

THE CONUNDRUM OF SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE

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INTRODUCTION

Scotland, as a nation that does not possess a fully independent state, is one of the few western European countries with an independence movement which is a major player in party politics. The Scottish National Party, as the main political challenger to the Labour party, is committed to full constitutional independence within the European Union, and can be contrasted with, for example, regionalist and nationalist parties in Wales and Catalonia which are committed to greater autonomy some way short of full independence. Thus secession from the British state is more likely to come from Scotland, and yet Scottish nationalism appears, in comparative terms, to have some unusual features. First, it is often argued that it is a paradigmatic case of 'civic' rather than 'ethnic' nationalism, insofar as conventional cultural features such as language and religion do not mark Scotland out as particularly distinctive from England. Benedict Anderson, for example, has argued that the Union of parliaments of the two countries in 1707 came about precisely because of the lack of strong cultural markers, at least between lowland Scotland and England (Anderson, 1996). Second, there is no simple relationship between preferring independence as a constitutional option, voting for the SNP, and defining oneself as Scottish. Thus, a minority of those who say they are in favour of independence vote SNP; and barely half say they are Scottish not British (Paterson et al., 2001; see also the article by Bond and Rosie in this issue of **Scottish Affairs**).

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One must be careful, of course, in implying that Scotland is an outlier in these matters, and these features may well be shared to a greater or lesser extent with other nations that do not have independent states. What makes the Scottish case particularly interesting at the moment is that the debate about autonomy has potentially been changed by the setting up of the Scottish parliament in 1999. Whereas the constitutional debate before that was structured mainly around whether Scotland should have a parliament or not, since then it has refocused around whether that parliament should be devolved or independent, or around the extent of the powers of the parliament. To date, most academic discussion of popular views has not caught up with this change of the terms of debate, and - so far as we are aware - there has not previously been any systematic analysis of Scottish views of independence.

This chapter explores the possibility that, in the eyes of people in Scotland, independence may actually result from a series of incremental steps along a continuum of greater self-determination, framed by developments elsewhere in the UK and the European Union. In political and academic debate, 'independence' is a term which carries its own historical and political baggage, and assumes that 'sovereignty' is a zero-sum game. But ordinary people may not share the common assumption that sovereignty is something which the polity either has completely or doesn't have at all. Sovereignty may be partial, shared, segmental. In terms of constitutional politics, in Scotland at least, such issues may not be separate from 'ordinary' politics but integral to them.

We examine here the degree to which support for independence has shifted over the last few years, its social base, and how it relates to political identity and to party identification. While much of our exploration depends on cross-sectional data, we are able to draw upon panel data collected as part of the British election panel study (BEPS) so as to explore the extent to which there is a core vote for independence or not. This has important theoretical implications because it is one of the assumed characteristics of nationalism that it grows outwards from a settled core. In his study of nationalism in Europe, for example, Miroslav Hroch argued that national movements had three phases: first, the search by intellectuals for national identity based on linguistic, cultural and historical attributes; second, the awakening of national consciousness by political activists; and third, the development of mass-scale nationalist movements (Hroch, 1985). If Hroch is correct, we ought to be able to place Scotland somewhere between stages 2 and 3, and to find that those

who support independence do so consistently, providing a core of political support which the nationalist party is able to exploit. In other words, we would expect to find support for independence to be solid rather than promiscuous over time.

The data come from the Scottish Election Surveys of 1979, 1992 and 1997, the Scottish Referendum Survey of 1997, the Scottish Social Attitudes Surveys of 1999 and 2000, and the British Election Panel Study which followed up the respondents in the 1997 election study in spring 1998, spring 1999 and spring 2000. Fuller details of these surveys are in the Appendix.

