

# THE SCOTTISH ELECTORATE AND THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

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## INTRODUCTION

The general election of the 1 May 1997 saw a Labour government returned to office for the first time in 18 years and placed firmly on the agenda the prospect of a parliament for Scotland. In the run-up to the election the Labour party had promised Scotland a referendum on the establishment of a parliament and, shortly after taking the reins of government, passed legislation allowing the referendum to take place. Held on the 11 September 1997, the referendum asked the Scottish people to vote on two issues: whether or not a parliament should be established and whether a parliament should have tax varying powers. Scotland awoke on the 12 September to the news that the people had supported both propositions by impressive majorities.

In this chapter we deal with two main aspects of the debate about a Scottish parliament:

- ◀ The first is to examine three competing explanations of voting behaviour and assess how well they explain the result in the referendum of 11 September. The first of these explanations is a model of voting based on rational choice theory, the second is a claim that social location (for

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example, social class) can explain voting patterns and the third is a model based on vote as an expression of national identity. We argue that understanding the vote in the referendum requires a model based not on economic rationality or on national identity but rather on welfare rationality. That is, the Scottish people voted for a parliament with tax varying powers because they believed it would bring benefits to Scotland in terms of social welfare.

- ◀ The second aspect of the debate is to consider the role which the issue of a Scottish parliament played in the general election. In 1992, the Conservatives claimed that their defence of the constitutional status quo was a reason why their vote held up, and yet, in 1997 with the same policy, they lost all their seats in Scotland and a third of their remaining vote. Was the issue of a Scottish parliament a factor in this collapse?

## **DATA**

The data used in this chapter come from the 1997 Scottish Election Study (SES)<sup>1</sup>, a representative study of 882 adults in all parts of Scotland. The survey fieldwork was conducted after the election and continued throughout the summer covering May-August<sup>2</sup>. In this chapter, we focus primarily on the question of how people intended to vote in the referendum. The questionnaire contained two questions aimed at mimicking the referendum questions. These were:

There are proposals to hold a referendum in Scotland to find out whether people want a Scottish Parliament to be set up. In such a referendum -

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<sup>1</sup> *The project was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, grant number H552255004. The conclusions reported here were the same as when the analysis was repeated using data from the ESRC-funded Scottish Referendum Study, conducted by CREST (an ESRC Research Centre linking SCPR with Nuffield College, Oxford) mostly in September and October 1997. The main difference was that the small proportion (about 4%) of people in the Election Study who intended to vote 'No-Yes' dropped to less than 1% in the Referendum Study, to the benefit mainly of the 'No' category.*

<sup>2</sup> *Fieldwork was carried out by Social and Community Planning Research, London. Further details of the study and the questionnaire items can be found on the internet at <http://www.strath.ac.uk/Other/CREST>. SCPR also carried out the fieldwork for the Scottish Referendum Study.*

supposing you had to vote 'yes' or 'no' to the following questions - how would you vote?

Should there be a Scottish parliament within the UK?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 3 (Would not vote in referendum)
- 4 Other answer (WRITE IN)

Should a Scottish parliament be able to increase or decrease income tax within a limit of 3 pence in the pound?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 3 (Would not vote in referendum)
- 4 Other answer (WRITE IN)

Table 1 shows how respondents to the 1997 Scottish Election Study answered these questions. This table suggests that many Scots had decided on their referendum voting intention well in advance of both the general election result and the announcement of the referendum itself; even opinion polls carried out well before the general election could predict the outcome of the referendum accurately. In addition, table 1 shows that the Scottish Election Study, whilst still looking at *intended* vote, was remarkably close to the actual result. This is probably less surprising when we consider that the fieldwork for the survey was carried out during the period of the referendum campaign.

**Table 1**  
**Intended vote in referendum on Scottish Parliament**

	May-Aug '96 (poll average)	Nov '96 (System 3)	SES 1997	Result
Parliament				
Yes	63	70	73	74.3
No	26	21	20	25.7
Don't Know/ Not answered	11	8	8	
Tax-varying powers				
Yes	53	59	64	63.5
No	31	30	26	36.5

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Don't Know/ Not answered	16	11	11
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In this chapter the questions above, on how people intended to vote on the two referendum questions, have been collapsed to give a five-fold measurement of intended referendum vote – Yes-Yes, Yes-No, No-No, No-Yes and Other (which includes all those who were undecided or said they would not vote on either question). By collapsing the questions in this way we are able to look at the likelihood of people choosing different combinations of vote intention. The proportions in these categories were 59% Yes-Yes, 10% Yes-No, 15% No-No, 4% No-Yes, and 12% other.

