

IS DEVOLUTION AT RISK? EXAMINING ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT IN LIGHT OF THE 2003 ELECTION

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We're in a really serious situation here. If Scotland is not well-governed over the next four years, then the devolution commitment Jim (Wallace) and I have had all our adult lives is threatened by a lack of public confidence.

Jack McConnell, **Sunday Herald**, 11 May 2003

With the above statement, Scotland's First Minister placed a question mark over the future of devolution. His point was not that the Scottish Parliament risked abolition, but that its credibility would be undermined and its views no longer taken seriously in Westminster or Europe (**Scotland on Sunday** 11 May 2003). These concerns emerged after an election in which fewer than half of Scots turned out to vote, and an unprecedented number of those who did vote rejected the mainstream political parties. For McConnell, this reflected declining confidence 'in politicians, in the trustworthiness of what they say, and whether or not they deliver what they promise' (**Sunday Herald** 11 May 2003).

The First Minister's words of warning followed post-election commentary in sections of the press, for whom the election result and low turnout was a damning indictment of devolution. The **Daily Mail** noted that the low turnout called into question the legitimacy of the Scottish Parliament, arguing that 'voters who stayed away from polling stations withdrew their endorsement' (**Daily Mail** editorial, 3 May 2003). The **Guardian's** election reporters

Attitudes Towards the Scottish Parliament

concluded that the result represented a 'bruising critique' of devolution that had 'put the Scottish parliament on notice' (**Guardian** 3 May). The **Scotsman** warned that if politicians did not learn to communicate better with the public, they would 'lack legitimacy and lose their right to speak on our behalf' (**Scotsman**, Editorial 3 May). Angus McLeod of **The Times** suggested that the low turnout reflected the 'deep disappointment many Scots felt so far with devolution' (3 May 2003).

But to what extent has the credibility of the Scottish Parliament been undermined? Is devolution really at risk, as post-election commentary suggests? Addressing these questions requires us to identify the basis of the concerns and critiques, and measure them against the available evidence. Three distinctive issues may be identified:

- declining trust in politicians and mainstream political parties;
- low turnout in the election;
- disappointment with the Scottish Parliament in its first four years.

This article considers each of these in turn, drawing upon survey evidence from the annual Scottish Social Attitudes surveys, election and referendum surveys, and in light of the 2003 Scottish election result.¹

TRENDS IN EFFICACY AND TRUST

Devolution was primarily a political response to increased demands for Scottish self-government. However, it was presented by the Blair government as part of a comprehensive package of constitutional reforms designed to renew and replenish British democracy. This idea of democratic renewal was in tune with the political discourse of the home rule movement, particularly within the Scottish Constitutional Convention. 'The first and greatest reason for creating a Scottish Parliament', it declared in its final report, 'is that the people of Scotland want and deserve democracy' (Scottish Constitutional Convention 1995, p.2).

¹ A full analysis of these issues must await publication of the 2003 Scottish Election survey. At the time of writing, the survey is being undertaken by the National Centre for Social Research.

Table 1
Political Efficacy in Scotland 1997 - 2002

| | 1997 (ref) | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|--|---------------|------|------|------|------|
| Doesn't matter which party in power | | | | | |
| Agree/strongly agree | 40 | 55 | 75 | 62 | 75 |
| Neither | 14 | 9 | 6 | 8 | 6 |
| Disagree/strongly disagree | 46 | 35 | 18 | 29 | 17 |
| Parties are only interested in votes | | | | | |
| Agree/strongly agree | 58 | 65 | 73 | 73 | 73 |
| Neither | 20 | 15 | 13 | 11 | 13 |
| Disagree/strongly disagree | 21 | 20 | 13 | 16 | 13 |
| MPs soon lose touch with people | | | | | |
| Agree/strongly agree | 60 | 66 | 72 | 72 | 71 |
| Neither | 24 | 17 | 16 | 12 | 17 |
| Disagree/strongly disagree | 14 | 15 | 11 | 15 | 10 |
| Scot Parl give ordinary people more say | | | | | |
| More say | 79 | 64 | 44 | 38 | 31 |
| No difference | 17 | 32 | 51 | 56 | 62 |
| Less say | 2 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 4 |

Note: Responses indicating don't know/not answered have been excluded.

