

OPINION POLLS IN SCOTLAND JULY 1995-JUNE 1996

David McCrone

VOTING INTENTIONS

Little has changed in the fortunes of the parties in the last twelve months (figure 1). Labour continues to dominate in the monthly System Three polls with over 50%, the SNP lie a handy second on 25%, and the Conservatives languish at 12% despite the proactive campaigning of Michael Forsyth. The Liberal-Democrats struggle to make double figures, but can count on substantial local support in the areas in which they hold parliamentary seats.

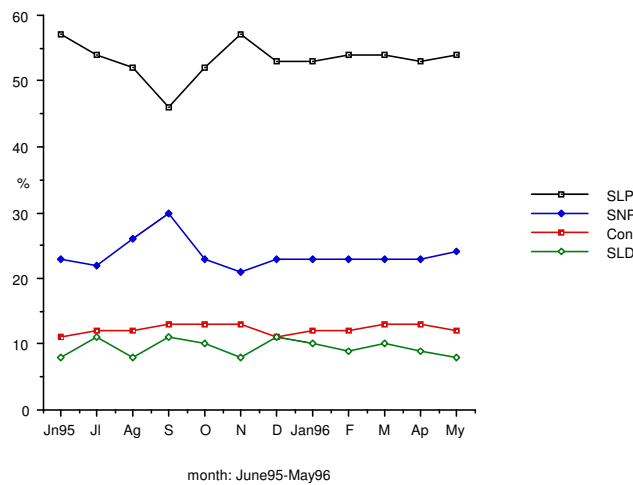
THE CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTION

A similar degree of stability emerges as regards views on constitutional change. Two major polls were carried out in Scotland. In March 1996 System Three for **The Herald** found 25% for Independence, 51% for Home Rule, and 21% for the status quo. ICM for **The Scotsman** put support for Independence at 33%, Home Rule at 44%, and the status quo on 20%. In both polls, opposition to constitutional change came in the main from Conservative supporters (49% opposition in the System Three poll, and 61% in the ICM poll), but with a substantial minority (51% and 38% respectively) in favour of change. More than half of Labour supporters were in favour of Home Rule, but between a quarter and a third supported Independence. In like manner, the SNP could count on between a half (System Three poll) and two-thirds (ICM) of their supporters in favour of Independence, but 32% and 25% were in favour of Home Rule. The Liberal-Democrats were more solid in support of

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the party policy of Home Rule (over 60%), with the status quo being more favoured by the minority than Independence. Such findings were broadly in line with those of previous years insofar as the views on the constitutional question did not map neatly onto party support.

FIGURE 1: VOTING INTENTIONS (System Three)



The ICM poll in April/May 1996 experimented with the wording of the constitutional options. For example, 'An Independent Scotland which is separate from England and Wales but part of the EU' replaced '..an Independent parliament with full taxation and spending powers.... and leave the UK parliament at Westminster'. This change produced virtually no change in support (33%) compared with the February 1995 poll figure of 31%. In like manner, the Home Rule option (from 47% to 44%) seemed to have changed little as a result of the change of wording from 'Scotland should have its own parliament with some taxation and spending powers' to 'Scotland remaining part of the UK but with its own devolved assembly with some taxation and spending powers'. In like manner, the more explicit 'Scotland should continue to have taxation and spending decided by the UK parliament at Westminster as at present' was replaced by a more terse 'no change from the present system', but with no change in opinion to speak of (from 21% to 20%). We might conclude that the three options are now sufficiently familiar in Scotland that they are not susceptible to changes in wording.

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Similarly, the now-familiar variations by gender, age and social class were evident. Women were less likely than men to support Independence, and somewhat more likely to back the status quo (see table 1). Young people (18-24 year olds) backed Independence over Home Rule, while those over 65 preferred Home Rule with the status quo supported by 33%. Scotland's middle class (ABC1) backed Home Rule (46%), while manual workers (DE) were evenly split between Independence and Home Rule (36% and 37%). These social dimensions were also important with regard to party preference, with women more likely to back the Tories, and less likely to plump for the SNP than men, but with both genders supporting Labour in broadly equal amounts (37% and 34% for women and men respectively). Young people are between two and three times more likely to back the SNP than older people, whose support for the Tories is broadly in inverse proportion. The middle classes are Labour supporters in the main (42%), with the SNP and the Conservatives vying for around 20% of its vote each. The political affiliations of the working class are in line with those of the population as a whole, with half supporting Labour and a quarter the SNP.