## **MODELS OF VOTING BEHAVIOUR**

The models of voting used in this chapter were developed in the context of voting behaviour at general and local elections, at which the electorate are asked to choose between parties offering differing bundles of policy promises. As referenda are relatively infrequent and often assumed to be 'one-off' events there are no general models of referendum voting on which to draw. It is usually assumed that vote in a referendum is a simple expression of policy preference. However, this is not necessarily the case and in the Scottish referendum is certainly misleading. In referenda voters are offered clear choices among preferences but not all the possible positions are offered. For example, in the Scottish referendum, independence from the UK state was not an option. Thus, in trying to understand the processes at work in people's decisions as to how to cast their vote at these referenda we must look for explanations beyond a simple expression of policy preference.

Models based on rational choice theory, on the social location of voters in Scotland and on national identity have all been used to explain the distinctive pattern of voting in Scotland at general elections. (Brand et al, 1993; Brand et al, 1994; Brown et al, 1996). This chapter applies each of these models in turn to vote intention in the referendum.

### ***Rationality and the referendum vote***

Models of voting behaviour based on rational choice theory have become commonplace in recent years, both in academic circles and in the common-sense explanations of election results. Beginning in the 1970s, political commentators identified a 'decade of dealignment' (Sarlvik and Crewe, 1983)

during which, it was argued, voters became loosened from the anchors of social location and identity and started to choose parties on the basis of rational decisions. Several models of these rational decisions have been put forward. The earliest of these was the 'issue voting' model (Downs, 1957; Sarlvik and Crewe, 1983), in which voters line up their own attitudes and preferences against the policy positions of the parties and cast their vote for the party closest to their own choices. This model has proved difficult to test and substantiate at the level of vote in a general election as the level of knowledge of party positions among the electorate is often quite low. Moreover, the issue voting model is not appropriate for modelling vote at a referendum, when the electorate are asked to state their own position on a single issue and not to choose from bundles of policy positions put forward by parties.

More recent models of voting, based on rational choice theory, have focused on the economic evaluations voters make. These models can be divided into two types (following Kinder and Kiewit, 1981), egocentric models and sociotropic models. The first of these, egocentric models, are based on economic evaluations of the voters own position: that is, whether the individual voter feels that he or she would be better off with a given party in government. These models have been widely used to explain the electoral victories of the Conservative party in the 1980s. As the Conservative party were associated with lower taxation, people believed they would be better off (financially) under a Conservative government. These models also underpinned much of the Labour party's campaign advertising during the 1997 election campaign, when much of the advertising focused on taxation and tried to reassure people that taxes would not go up under a 'New Labour' government. The sociotropic models, on the other hand, are based on evaluations of the economic position of the nation as a whole: that is, whether or not the fortunes of the national economy are best served by a particular party. Again these models have been widely used to explain Conservative victories in recent elections and featured in their advertising during the 1997 campaign under the guise of 'Britain is booming'.

Earlier work on voting behaviour in Scotland has suggested that the Scottish National Party vote could be understood using a model of sociotropic economic voting, whereby a feeling of economic deprivation relative to the rest of Great Britain, coupled with a belief that independence for Scotland would improve this position, led to a vote for the SNP (Brand et al, 1994). Can these economic models of voting be used to explain the outcome of the referendum in Scotland?

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In order to test these propositions in relation to the referendum questions, we asked our respondents to answer a series of questions on their expectations of a Scottish parliament. These were 'Now supposing that a Scottish parliament within the UK were set up. As a result of this Scottish parliament, would unemployment in Scotland become higher, lower or would it make no difference?' with similarly worded questions about taxation, and (with 'better' substituted for 'higher', etc) the economy, education, the NHS and social welfare.

The results in table 2 suggest that people in Scotland were aware that the introduction of a Scottish parliament was likely to make taxation higher, with 56% expecting taxes to go up. These figures show quite clearly that the Scottish people were not going 'blindly' along the path to home rule as was suggested by the British Conservative leader William Hague during the campaign. Rather they were fully aware that the parliament was likely to increase taxes in Scotland (the much publicised 'tartan tax') and voted in favour of the parliament regardless. On other issues only a minority expected the position to worsen and in most cases a majority expected things to get better (the exception being on unemployment where 37% expected there to be no change).