Source: Scottish Referendum Survey 1997; Scottish Election Survey 1999; Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2000-2002.

Analysis of data from the Scottish Social Attitudes survey permits insight into the extent to which devolution has coincided with changing attitudes towards the political system and the democratic process. A distinction is drawn here between political efficacy and political trust (Almond and Verba 1963). Political efficacy refers to the extent to which individuals feel they can have

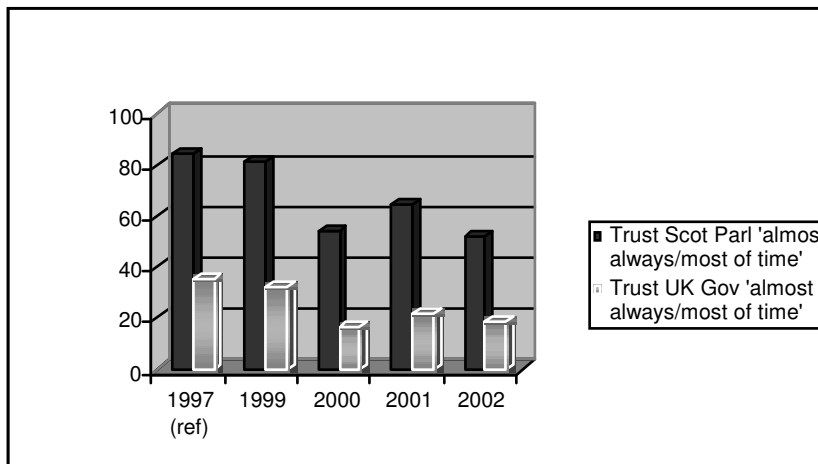
Attitudes Towards the Scottish Parliament

influence within the political system. While this may depend upon the resources available to each individual (time, money, political knowledge, access to networks, etc), the efficacy of a political system can also be measured by the degree to which individuals feel it is responsive to their views. Political trust, by contrast, refers to the extent to which voters trust politicians, parties and political institutions to work in the interests of those they represent.

Table 1 charts trends in political efficacy since the 1997 devolution referendum. The first three questions concern feelings towards the responsiveness of the political system in general, asking respondents to give a view on whether it matters which political party is in power; whether parties are only interested in votes, not opinions; and whether they believe that politicians lose touch with the people once they are elected. The fourth specifically concerns devolution, asking respondents if they believe the Scottish Parliament has given ordinary people more say. A number of inferences can be drawn from this data. Firstly, it should be noted that a high degree of cynicism was evident within the system before the establishment of the Scottish Parliament. For example, the survey suggests that around two-thirds of Scots believed that elected politicians lose touch with their voters. A similar degree of cynicism has been evident since the 1970s (Bromley, et al 2001, p.205). However, it is also clear that cynicism and scepticism are on the rise. The data suggests that Scots have become less inclined to believe political parties are interested in their views, less inclined to consider that it matters which party is in power, and more inclined to believe that elected politicians are out of touch. This has coincided with a decline in the extent to which people believe that the Scottish Parliament gives ordinary people more say. In the wake of the devolution referendum, almost 80% believed that the Parliament would enhance the influence of ordinary voters. Barely two years into the devolution project, less than a third judged it to be doing so.

We find a similar trend when measuring political trust. At the time of the referendum, 36% trusted that the Scottish Parliament would work in Scotland's interests 'just about always', while a further 48% believed it could be trusted to do so 'most of the time' (Scottish Referendum Survey 1997). Measurements of trust after the Scottish Parliament's establishment indicate a marked decline. By 2002, just 9% trusted the Scottish Parliament to 'just about always' work in Scotland's interests, while 43% trusted it to do so 'most of the time' (Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2002). Figure 1 highlights this general trend.

Figure 1
Trust in Scottish Parliament and UK Government, 1997-2002



Source: *Scottish Referendum Survey 1997*; *Scottish Election Survey 1999*; *Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2000-2002*.

