25 May 2012

Scottish Election: SNP wins historic victory
STV 6 May 2011

Salmond prepares for SNP minority government
Guardian 8 May 2007

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NOTES

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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- 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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TEACHES A WAY
OF THINKING.
INTELLECTUAL
ARCHITECTURE
IS CREATED BY
ENGAGING WITH
IDEAS”**

TRISTRAM HUNT, HISTORIAN & BROADCASTER