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**Table 2**  
**Expected effects of Scottish Parliament**

	Economy	Unemploy- ment	Education	NHS	Welfare	Taxation
Lot better	13	6	17	16	8	
Little Better	41	32	45	44	40	9
No change	23	37	25	25	36	26
Little worse	11	10	3	4	5	48
Lot worse	3	4	1	1	1	8
Don't Know/ Not answered	9	11	9	10	10	9
Unweighted N (=100%)	882	882	882	882	882	882

*Source: 1997 Scottish Election Survey*

*For unemployment and taxation 'better' corresponds to 'lower', etc.*

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Using an egocentric model of voting we would expect to find that those who thought taxation would be higher after the introduction of a parliament were inclined to vote against the parliament, and especially against the parliament having tax-varying powers. Table 3 looks at the intended vote in the referendum according to expectations of taxation if a parliament were introduced.

In this table we have collapsed the categories shown in table 2 into two groups, those who expected taxes to be higher (either a little or a lot) and those who expected taxation to either remain unchanged or to be lower. This allows for a clear contrast between the pessimists and optimists on this issue. As the table shows, the expectations people held about taxation after the introduction of a parliament are not good predictors of intended referendum vote. Whilst a higher proportion of the group that expected higher taxes intended to vote no-no, this still only represents one fifth of this group: over half still intended to vote yes-yes. These results seem to fly in the face of the models of rational choice discussed above. People in Scotland were not only aware of the likelihood of higher taxes but, in addition, this expectation did not lead them to vote no.

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**Table 3**  
**Expectations of tax rises and intended referendum vote**

	Yes- Yes	Yes- No	No- No	No- Yes	Other	Unweighted N (=100%)
Taxes higher	59	9	20	5	7	491
Taxes Unchanged/ lower	65	12	8	2	12	306

*Source: 1997 Scottish Election Survey*

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On the face of it, this evidence seems to suggest that rational-choice models of the vote do not explain the referendum result in Scotland. However, the position is altered if we look at rational voting as an exercise in cost-benefit analysis. Perhaps people are willing to pay more taxes if they perceive that the higher taxes will result in other benefits. That is their egocentric evaluations may take second place to their sociotropic evaluations.

To test this proposition, a scale of benefits was constructed. Excluding taxation, each of the other five variables (as shown in table 2) were collapsed to be either a positive response or no change and lower. The scale was then simply constructed counting each of the items on which people expected a

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benefit. Thus, the scale runs from 0 (where the respondent expected none of these items to improve) to 5 (where they expected all five areas to improve). The distribution of respondents on this scale is shown in table 4. This table shows that, as well as the awareness of the 'tartan tax', people made distinctions about which areas would improve. There was not a simple divide between those expecting everything to get better and those who expected everything to get worse. Around a quarter of our respondents expected there to be no benefits of a Scottish parliament, whilst a fifth expected everything to get better.

In order to answer the question posed above we need to compare the expectations people held on taxation with the benefits they expected from the parliament. Table 5 does this, looking only at those who expected taxes to increase.

It is quite clear from this table that people were prepared to support a parliament, despite expecting higher taxes, if and only if they expected the parliament to bring wider benefits. Of those who expected higher taxes but who did not expect any wider social benefits just 10 percent intended to vote Yes-Yes in the referendum. However, amongst those who expected higher taxes and one benefit this proportion increase to 43 percent and amongst those expecting three or more benefits from the parliament over 80 percent intended to vote Yes-Yes.

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**Table 4**  
**Number of expected benefits of Scottish parliament**

	Number of benefits expected
0	24
1	9
2	10
3	14
4	22
5	20
Unweighted N (=100%)	882

*Source: 1997 Scottish Election Survey*

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This simple analysis suggests that the expectations which people held of a Scottish parliament were a key determinant of the referendum outcome. It also suggests that an expectation of a 'tartan tax' did not deter people from supporting the parliament. However, these claims need to be evaluated alongside other competing models of referendum vote. Models based on social location and on national identity are looked at below. However, in a more sophisticated statistical model of these processes the findings described above were confirmed. A logistic regression model<sup>1</sup> was used to assess the relative impact of a number of factors on the likelihood of someone intending to vote Yes-Yes. This model showed that other factors, such as social class, gender and national identity, had only a small impact on intended vote, whilst the impact of expected benefits of the parliament remained significant even after taking these other factors into account. In addition, there was no significant impact of expectations of tax rises after the level of expected benefits was taken into account. These models and the evidence presented above suggest that an economic model of voting based on egocentric evaluations cannot explain the referendum outcome. A rational model based on a sociotropic evaluation of benefits of the parliament does explain the outcome. This is what we mean by 'welfare rationality': people supported a parliament because they believed that it would improve the quality of public welfare in Scotland.