Although controversial issues, such as the spiralling costs of the new Parliament building, may have done little to ease voters' cynicism towards the political establishment, there is no evidence to suggest that the Scottish Parliament has itself caused Scots to be more cynical and less trusting of politicians and political parties. Confidence in the political system has declined regardless of expectations and evaluations of the Scottish Parliament (Curtice 2002, pp.153-5). Furthermore, trends in Scotland reflect trends in England, where surveys suggest very similar levels of mistrust and scepticism towards the political system (*ibid.*, pp. 154-6). Such trends are not confined to the United Kingdom. Cross-national comparisons suggest a general trend within most advanced industrial democracies towards increased scepticism of political elites and deep erosion in the confidence voters have in governments and political parties (Dalton 1999). It is beyond the scope of this article to examine the rival hypotheses that seek to explain these trends (but see Norris 1999; Klingemann and Fuchs 1998). The key point to note is that declining

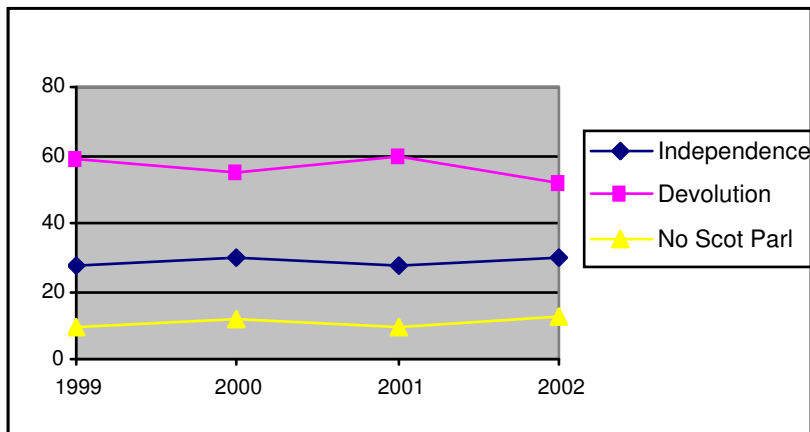
Attitudes Towards the Scottish Parliament

levels of trust and efficacy are neither a consequence of devolution nor unique to Scotland.

Increased scepticism of and cynicism about the political system may have contributed to the rise in support for political parties and candidates outside of the political establishment in the 2003 Scottish election, as well as dissuading some eligible electors from using their vote (see below). Nevertheless, the consequences of declining trust and efficacy should not be exaggerated. Indeed, within traditional liberal doctrine, mistrust of government on the part of the citizenry is considered healthy in a democracy (Hardin 1999, pp.22-4). In any case, as Figure 1 indicates, the degree of trust in the Scottish Parliament to work in Scotland's interests remains quite high, significantly higher than levels of trust in the UK government.² Moreover, we should distinguish increased scepticism and mistrust of politicians and political parties from an underlying support for the political system (Klingemann 1999; Dalton 1999). In Scotland, the underlying legitimacy of the political system is evident when we examine constitutional preferences (Figure 2). In the years since the Parliament's establishment, a majority of survey respondents have consistently selected a devolved Scottish Parliament as their preferred constitutional option, with the next most popular option being an independent parliament. The proportion of Scots supporting a constitutional settlement akin to the pre-devolution arrangement – effectively, abolition of the Scottish Parliament – is around 10%, considerably fewer than those voting No in the 1997 referendum. This underlying support suggests that some form of Scottish Parliament is here to stay.

² *It should be noted that these survey questions do not compare like with like. By contrasting trust in a legislature with trust in a government, the Scottish Social Attitudes surveys may exaggerate the differences in the trust that Scots hold towards Scottish and British political institutions. Unfortunately, the surveys do not permit a comparison between trust in parliament and government at each level of the state.*

Figure 2
Constitutional Preferences, 1997-2002



Note: The data for independence combines those supporting independence in and out of the European Union. The data for devolution combines those who support a devolved Scottish Parliament with and without tax-varying powers. Responses indicating don't know/not answered have been excluded.

Source: Scottish Election Survey 1999; Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2000-2002.