SUPPORT FOR INDEPENDENCE: CROSS-SECTIONAL DATA

Table 1 gives the context for patterns of attitudes to independence, showing the support for various constitutional options among people in Scotland between 1979 and 2000. The modal position has always been some kind of domestic parliament, the position that was eventually endorsed by the referendum of 1997. In that referendum, nearly all independence supporters voted for a devolved parliament: according to the Scottish Referendum Survey, 96% of people who supported either of the independence options voted in favour of a parliament. After the parliament was actually established in 1999, the new institution became the most popular single option, attracting around 50% support. After the referendum, the opposition to a parliament faded to around one in ten people, but throughout this period it had never been higher than one in four. Independence started in 1979 as an option with very low support: only 7%. By 1992, after a decade of Conservative government, that had grown to around one quarter. At the time of the 1997 referendum, it reached 37%, after which it fell back to around 30%. Moreover, a feeling that independence was likely to come about became the common view. At the time of the referendum in 1997, 59% thought that independence was 'very likely' or 'quite likely' in the ensuing two decades (made up of 76% of those who supported that option, and 48% of those who did not). In 1999, 51% took this view (75% of those who supported it and 43% of those who did not). For most of the last decade, independence within the EU has been about twice as popular as independence outwith the EU, although the temporary rise in support for independence at the time of the referendum was entirely accounted for by greater popularity for independence in the EU. Given the steady fall in support for no elected parliament, and the persisting low level of support since 1997 for a weaker form of parliament

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than is currently in place, the strengthening of support for independence almost certainly has come as a result of people shifting away from supporting a strong domestic parliament, being replaced in supporting that option by people who previously would have not supported any parliament. For the period since 1997, we look further at this question of the extent to which people change their views when we consider the panel study data later.

Table 1
Support for various constitutional options, 1979-2000

	1979	1992	1997 (election)	1997 (referendum)	1999	2000
independence outwith EU*		6	8	9	10	11
	7					
independence in EU*		17	18	28	18	19
strong domestic parliament**	26		42	32	50	47
		50				
weak domestic parliament**	28		9	9	9	8
no elected body	26	24	17	17	10	12
<i>s p e s z e</i>	✓	✓		✓	4	
<i>No d s n c o n s d e e e e n e o y p e s o f n d e p e n d e n c e n</i> ✓						
<i>r o n g d o e s c p r e n s r e f e r r e d o n</i> ✓ <i>s c o s A s s e y c</i>						
<i>o d n d e o s c o s f f r s n d f r o</i> ✓ <i>o n r d s s c o s P r e n</i>						
<i>n e s o e o n p o e r s e d o e s c p r e n s r e f e r r e d o</i>						
<i>n</i> ✓ <i>s c o s A s s e y c o d n d e s o e c o s f f r s n d o d e</i>						
<i>r e s p o n s e o P r e n e s n s e r n d f r o</i> ✓ <i>o n r d s s c o s</i>						
<i>P r e n n e n o o n p o e r s N o d s n c o n s d e n</i>						
<i>D o n n o n d n o n s e r e d n c d e d n e s e</i>						
<i>o r c e s c o s E e c o n r e y s o f</i> ✓ <i>n d</i> ✓ <i>c o s e f e r e n d</i>						
<i>r e y o f</i> ✓ <i>c o s o c A d e s r e y s o f</i> <i>n d</i>						

Attitudes towards Independence

Attitudes towards independence also changed in a positive direction, as Table 2 shows (the question was asked in only 1979 and 1999). In 1979, 54% of people thought that independence would be 'bad' or 'very bad'; this had fallen to 45% in 1999. The proportion regarding independence as 'good' or 'very good' rose more sharply, from 29% to 45%, because the proportion taking no view on the matter fell from 17% to 11%. But the main reason for the growth in support for independence is not this: it is that far more of those who regard independence as attractive now also support it. In 1979, only 16% of those who saw it as 'good' also supported it; by 1999 this had risen to 45%. Similarly, the proportion supporting independence among those who viewed it as 'very good' rose from 40% to 77%. Nevertheless, in both years, the proportion regarding independence as 'good' or 'very good' was much higher than the proportion willing to support it: 29% against 7% in 1979, and 45% against 28% in 1999. Looking at this another way, despite the rise in overall support for independence, and despite the shift in a positive direction in people's views of independence, a consistent 28% of the majority who did not support independence regarded that option as 'good' or 'very good'.