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**Table 5**  
**Expected benefits of Scottish parliament and intended referendum vote,**  
**among those who expected higher taxes**

	Yes- Yes	Yes- No	No- No	No- Yes	Other	Unweighted N (=100%)
Number of expected benefits						
0	10	10	55	11	14	114
1	43	6	33	9	9	54
2	43	12	26	4	16	54
3	79	11	6	2	2	59

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<sup>1</sup> *Logistic regression is a technique which predicts the outcome of a dichotomous dependent variable - for example, voting yes or no - in terms of a collection of potential predictors. For further details, see Aitkin et al (1989).*

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4	86	7	2	1	4	118
5	88	10		1	1	92

Source: 1997 Scottish Election Survey

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**Social Location**

In the 1950s and 1960s models of voting behaviour were based largely on the social location of voters. Put simply, it was argued that people in the working class voted Labour and those in the middle class voted Conservative (Butler and Stokes, 1969). There has been much debate in recent years about the extent to which these old alignments still explain voting behaviour in general elections (Crewe and Sarlvik, 1983; Heath et al, 1985, 1987, 1991). However, models based on social location (and social class in particular) have been used to explain voting patterns in Scotland. Here it is argued that the Conservative party do poorly in Scotland as there are fewer of their 'natural' supporters (ie middle classes) than in other parts of Great Britain (but see Brown et al (1996) for a critique of this theory). To explain the election victories of the Conservatives during the 1980s many commentators pointed to the 'extension of popular capitalism' (Heath et al, 1991), in other words to the fact that Thatcherism as a project had converted many of those who had been 'working class' into home owners and share owners – thus making them more ready to support the Conservatives. These particular social changes appeared to have less impact in Scotland (although reliable data sources are scarce). To what extent, then, can intended referendum vote be explained in terms of the social location of voters?

Table 6 looks at the sex, age, religion and social class of respondents to assess how, if at all, these are related to intended referendum vote. Social class is measured according to the categories developed by Goldthorpe (Heath et al, 1991).

The table does show some differences among social groups, especially in terms of social class. However, despite these differences, the largest proportion of each group intended to vote Yes-Yes. Among the small group of petty bourgeoisie we find the highest likelihood of a No-No vote, at 30%. However, even amongst this group almost half intended to vote Yes-Yes. Perhaps surprisingly there are few differences among the religious groups in their intended vote with a majority of both Catholic identifiers and Protestant identifiers intending to vote Yes-Yes. There is no strong tendency for young people to be more in favour of a parliament than older people: there is clear

support on both questions in all the age groups apart from among those aged over 65.

The data in table 6 suggests that a model based on social location cannot explain the referendum outcome. This is further confirmed by the statistical modelling described above, in which social class and gender were included alongside expectations of benefits and taxes and national identity. In these models social class had only a small impact on the referendum vote, with

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**Table 6**  
**Social characteristics and intended referendum vote**

	Yes- Yes	Yes- No	No- No	No- Yes	Other	Unweighted N (=100%)
<b>Sex</b>						
Male	61	12	16	4	8	376
Female	58	8	15	4	16	506
<b>Age</b>						
18-24	69	12	12		8	129
25-34	68	9	8	4	11	157
35-44	63	9	13	3	12	154
45-54	57	9	24	3	8	159
55-64	58	12	12	5	13	118
over 65	44	8	22	8	18	156
<b>Religion</b>						
None	68	10	11	3	8	270
Catholic	59	14	12		15	126
Protestant	55	9	19	6	11	415
<b>Social Class</b>						
Salariat	49	12	24	5	9	211
Routine non- manual	66	5	15	5	10	188
Petty bourgeoisie	43		30	5	21	53
Manual Foremen and Supervisors	59	16	14	4	7	71
Working Class	67	11	6	2	14	298

*Source: 1997 Scottish Election Survey*

members of the salariat and manual foremen being less likely to intend to vote Yes-Yes than members of the working class.

### *National identity*

National identity does not explain more than a small part of the referendum outcome either. There are good reasons to test such a model, because it is the dominant one both in political beliefs about what influences people's attitudes to the constitution, and in the academic writing on this subject. At the political level, all sides in the debate about a Scottish parliament over the last couple of decades have made some use of national identity in an attempt to increase their vote. This has been strongest from the opponents of any Scottish parliament and from those who favour independence. For example, when he was Prime Minister, John Major frequently spoke of the Britishness of Scotland and the history which Scotland had shared with England for three centuries (Finlay, 1997). Correspondingly, cultural nationalists have suggested that Scottish culture requires a Scottish parliament if it is to survive (Scott, 1989). Even the supporters of home rule (as opposed to independence) have invoked Scottish identity as one argument for a parliament: this strand can be found in, for example, the Claim of Right for Scotland which preceded the setting up of the Constitutional Convention and which, therefore, led to the set of proposals that were voted on in the referendum (Edwards, 1989).