Almost half of those polled (46%) thought that a Scottish parliament would improve social and economic conditions for people like themselves, 30% that it would make no difference, and only 15% that it would make them worse-off. Those most likely to say it would improve conditions were men, Labour and SNP supporters. 'Pessimists' tended to be Tory supporters, but only one-third thought that conditions would worsen under a devolved Scottish parliament, and 38% thought that it would make no difference. Scotland's middle classes were much more optimistic, with 45% saying it would improve social and economic conditions for people like themselves.

Optimists outnumbered the pessimists as regards a Scottish parliament with tax-raising powers. Over half (52%) thought it should be given such powers, and 32% that it should not. Those in favour of tax raising powers included men, and SNP voters. On the other hand, the largest number (43%) thought that such powers would make them less likely to support such a parliament, with Tories, older people and the middle classes prominent. Nevertheless, the latter are strong supporters of a Scottish parliament within the UK, while around one-third of them think that an Independent parliament would improve social and economic conditions for people like them, compared with 30% who think it would not.

Table 1
Political attitudes by gender, age, social class, and party supported

	Gender		Age ¹		Social Class ²		Party Supported			
	Male	Female	young	old	middle class	working class	Con	Lab	SNP	SLD
Voting intention										
Cons	13	20	12	27	22	13				
Lab	48	46	45	48	42	50				
SNP	27	21	32	11	22	26				
SLD	12	11	10	14	12	10				
Constitutional Option										
Independence	37	29	42	25	30	36	17	29	67	13
Home Rule	43	45	38	39	46	37	34	52	25	62
Status Quo	17	24	17	33	20	24	49	16	6	19
Effect of Scottish Parliament										
Improve	49	43	48	35	45	44	20	53	58	37
Worsen	17	14	15	18	17	13	34	12	8	16
no difference	27	33	25	37	28	34	38	25	27	39
don't know	8	11	12	10	10	9	8	10	6	8
Effect of Independence										
Improve	38	30	43	21	32	35	9	32	64	28
Worsen	29	27	24	31	30	25	56	27	12	34
no difference	25	33	24	41	28	32	28	32	18	27
don't know	7	11	9	8	10	8	7	9	6	10
Should a Scottish Parliament have powers over tax?										
yes	58	45	53	42	54	48	27	52	74	52
no	32	32	29	40	33	31	59	31	12	38
don't know	10	23	18	18	13	21	14	17	13	10
If Referendum on Home Rule										
vote for	61	52	55	48	54	56	26	74	61	41
vote against	24	21	20	30	25	21	58	12	22	27
don't know	15	27	25	22	21	23	16	14	17	32
If Referendum on Independence										
vote for	38	33	45	27	33	40	19	24	81	28
vote against	47	39	31	54	47	38	65	54	8	48
don't know	15	28	23	18	20	22	16	22	11	24
If Referendum on UK in EU										
stay in	59	52	66	48	60	51	55	65	51	45
leave	28	28	18	36	26	29	31	24	30	34
don't know	13	20	16	16	14	19	14	11	18	21

¹ 'young' = 18-24; 'old' = 65+

² 'middle class' = social grades ABC1; 'working class' = social grades DE

Figures shown are percentages in columns within blocks.

Source: ICM poll, April-May 1996; for sample sizes, see Appendix

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In the System Three poll, when higher taxes resulting from a Scottish parliament were mentioned, support for Independence fell by three percentage points, but for Home Rule the fall was of ten percentage points. Support for the status quo rose from 21% to 30%. A similar question had been asked by System Three in January 1995, and the March 1996 poll suggested that the 'tax factor' had a similar effect in both polls. In general terms, the slight fall in support for constitutional change on mention of tax rises was found across all social and political groups. More people (57%) believed that a Scottish parliament would lead to higher taxes than not (22%).