Table 2

Attitude towards independence, and support for independence, 1979 and 1999

view of independence	1979		1999	
	column %	support for independence (% in cell)	column %	support for independence (% in cell)
very bad	21	0	14	3
bad	33	0	31	6
good	21	16	33	45
very good	8	40	12	77
no view	17	—	11	—
total	100	100	100	100

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Table 3
Support for independence by class, gender and age, 1979-2000

class*	1979		1992		1997 (election)		1997 (referendum)		1999		2000	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
professional	7	4	5		14	4	25		26	✓	43	
intermediate	8	✓	19	4	22		25		20	✓	22	
routine non-manual	8		19		24		30		25		28	
skilled manual	5		30		32		48	4	31	✓	39	
semi-skilled manual	8		30		29	4	49		38		36	4
unskilled manual	8		20		34		54		34		27	
gender												
men	8		28	44	29	✓	40		30	✓	34	
women	6	✓	18		24		34		24		27	✓
age												
18-24	11		30		36		46	4	44		44	44
25-34	7		27		35	✓	50		31		44	
35-44	10		27	✓	30		38	4	30		31	
45-54	6		27		25	4	36		27	4✓	23	✓
55-64	4		12	✓	19		32	4	22		28	
65+	7		15	✓	13		24		17		17	4 4

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There is a fair measure of consistency in the social basis of support for independence, as can be seen from Table 3. Support rose in all social classes, but, setting aside fluctuations that are probably the result of sampling variation, support has always been higher in working class groups than in middle class ones¹. This was starkest at the peak of independence support at the time of the referendum in 1997, when around one half of working class people supported it. Nevertheless, in all years since 1997, around one quarter of middle class groups have supported independence. These social class differences were much more pronounced than in the support for any kind of elected parliament (Brown et al, 1998, p. 160): in 2000, for example, the proportions opposing any kind of parliament were 11% in the salariat, and 10% in the working class.

The gender difference in support is clear and stable: in all years, men have been more likely to support independence than women, usually by around five percentage points. This gender difference is not found in support for any kind of elected parliament, because women are more likely to support a domestic parliament than men (Brown et al, 1998, p. 161): in 2000, 12% of men and 11% of women opposed any kind of parliament.

In the last decade, younger people have been much more likely to support independence than older people. There is some evidence, however, that this is, at least in part, a cohort effect. This is clearest if we look at the 45-54 age group in 1992, who then showed 27% support. As they aged, to become roughly the 55-64 group in 2000, they maintained that level of support (at 28%), and certainly did not fall to the 12% which the 55-64 group had in 1992. Something the same could be said of the 18-24 group in 1992, which had a 44% level of support by 2000. Nevertheless, if we go back to 1979, we can see that the main change has been related to period: between then and 1992, all age groups showed a rise of at least twice (the oldest group), and mostly by much more than that.

¹ The independence of the four nations does not differ from the independence of the four nations once the effects of the period are taken into account. The only exception is the support for independence in the working class.

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The conclusion from Table 3 is that, by 2000, there were substantial minorities supporting independence in all class, gender and age groups, but with the strongest support among working class people, men and young people, and with distinctly low levels of support only among old people.

Table 4
Support for independence by self-assigned class, 1979-1999

	1979		1992		1997 (election)		1997 (referendum)		1999	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
middle class	3	✓	17	4	17		27		23	
working class	9		24	✓	30		40	4	✓	28

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Table 4 shows that levels of independence support are less clearly related to people's sense of their class identity than it is to their objectively measured class. This is quite the opposite of what is typically found for levels of support for political parties, where opposition to the Conservatives, in particular, is more strongly related to subjective class than to objective class (Bennie et al, 1997, pp. 103-4).