Similar views can be found among academics. Thus all the most influential writers about nationalism, despite the great differences among their interpretations, attach some importance to national identity as an explanation of why people support or oppose self government. The dispute between Gellner and Nairn on the one hand (Gellner, 1983; Nairn, 1989, 1997) and Smith (1991) on the other, significant though it is, is about how nationalist movements mobilise national identity, not about whether they do so: they disagree over the extent to which that national identity was mainly invented along with industrialism (Gellner and Nairn), or was made up of much more ancient elements (Smith). Anderson (1983), too, does not question the importance of national identity: his contribution was to explain how it could be disseminated to a mass audience (through the new print media of the nineteenth century). Many other writers have explored the ways in which the political use of national identity is not only the preserve of opposition movements. For example, Kellas talks of the 'official nationalism' of the state (Kellas, 1991): in Scotland, an instance would be the rhetoric from John Major about Britishness. Billig (1995) has pointed out that state-sponsored identity does not have to be strident to be politically effective. It can be the taken-for-granted background to everyday life.

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Our data do not provide tests of all these theories in their full complexity: we are looking only at the immediate influences on people's vote on one specific set of proposals in the referendum in September 1997. Nevertheless, the data do allow us to examine the importance of national identity in explaining the positions which people take when faced with a crucial decision about the future of the overlapping nations in which they are living. One way of looking at it is through a question in the survey which asked respondents to say whether they felt themselves to belong to any of a list of national groupings. The options offered were (in this order) 'British, English, European, Irish, Northern Irish, Scottish, Welsh, Other, None of these'. People found no difficulty answering this, and in naming more than one identity. Thus, 79% said they were Scottish, 52% British, 10% European, and 4% English; the other categories attracted negligible proportions. Among the Scottish identifiers, 45% said they were also British and 7% European. Among the British, 13% said they were also European.

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**Table 7**  
**Identities and intended referendum vote**

	Yes- Yes	Yes- No	No- No	No- Yes	Other	Unweighted N (=100%)
Scottish	63	9	14	4	11	704
English	54	16	16	5	9	37
British	51	12	21	5	10	459
European	62	5	15	6	12	80

*Source: 1997 Scottish Election Survey*

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Table 7 shows the intended referendum vote according to these non-exclusive categories of national identity. The striking conclusion, in the light of all the debate, is how unimportant national identity was in explaining the vote. For each category of allegiance, a clear majority intended to vote Yes on both referendum questions. Thus, even people who expressed some allegiance to an idea of Britishness voted 63% in favour of a parliament, and 56% in favour of its having tax-varying powers. Whatever weak effect Britishness may have had on the referendum vote, it certainly did not force people into opposition to the proposals. Furthermore, people who felt English apparently saw no incompatibility between that identity and supporting a parliament for the nation in which they had come to live.

Not surprisingly, in the light of the data in table 7, the measures of national identity were much less powerful explanations of referendum vote than were the expectations of the parliament or party vote. Thus, in a logistic regression which analysed the intended vote on the first question in the referendum, Scottish, European and English identities had no effect at all beyond people's expectations of the parliament and their party vote in the general election. British identity was associated with being slightly less likely to vote yes, but was a weaker predictor than expectations of the parliament for the economy, education, unemployment and the health service, and was much the same strength as age. The pattern was similar for the second question.

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**Table 8**  
**Views on 'government should do everything possible to keep Britain united'**  
**and intended referendum vote**

	Yes- Yes	Yes- No	No- No	No- Yes	Other	Unweighted N (=100%)
strongly agree	41	12	33	6	8	118
agree	45	11	23	6	15	323
neither agree nor disagree	60	13	7	1	19	130
disagree	85	7	4	1	3	236
strongly disagree	80	7	3	3	7	52