As regards an Independent parliament, just over one-third thought it would improve social and economic conditions for people like them, with young people, SNP voters, and men to the fore. It is interesting that more SNP voters believe that 'devolution' would be better for them in these respects than full Independence. A majority of all social groups want a referendum on Independence, in which 43% claim that they would vote against, and 36% in favour. Most SNP voters (8 out of 10) would vote yes, with the largest number of young people, and of the working class, also in favour.

There is a general belief that Home Rule will eventually lead to Independence. On a scale of +2 (strongly agree) to -2 (strongly disagree), the mean score was +.39, with SNP voters (+.93), men (+.48) and the working class (+.43) having above-average scores. Only Conservative supporters thought that Independence would lead to unnecessary conflict with England (+.57), with SNP supporters taking the opposite stance (-.44). There was little liking for separate Scottish armed forces in an Independent Scotland, with all social and political categories thinking it a 'bad idea'. Even SNP supporters are more likely to be against (53%) than in favour (31%).

BUSINESS AND A SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

Given the heat generated by taxes rises in the past twelve months, it is useful to have the results of twin polls carried out by System Three among Scottish businesses. Its April 1996 poll surveyed 450 leaders of small businesses belonging to the Federation of Small Businesses (with a 67% response rate), and 498 large 'Insider 500' companies (getting a 46% response). Taking these polls together, we can see that in general the attitudes of small businesses are less hostile than large ones to constitutional change. For example, as regards the impact on the economy generally, the differences between negative and positive reactions among large businesses were of the order of 47 percentage

points, but were 9 points among small businesses. On the impact on Scottish-based businesses, small businesses were marginally positive (+2 percentage points) and large businesses more negative (-37). Similarly, small businesses thought that a Scottish parliament would have a positive impact on the ability to attract inward investment (+22, compared with -17 for large businesses), a positive impact on employment (+14, compared with -29), and on own business prospects (+2, compared with -27).

Press reports in the last twelve months have carried comments from some leaders about moving their businesses elsewhere. Small businesses are less likely to give this credence in general (58% thought it unlikely, compared with 30% who thought it likely; the comparable figures for large businesses were 35% and 44% respectively). However, when leaders were asked how likely it was that their own businesses would move, both small and large owners did not think this would happen to them (93% and 83% respectively). In terms of their own personal preferences for the constitution, small business leaders were balanced between supporters of a Scottish parliament (37%) and its opponents (38%), compared with a more hostile reaction from large businesses (16% and 63%).

NATIONAL COMPARISONS

The Scottish Public Opinion monitor is a newsletter issued by MORI to match its long-standing UK-wide one. MORI opened an office in Edinburgh in September 1995 at 100 Constitution Street, Leith, EH6 6AW (tel: 0131 467 7357). Its opening edition carried the results of the 1995 Rowntree Reform Trust survey, giving a Scottish total of 375 cases out of a GB sample of 1758 (with 240 in Wales). Although it has a higher sampling error than the larger ICM and System Three polls (around 1000 Scottish cases), the MORI polls are indicative of national comparisons. For example, the data suggest that Scots are less satisfied with the constitutional role of the monarchy, the British constitution generally, and the House of Lords than the English are (the Welsh figures being closer to the Scottish ones), but more content with the working of local councils, the courts and the European Union. The Scots (and the Welsh) are less impressed than the English with the present system for governing the UK. Twenty percent of Scots believe that the system 'works well', and 78% that 'it could be improved', a gap of 58 percentage points compared with 53 for England and 59 for Wales. Scots claim greater satisfaction with their MP (60%) than their English and Welsh neighbours (41% and 48% respectively).

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The Rowntree Survey also counters the view that people in England are hostile to constitutional change in Scotland: see table 2, which shows that well over half of English voters support some kind of parliament for Scotland, and that only one quarter oppose it.

Table 2

Attitudes to constitutional options, by country of Britain

	Scotland	England	Wales
an Independent Scotland separate from both England and Wales and the EU	9	5	5
an Independent Scotland separate from both England and Wales, but within EU	20	9	11
Scotland remaining part of UK but with its own devolved assembly with some taxation and spending powers	52	51	40
no change from the present system	17	25	26
don't know	2	11	18

Percentages in columns.