There is some association of independence support with left-wing allegiance, as Table 5 shows. To define left, centre and right, we start with individual questions that relate to typical ideological issues separating left and right (Paterson, 2002). In the surveys of 1992, 1997 and 1999, these were six questions about inequalities of wealth and power, about the role of trade

unions and of private enterprise, about government ownership of public services, and about government responsibility for creating full employment. The replies were then added up to give a scale of views: people who consistently took a left-wing position were at one end of the scale, and so on. In the survey of 2000, a different set of five questions was asked, but they were used in the same way: these asked for views about the extent of inequalities in wealth and power, about government's responsibility for redistributing income, about whether big business exploits workers, and about whether management takes advantage of workers. In each year, the left was then defined in each survey as the most left-wing third of people on this scale, the centre as the middle third, and the right as the most right-wing third. (Because of the way in which values were grouped on the scales, it was not possible to divide the samples into exactly equal thirds, as can be seen from the sample sizes in Table 5.) We can see from Table 5 that, on the left, independence has had around one third support or higher since 1992, in the centre it has had about a quarter of support, and on the right it is generally supported by no more than about one in five people.

Table 5

Support for independence by ideological group, 1992-2000

	1992		1997 (election)		1997 (referendum)		1999		2000	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
right	12		17		29	4	17		23	4
centre	25		27	4	33		26	4	27	44
left	30		33		48		33	4	38	

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Levels of support for independence are closely linked to nationalist ideology. Table 6 shows support according to whether people identify more strongly

with a Scottish person of the same class, or an English person of the opposite class. Between 1979 and 1999, national identification grew at the expense of class identification (Paterson et al, 2001, p. 108): in 1979, 44% identified first with class, and 38% with nation, whereas by 1999 this had become 24% with class and 43% with nation. The national identifiers do show generally higher support for independence than the class identifiers, but the differences are in fact not as large as might be expected, except in 1979 when independence support was very low anyway. In one respect, there is a rather clearer relationship between independence support and a perception that there is serious conflict between Scotland and England (also in Table 6). That, too, grew (Paterson et al, 2001, p. 116): in 1979, 15% perceived 'very serious' or 'fairly serious' conflict. This became 30% in 1992, 43% in 1999 and 38% in 2000. The table shows that people who perceive very serious conflict are more likely to support independence than those who see less severe conflict. Nevertheless, support for independence is not strongly related to the other categories. Because the 'very serious' group never makes up more than about one in ten of the population, for most people attitudes to independence do not seem to be strongly shaped by their view as to the extent of any conflict between Scotland and England.

Something the same can be said about the relationship with feelings of being Scottish or being British (Table 7). Identifying mainly as British does seem to have been a definite barrier to supporting independence throughout most of the last two decades. But Scottishness has been so pervasive since the 1990s - with 80% preferring this identity in 2000, for example - that independence support among such people is just a little above the overall percentage as shown in Table 1.

It might be thought that independence support could be readily explained by political mobilisation. Certainly supporters of the Scottish National Party are much more likely to support independence than supporters of other parties (Table 8). Since 1997, in fact, the SNP has consistently had around two thirds or more of its supporters also supporting the party's core policy. Yet that leaves one third not doing so. What is more, in the past decade, at least one half of independence supporters have not supported the SNP, as Table 9 shows.

Table 6
Support for independence by national identification, and by perception of conflict between Scotland and England, 1979-1999

	1979		1992		1997 (election)		1997 (ref'dum)		1999		2000	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
identify most with [†] :												
same class English	5		26		27		38		26			not asked
opposite class Scot	11		24	4	32		39		30			not asked
no preference	5		22		20		31		22			not asked
perceived conflict between Scotland and England ^{**} :												
very serious	18		35		not asked		not asked		40		43	4
fairly serious	8	✓	30		not asked		not asked		29	4	34	4
not very serious	8		20	4✓	not asked		not asked		24	✓✓	27	
none	6	4	18	✓	not asked		not asked		25		24	

Don't know/No answer/Not decided/Not seen N

English respondents (same class) English people or Scottish people
 Q: How serious is the conflict between Scotland and England?

English respondents (opposite class) Scottish people
 Q: How serious is the conflict between Scotland and England?

Other respondents
 Q: How serious is the conflict between Scotland and England?