*Source: 1997 Scottish Election Survey*

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The essential irrelevance of national identity to the intended referendum vote is probably a signal of the success of Labour's strategy of associating its proposals for a Scottish parliament with renewing British democracy. Indeed, people who believed that Tony Blair was going to be an effective prime minister were more favourable to a parliament than people who did not, even after taking account of partisanship: thus, Labour supporters who admired Blair were more likely to intend to vote yes than Labour supporters who were more sceptical of him. This success for Blair's approach can be seen further from table 8, which shows intended referendum vote according to how the respondent felt about keeping the UK united. It is true that people who did care about this were more likely to oppose a parliament in the referendum than those who did not care about it: thus the No votes were between 30% and 40% among people who agreed or strongly agreed that the UK

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government should keep the Union together, in contrast to about 10% or less among people who disagreed or strongly disagreed. Nevertheless, the resonance of Blair's strategy is seen in each of these groups. Even people who felt strongly that the UK should be kept united were evenly balanced in their attitude to a parliament, 53% voting yes on the first question and 46% doing so on the second. Voting 'Yes' was largely not seen as a way of breaking up the Union.

## **THE CONSTITUTION AND THE GENERAL ELECTION**

The Conservative party believed that their stance on the constitution in the 1992 general election had won them votes in Scotland, and that, in particular, it was the tactic which saved them from the collapse which both they and most observers expected (Lang, 1994). In the 1997 general election, they therefore tried the same tactic again. Indeed, in the final few days of the campaign, the prime minister John Major toured Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland reiterating his belief that the Union was beneficial to all its partners, and that it was threatened by Labour's proposals for a Scottish parliament and a Welsh assembly.

Scottish Labour, on the other hand, had come to believe firmly and almost unanimously in its policy on home rule. That policy may have started expediently in the 1970s as a response to the rise of the SNP, but, by the time of John Smith's leadership between 1992 and 1994, it had become a matter of principle (Brown et al 1995, chapter 6). The main reason for the change was the party's work with the Liberal Democrats and various civic bodies in the Constitutional Convention between 1989 and 1995. The consensus which Labour could thus feel they were leading lasted through the referendum campaign itself, and, indeed, broadened significantly to include the SNP.

Labour also, however, feared that the Conservatives may have been correct that they had gained from their opposition to home rule in 1992. They also feared that the proposal to give a Scottish parliament powers to vary income tax would be used by the Conservatives throughout Britain to claim that Labour really believed in increasing taxes after all, despite protestations to the contrary by the Shadow Chancellor, Gordon Brown. That is one reason why, in the summer of 1996, they announced their intention to hold a referendum on their proposals, with a separate question on the proposed taxation powers (Jones, 1997). They hoped that this would deflect Conservative criticism during the general election campaign: Labour would be able to say that decisions about home rule and about tax would be taken by the Scottish people themselves in a separate vote.

To many commentators, this move by Labour appeared to have worked. The constitutional issue seemed to play a less prominent role in the 1997 general election than it had done in 1992, despite Major's attempts to repeat his themes. The Conservative collapse in the election was taken by some opponents of home rule as confirmation of that: they claimed that voters felt safe about voting against the Conservatives because they knew that this would not automatically translate into a threat to the Union.

And yet the referendum delivered an emphatic endorsement of Labour's policy, and - as we have seen - this happened despite a widespread belief that taxes would rise. So was the constitution an issue in the election? Did it contribute to the Conservatives' losses? Did the Conservatives get their message about the effects of a parliament across?

The first point to note is that 50% of people in the survey said that the issue of a Scottish parliament was important to them in deciding how they would vote in the general election. That does not suggest that the matter had been wholly removed from the election in the way that Labour had intended. But table 9 shows that the effects of the issue were not as favourable to the Conservatives as they hoped and as Labour and the Liberal Democrats feared. This table displays the referendum intentions among three groups of people: those who recalled voting Conservative in 1992, those who still identified with the Conservative party in 1997, and those who actually voted Conservative in 1997. (Identifiers were those who chose the Conservatives in response to the question 'generally speaking, do you think of yourself as ...'.) These can be taken as three increasingly strong measures of attachment to the party. For this purpose, it does not matter whether people were accurate in their recall of their 1992 vote: their response to that is merely a measure of some willingness to acknowledge a past association with the party. The main message of the table is that the Conservatives lost the votes of many of those among their supporters who intended to vote in favour of a parliament. Thus, whereas 41% of people who recalled voting Conservative in 1992 intended to vote Yes on the first question, that proportion was only 36% of those who still identified with the Conservatives, and a mere 23% of 1997 Conservative voters. So a first inference from the table is that the Conservatives' stance on the constitution lost them votes.

This interpretation is confirmed by four further pieces of statistical analysis. The first is that, for the other three main parties, the referendum intentions were almost the same for their voters as for their identifiers or their previous voters. So people had already accepted these parties' stances long before the general election, and were not either attracted or deterred any further.