For sample sizes and source, see Appendix

There is broad support among the British nations for a referendum on the EU (59% in Scotland, and 62% in England and in Wales), while the Scots are keener than their counterparts on a referendum on a Scottish 'assembly' (80% in favour, compared with 54% and 49%). In general, support for home rule in Scotland is matched by similar support for a Welsh assembly (in Scotland, 62% support for a Welsh assembly, in England 47% support, and in Wales 67%), and for Northern Ireland (support levels of 55%, 48%, and 50% respectively). On the other hand, support for devolution of powers to English

regions is more lukewarm (32%; 25% and 33%, but with a majority opposed only in England - at 62%).

Support for a written British constitution is strongest in Scotland (a gap between those who agree and disagree of +81 percentage points), while also strong in England (+72) and Wales (+79). All three peoples see themselves as occupying 'the middle of the road' politically (54% in Scotland, 57% in England, and 58% in Wales), with strikingly similar percentages to each other on the Left (19%, 18% and 20%), and on the Right (15%, 12% and 10%), this despite the marked differences in party political behaviour in the three countries.

Table 3

National identity, by country of Britain

	Scotland	England	Wales
Scottish/English/Welsh not British	30	13	20
More Scottish/English/Welsh not British	34	12	21
Equally Scottish/English/Welsh and British	24	45	35
More British than Scottish/English/Welsh	3	11	10
British not Scottish/English/Welsh	5	13	12
Other	1	4	1
None/don't know	2	2	1

Percentages in columns.

For sample sizes and source, see Appendix.

Finally, the Rowntree Trust poll carried confirmation of previous results on national identity. The Scots were eight times more likely to stress their Scottishness than their Britishness; the Welsh and English twice as likely; but the largest number of the English claimed to be British and English equally: see table 3.

EDUCATION

As part of its April 1996 poll, System Three asked questions about attitudes to education in Scotland. (These questions were commissioned by the EIS, the main teachers' trade union.) The results showed strong support for the education system, both among parents of current school children and among the general population. For example, 79% of parents and 73% of the general population believed that the quality of Scottish education is 'very good' or 'fairly good'. At the same time, people believed that education is underfunded (68% of parents, and 63% of the general population). This does not have encouraging implications for the government, which is trying to make education into an issue for the general election. There was also bad news for the government in popular hostility to selecting pupils for secondary school on academic grounds. Although the majority against selection was quite small (46% of the whole population against, compared to 38% in favour), the majority was much greater among those aged under 45 than among older people. The significance of this age threshold is that people who are younger than that attended secondary school within the last 30 years, in other words in the period since selection was abolished in favour of comprehensive education.

For analysts of Scottish 'myths', this poll provided two interesting findings. A majority (52%) of the whole sample believed that Scottish educational standards are higher than those in the rest of Britain (compared to just 18% who took the opposite view); but also a majority (59%) believed that standards in Scotland are not as high as they used to be (compared to 15% taking the opposite view). Political parties which might want to take advantage of such beliefs might be interested in the large proportion (46%) who said that parties' positions on education would influence their vote at the general election, and even more so in the 19% who agreed strongly that they would be influenced in that way.

APPENDIX

System Three carried out the following polls for **The Herald**:

- Scottish Self-Government: 1024 adults at 40 sampling points throughout Scotland between 21-27 March 1996.
- Attitudes towards Devolution among Small Businesses: 450 members of Federation of Small Businesses throughout Scotland between 29 April and 3 May 1996.

- Business Attitudes towards Devolution: 498 of the Insider 500 list of top companies with their headquarters in Scotland between 9-16 April 1996.
- Income Tax: 1053 adults at 40 sampling points throughout Scotland between 21-26 September 1995.

System Three also carried out a poll for the EIS on education, on 25-30 April 1996. 1071 adults were interviewed at 40 sampling points.

ICM interviewed for **The Scotsman** 1000 adults in 50 randomly selected constituencies throughout Scotland between 30 April and 3 May 1996.

MORI interviewed for **The Rowntree Reform Trust** a representative quota sample of 1758 adults in 258 enumeration district sampling points across great Britain, with additional booster samples of 222 ((at 23 sampling points⁰ in Scotland (for a total Scottish sample of 375), and 161 (at 23 sampling points) in Wales (for a total Welsh sample of 240). Interviews were carried out at home between 21 April and 8 May 1995.

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