Table 7
Support for independence by Scottish and British identity, 1979-2000

1979	1992	1997	1997	1999	2000
------	------	------	------	------	------

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					(election)		(ref'dum)					
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
British	2		11		10	77	17		11		11	
Scottish	11	7	27		31	4	41	4	31		34	7

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Table 8
Support for independence by party identification, 1979-2000

	1979		1992		1997 (election)		1997 (ref'dum)		1999		2000	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Con	3		4		7	44	11		9		13	
Lab	4	7	21	4	22	4	37		22		25	
Lib Dem	1	7	19		15		11		16		14	
SNP	37	7	51		67	47	77		61		60	

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Table 9
Party identification, among independence supporters, 1979-2000

	1979	1992	1997 (election)	1997 (referendum)	1999	2000
Con	13	5	5	5	6	9
Lab	22	38	42	50	36	37
Lib Dem	2	7	7	2	8	5
SNP	62	51	47	42	50	49
sample size			✓			44

Don't know and no response

Party identification by region of residence

Regions of residence of independence supporters in 1997

When independence reached its recent peak of support, at the time of the referendum in 1997, a clear majority of these supporters would have voted for the Labour party, not the SNP. Back in 1979, things were markedly different. The SNP attracted two thirds of the small band of independence supporters (Table 9), but depended on supporters of other options for a much larger share of its vote than it has done recently (Table 8).

These results from the cross-sectional surveys suggests, then, that there might be a core of independence supporters who are left-wing, inclined to a nationalist ideology, young, working class and male. In any given year, these views and social characteristics certainly do characterise the people who are most likely to support independence. But how consistent are they in their support? Are they really a stable core around which an independence majority could be built? To study this empirically, we have to look at data from the panel study.

SUPPORT FOR INDEPENDENCE: PANEL DATA

If there were a core group of independence supporters, ideologically committed to that option, then we would expect them to be highly stable in their support. Table 10 shows the contrary to be the case. Each row corresponds to those people who supported independence in a particular wave of the survey. The columns show what they believed in each of the other three waves. The immediately striking thing is that, among those who support independence at any particular wave, at most just over half support it at any other wave. It is not even a matter of initial support slowly draining away: continuity from one year to the next is not consistently greater than continuity between waves that are two or three years apart.

Table 10

Support for independence each year among those who support independence in other years, 1997-2000

among people who supported independence at wave:	Proportion supporting independence at wave:				s p e s z e
	1997	1998	1999	2000	
1997	100	52	44	47	↗
1998	61	100	59	59	↘
1999	59	63	100	59	
2000	53	54	54	100	

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Table 11
Support for independence each year among
those who did not support independence in other years, 1997-2000

among people who did not support independence at wave:	Proportion supporting independence at wave:				s p e s z e
	1997	1998	1999	2000	
1997	0	12	11	15	
1998	16	0	10	13	4
1999	19	11	0	13	4
2000	18	11	11	0	44

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The same kind of conclusions can be reached about people moving towards independence from other options, as Table 11 shows. Broadly speaking, around one in eight of such people in any given year would support independence in any other given year. A simpler way of looking at the same data as in Tables 10 and 11 is in Table 12, which shows the number of waves at which people supported independence, and the same for a domestic parliament and for no parliament. For example, in the first column, we see that 55% never supported independence, 20% supported it on one occasion, and so on. On the one hand, this means that, at some time during the four years, nearly half - 45% - of people did support independence. On the other, only one in fourteen - 7% - consistently supported it on all four occasions. The 45% can be contrasted with the 89% who supported a domestic parliament on at least one occasion, and with the 74% who on no occasion opposed some kind of parliament. If we take the core supporters of each option as those who supported it on at least three of the four occasions on which they were asked, independence commands 14% core support, no

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parliament at all 6%, but a domestic parliament 60%. We can deduce from the 3% in the final column who consistently opposed a parliament that 97% were not determinedly averse to one. By contrast, 55% were never inclined to support independence.