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Second, people who identified in some way with the Conservatives in 1997 and who supported a Scottish parliament were more likely to say that the issue of a parliament was an important influence on their vote than people who identified with the Conservatives and who opposed a parliament. For example, among people who recalled voting Conservative in 1992 and who intended to vote Yes on the first question in the referendum, 43% said that the issue was important; among those 1992 Conservatives who intended to vote No, only 34% said it was important. Previous Conservatives who supported a parliament and who believed that the issue was important were faced with only two options in the general election: abandon their party or abandon the parliament. The fall-off in Conservative support among such people suggests that they tended to choose to abandon the party.

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**Table 9**  
**Attachment to Conservative party and intended referendum vote**

	Yes- Yes	Yes- No	No- No	No- Yes	Other	Unweighted N (=100%)
recalls voting Conservative in 1992	31	10	42	7	11	159
identifies with Conservatives	25	11	47	7	10	140
voted Conservative in 1997	15	8	59	10	9	100

*Source: 1997 Scottish Election Survey*

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Third, the fall-off in Conservative vote seen here was not found in 1992, the election when the Conservatives believed that this issue bolstered their vote. In the absence of specific referendum proposals in 1992, there is no direct comparison to table 9, but we can look instead at general attitudes to a Scottish parliament. The election surveys in both 1992 and 1997 asked what is now a standard question about options for governing Scotland. In the 1992 election study, 72% of the whole sample opted for either home rule or independence; in 1997, the proportion was much the same, at 76%. In 1997, as in the specific questions on the referendum, support for some kind of parliament was higher among Conservative identifiers (47%) than among Conservative voters (38%), and for the other parties there was no difference.

But in 1992 there was almost no such difference for the Conservatives either (44% for identifiers and 41% for voters). These figures suggest that the Conservatives' stance in 1997 was off-putting in a way that it had not been 5 years earlier.

The fourth reason to believe that the Conservatives lost support as a result of their opposition to a Scottish parliament comes from a more rigorous analysis of the data in table 9. One objection to the interpretation that we have made is that the loss of Conservative support could, perhaps, be explained by factors other than the constitutional issue. For example, it is generally agreed that the Conservatives lost votes throughout Britain because they were no longer seen as capable of being a strong government and because some of their MPs had been the subject of political scandal (for example, allegedly taking bribes for asking parliamentary questions). If Conservative identifiers who believed these accusations were also more likely than other Conservatives to believe in a Scottish parliament, then the patterns in table 9 could be explained by these attitudes to leadership capacity and to politicians' honesty rather than by attitudes to home rule.

The way to test this is to control for various other factors which predict the Conservative vote well, and then to see whether referendum intention continues to be associated with Conservative vote. Consider, for example, all those people who still believed that the Conservatives were capable of running a strong government. Of those in this group who recalled voting Conservative in 1992, 30% intended to vote Yes on the first referendum question; of those who voted Conservative in 1997, 25% intended to do so. Thus, even among those who continued to admire the Conservatives' capacity for firm leadership, intentions for the referendum seemed to influence their decision as to whether to remain with the Conservatives in 1997.

The more thorough way of doing this using many predictors of Conservative vote is, again, logistic regression. Account was taken of 31 factors which predict Conservative vote - attitudes to the record of the Conservative government on keeping their promises, standing up for Britain, and exercising strong government; to their record on crime, education, the health service, prices, standard of living, tax and unemployment; attitudes to John Major; beliefs as to whether Conservative MPs were more open to bribery than other MPs; general views about policies on poverty, private medicine, spending on the health service, education and defence; beliefs about whether workers should have more say in the running of industry and whether there should be redistribution of wealth; attitudes to Britain's membership of the European Union; attitudes to the effectiveness of British state institutions and to British cultural values (Heath and Taylor, 1996; Heath, 1998); general views on the

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moral standards of British public life; and general demographic variables (age, sex and social class). So this was a very strong set of controls. It was able accurately to predict 94% of the decisions of the whole sample to vote or not vote for the Conservatives in 1997 (including 66% of the decisions to vote Conservative); 76% of those decisions among 1992 Conservative (including 79% of the decisions to vote Conservative); and 84% of those decisions among Conservative identifiers (including 91% of the decisions to vote Conservative). And yet, for each of these predictions, intentions for the first referendum question remained as a further predictor of 1997 Conservative vote. For the analysis involving the whole sample (comparing Conservative voters with all other electors), referendum intention was a stronger predictor of Conservative vote than all others except views on the Conservatives' record in dealing with unemployment. For the analysis involving only 1992 Conservative voters, referendum intention was as strong a predictor of Conservative vote as a tendency to blame the Conservatives for a drop in the average standard of living, and was stronger than all other predictors. Among Conservative identifiers, referendum intention was a stronger predictor of Conservative vote than any other variable. In none of these analyses was the intention for the second referendum question influential on the Conservative vote over and above the effect of the intention on the first question.