Table 12

Frequency of support for various constitutional options, 1997-2000

number of waves at which support option:	independence	domestic parliament	no parliament
0	55	11	74
1	20	12	14
2	10	17	6
3	7	28	3
4	7	32	3

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We can reach similar conclusions if we look further into the apparent social segmentation of support that we summarised cross-sectionally in Table 3. On the basis of that table, we might be inclined to say that the working class, men and young people made up the core of support. So far as class is concerned, that is not so. When we draw up a table analogous to Table 10, but separately for middle class and working class groups, we get a very similar pattern to Table 10. Middle class is defined to be the first three class categories in Table 3, working class to be the last three. Among the working class, usually only about one half of the supporters of independence on any given occasion also supported it on another given occasion. As a result, the versions of Table 12 for different classes were also similar. The proportion of working class people who had supported independence on at least one occasion was 52%, not much larger than the 45% in the sample as a whole. For the middle class,

the proportion was 40%. The proportion of people who consistently supported independence on all four occasions was very small in both groups - 7% in the working class and 9% in the middle class.

A similar pattern can be found with respect to age. To achieve adequate sub-sample sizes, age is grouped into 18-34 and 35 or older (following what appears to be a fairly clear break in levels of support for independence in the election survey in 1997: Table 3). But young people did not form any more of a stable core of support than the working class. People aged 18-34 were only moderately more likely to experiment with supporting independence than those aged 35 or over: 53% supported independence at least once, as against 42%.

The pattern with respect to gender is somewhat different, as Table 13 shows. We might expect from Table 3 that men would form a core group for independence. Men were indeed more stable in their allegiance to independence than women: for nearly all pairs of years, around 60% or more of male supporters of independence consistently supported it, in contrast to usually around 45-55% of women. Yet the consequence of that greater experimentation by women is that the cross-sectional differences shown in Table 3 exaggerate the gender effect. Nearly the same proportion of men and women had experimented with supporting independence at least once (as in the first column of Table 12): 46% of men and 44% of women. There was a larger core of men doing so, 10% maintaining support on all four occasions, against 5% of women, and 19% maintaining it on at least three occasions, against 11%. But this does not suggest that women are any more averse to independence than men: more women experiment with independence than men, but also more women experiment with other options too.

Much the same is true of ideology. The left, as we saw, was apparently more likely to support independence than the centre, which in turn was more likely than the right. But that on its own does not show that the left or centre are stable core groups for independence. If we trace the evolution of these groups' views of independence between 1997 and 2000, analogously to the first column of Table 12, we find that 55% of people on the left supported independence at least once, but only 11% supported it on all four occasions. Similarly, 44% of people in the centre supported it at least once, and 7% four times. In fact, the right is closer to forming a core opposition to independence than the other two groups are to providing stable support: 73% of the right opposed independence on all four occasions.

Table 13
Support for independence each year among
those who support independence in other years, by gender, 1997-2000

		Proportion supporting independence at wave:				
among people who supported independence at wave:		1997	1998	1999	2000	<i>s p e s ze</i>
1997	men	100	60	50	57	
	women	100	45	39	36	↗
1998		60	100	60	65	
		64	100	58	50	↗
1999		66	70	100	68	
		52	55	100	49	
2000		63	62	58	100	
		41	45	48	100	

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On nationalist ideology, the group we might expect from Table 6 to be core - that which tends to identify with nation before class - actually turns out to be no less fluid in its attitude to independence than the group who take the opposite position. (The question on conflict between Scotland and England has not been asked in the panel study.) This can be seen in Table 14. In almost all pairs of years, the consistency in attitude to independence shown by people who identify first with nation (the bottom percentage in each cell) is no higher than the consistency of those who identify first with class; the

small sample sizes prevent our concluding definitely that there is any difference in fluidity between the groups. Over the four years, 51% of those who identify with nation supported independence at least once, compared to 43% of those who identify with class.

Table 14
Support for independence each year among those who support independence in other years, by national or class identification, 1997-2000

		Proportion supporting independence at wave:				
among people who supported independence at wave:		1997	1998	1999	2000	sample size
1997	class	100	58	56	49	
	nation	100	49	42	46	
1998		73	100	71	66	↗
		66	100	58	66	↗
1999		71	66	100	62	4
		58	59	100	63	
2000		56	57	60	100	4
		54	56	55	100	↗

For figures in percentage for people who identify as Scottish English or second for those who identify as opposed to Scottish see