So here we have a stringent test of the claim that the Conservatives lost votes because of their stance on the constitution. Even when we take account of all the other reasons why the Conservatives lost votes, we still find evidence that people were influenced in their attitude to the Conservatives by the party's attitudes to a Scottish parliament.

One of the reasons the Conservatives lost votes in this way was the point we have already noted about Britishness and attitudes to home rule. Blair and the Labour party seem to have persuaded people that being British was consistent with supporting a parliament. The implications of this for the Conservatives can be seen further if we look at the small group of people who rate their Britishness higher than their Scottishness. This came in response to a question which asked people to place themselves on a scale ranging from 'Scottish, not British' at one end to 'British, not Scottish' at the other. In between were 'Scottish more than British', 'Scottish equal to British' and 'British more than Scottish'. Just 8% of the sample chose to rate their Britishness ahead of their Scottishness, a similar proportion to the 5% who did so in 1992. But, in 1992, this group had been very clearly sympathetic to the Conservatives, as table 10 shows. They had also been at best sceptical about home rule (as evidenced by the general question about constitutional change). By 1997, the Conservative vote among them had collapsed to just 19%, and the support for home rule

had risen to 61%. The continuing low level of support for independence among these people tends to confirm that

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**Table 10**  
**Conservative vote and constitutional preference, 1992 and 1997,**  
**among those who identified themselves as 'British more than Scottish' or 'British**  
**not Scottish'**

	1992 (%)	1997 (%)
voted Conservative	53	19
home rule	43	61
independence	7	11
Unweighted N (=100%)	58	67

*Source: 1992 and 1997 Scottish Election Surveys*

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**Table 11**  
**Attachment to Conservative party and expectations of benefits from Scottish**  
**parliament**

	number of benefits expected						Unweighted N (=100%)
	0	1	2	3	4	5	
recalls voting Conservative in 1992	44	19	12	10	11	6	159
identifies with Conservatives	51	20	11	7	8	3	140
voted Conservative in 1997	58	23	9	7	3	1	100

*Source: 1997 Scottish Election Survey*

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we are seeing here evidence of a redefinition of Britishness. Asserting Britishness acquired a new political meaning between 1992 and 1997, no longer closely tied to voting Conservative or to being wary of a Scottish parliament.

Moreover, if the Conservatives lost the argument over the alleged threat which a parliament would pose to Britishness, they also lost the votes of people who did not believe their detailed case on the effects of a parliament. Table 11 shows the number of benefits which people expected from the parliament, separately for 1992 Conservatives, for Conservative identifiers, and for 1997 Conservatives. The Conservative arguments on this seemed to have had only a weak effect, even with their core support. Around one half of Conservative identifiers and previous supporters expected some benefits from the parliament, and just under one half of 1997 Conservative voters expected some benefits. Thus, when the British Conservative leader William Hague reacted on 12 September 1997 to the referendum result by claiming it was a 'sad day for Scotland', he was apparently not in tune with the people whom the Conservatives must win back if they are to recover their electoral position in Scotland.

## **CONCLUSION**

We have argued three main points in this chapter. The first is that intentions for the referendum were shaped by the expectations which people had of what a parliament would do. The result in the referendum was decisive because most people expected clear welfare benefits, and because they expected higher taxes to be used to pay for these.

The second point is that intentions for the referendum were not shaped by social structure or of identity, but by issues of welfare. The referendum vote was fairly uniform across all social classes, all age groups, and both sexes. It was not strongly influenced by national identity, probably because the Labour party and Tony Blair had successfully appealed to a sense of modernising Britishness as one reason for supporting change. Feeling Scottish was certainly one influence on voting in favour, but feeling British was not mainly a reason to vote against.

The third point is that the Conservative party lost votes in the general election because of its stance on the constitution. They lost the argument both with the electorate as a whole, and with people who generally thought of themselves as Conservative supporters. If they are to recover in Scotland, then they will

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have to find a way of working constructively with and in the new parliament, in order to exorcise the memories of their intransigence through their electoral debacle of the 1997 general election.

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