Don't know/never identified/never

Source: Scottish respondents in British Election Panel Study, 1997-2000

The point, then, is that Scots are still very open to experimenting with constitutional futures. They do not see a stark divide between independence

and a domestic parliament. Indeed, further analysis like that in Table 10 showed that, of those supporting independence on any occasion, at least one third, and usually over 40%, would support a domestic parliament at another occasion, but that only around 3% would shift to opposing any parliament at all. Despite the apparent stability of the cross-sectional differences in earlier tables, there is no stable core group of supporters. The core group of opponents of independence is rather larger - around 55%. But if we add in also the 18% who, in 1997, gave independence as their second choice and gave neither type of independence as their first choice, 63% of people would at least contemplate independence. Given the fluidity we have seen here, that would almost certainly be higher if second choices had been recorded at other waves. This is consistent with the comment we made earlier on Table 2: the people who view independence positively tend to be much more numerous than the people who are willing to support it at any particular time.

CONCLUSION

What are we to make of attitudes to independence in the aftermath of the most significant constitutional change in Scotland in almost 300 years? The setting up of a Scottish parliament, the first properly democratic one in its history, is undoubtedly an extraordinary event, with consequences as yet unforeseen. To those who would aspire to hold the British union together, it is the 'settled will' of the Scottish people, recognising their identity as both Scottish and British, and devolving powers to the appropriate level. To those who would end that union, it is the stepping stone to ultimate independence, but an independence in Europe. While devolution has the support of a clear majority of Scots, it also has the capacity to be unfinished business, to lead to further powers being devolved, and a further shift along the continuum of self-government.

As we have seen, there is no dramatic divide between the two constitutional options, devolution and independence, in the minds of the Scottish electorate. Distinctions between first and second-order elections simply do not apply (Paterson et al., 2001), and much higher levels of trust are invested by the electorate in the Scottish parliament than in the one at Westminster (SurrIDGE, 2002, p. 138). The fact that there is no stable core of supporters for independence implies not that this is a fragile option, but that many more people are prepared to countenance independence if they were persuaded that it would generate more responsive government, and would be likely to

produce the kind of society they aspire to. Likewise, though, they may be quite open to options that are short of formal independence but nevertheless significantly stronger than the devolved parliament the country now has. The model of independence which assumes that support grows outwards from a stable core certainly does not apply in the Scottish case, and it remains to be seen whether or not similar patterns and processes apply to comparable nations such as Quebec, Catalonia and Wales. To be sure, if Scotland does eventually become independent, it is much more likely to be the product of a series of events and processes central to its everyday politics and practices. Not for the first time, the unintended consequences of human action hold the key to social and political understanding.

APPENDIX: DETAILS OF THE SURVEYS

The cross-sectional surveys cited in the tables were multi-stage cluster samples, stratified at the cluster level, and drawn from the electoral register until 1992 and from the postcode address file from 1997. Data were collected by face-to-face interviews in respondents' homes, computer-aided from 1997. Full details of the sampling design etc are reported in the appendices of Paterson et al (2001) and Curtice et al (2002). The response rates were at least 60% and usually between 65% and 70%. The Scottish Social Attitudes Survey achieved samples of 1482 in 1999 and 1663 in 2000. The Scottish Election Survey achieved samples of 729 in 1979, 957 in 1992 and 882 in 1997. The Scottish Referendum Survey of 1997 achieved a sample of 676. Among the 882 respondents in Scotland to the 1997 election survey, the British Election Panel Study achieved response rates of 76% in 1998 (672 respondents), 71% in 1999 (626 respondents) and 66% in 2000 (586 respondents). Although the panel study thus had quite high levels of attrition, it does have the unique virtue of letting us study the ways in which individuals do or do not change their minds in their political attitudes. Moreover, the attrition did not vary by relevant attitudes (as measured in 1997): it was much the same among supporters of various constitutional options for Scotland, of various political parties, and in various demographic groupings defined by social class, gender and age: see Paterson et al (2001, p. 174) for further details. The surveys have been funded mainly by the UK Economic and Social Research Council and its predecessors, and have been run mostly by the National Centre for Social Research (formerly SCPR). The survey data can be obtained from the Data Archive at Essex University.

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