ELECTION TURNOUT

Less than half of the eligible electorate turned out to vote in the Scottish Parliament election of 2003. 49.4% of Scots voted in the election, down from 59% in the 1999 election. At the constituency level, turnout ranged from 35.41% in Glasgow Shettleston to 58.42% in the Western Isles, with the regional vote ranging from 41.45% in Glasgow to 53.25% in the West of Scotland (Burnside, et al. 2003, p.9³). Notwithstanding these regional variations, the overall pattern is of a decline in voter participation when compared to the 1999 election. Among some journalists and political

³ See also the article by David Denver in this issue of *Scottish Affairs*.

Attitudes Towards the Scottish Parliament

commentators, this decline was interpreted as a verdict on the Scottish Parliament after a disappointing four years.

However, the causes and explanations of declining voter turnout are many and varied. Moreover, this is not a phenomenon exclusive to Scotland. The last UK election produced the lowest ever turnout in a General Election since the franchise was universalised. The extent to which this represented a feature specific to that election, rather than a longer term decline, has been a matter of some debate (Pattie and Johnston 2001; Whiteley 2001; Denver 2003, pp.28-31). Turnout will vary between elections depending upon the circumstances in which each election is contested. Considerably more variation remains in the participation rates between countries (Franklin 1999). Nevertheless, comparative survey data suggests evidence of a general decline in voter turnout across almost all industrial democracies, particularly in the last 20 years (Gray and Caul 2000). Although sceptical about the extent of the decline, Franklin suggested that it may largely be explained by the changed political circumstances in which we live. Elections during the immediate postwar period, when turnouts were high, wrestled with the resolution of the conflict between labour and capital. Such grand issues are simply absent from modern day electoral contests. Issues in today's contests are less important, diminishing the perceived need to vote (Franklin 2002).

Trends in Scotland and elsewhere suggest that voter abstention is concentrated among the urban working class and the young. A number of possible explanations underpin the long-term decline in rates of participation among the urban working class, including increased scepticism towards the political system (Electoral Commission 2002, p.16); declining identification with political parties (Crewe, et al 1977); and a weakening of the link between the working class and the labour movement, which has left many working-class voters 'uninterested, uninformed and politically inactive' (Gray and Caul 2000, pp.1091-3). Among young people, a powerful factor explaining non-voting appears to be the lack of interest in politics and the perceived irrelevance of voting in an election. There is little evidence to suggest that non-voting young people grow into voters as they acquire greater responsibilities and maturity. Rather, non-voting appears to be a practice that young people are increasingly taking into adulthood (Electoral Commission 2002; Leduc and Pammet 2003). For Lijphart, differential turnout among social groups poses two dilemmas for democracy. Firstly, unequal participation spells unequal influence, as politicians and parties will tend to respond to the concerns of voters rather than non-voters. Secondly, unequal

Scottish Affairs

participation introduces a class and age bias into election results, with conservative parties tending to perform better because of their disproportionate support among older and middle-class voters (Lijphart 1997, pp.1-5). This may go some way to explaining why the Scottish Conservatives were alone among the mainstream political parties in increasing their share of the constituency and list votes in 2003 (Burnside, et al. 2003).

Clearly, then, some of the explanations for a decline in voter turnout are not unique to Scotland. Declining rates of voter participation among young people and the urban working class are evident elsewhere, within and beyond the UK. While these general trends may explain some of the decline in voter turnout in the Scottish Parliament election, they are unlikely to fully account for a drop of almost 10% between 1999 and 2003. Consideration must therefore be given to the distinctive factors at play in this election which may have contributed to dissuading so many Scots from using their vote. Four possible explanations have been identified.

Firstly, just as the Kosovo conflict and bombing of Serbia cast a shadow over the 1999 election, so the 2003 election was overshadowed by the war in Iraq. As well as any effect this may have had on the election outcome, the war may have had two consequences for the election campaign. War news dominated the broadcast and print media, pushing election coverage to the inside pages. In addition, amid the images of death, destruction and liberation, the domestic issues at stake in the Scottish election may have seemed less important. Although the war had threatened to spill over into the election campaign as opposition mounted to a military campaign without United Nations' backing, opposition subsided once the troops had entered battle, and particularly after the collapse of the Iraqi regime (Enyon and Martin 2003).

Secondly, even if we set aside the impact of the war on the election campaign, there were few issues that could ignite the electoral contest and spark the interest and engagement of the voters. Political commentators complained about a lack of policy debate between the mainstream parties. Iain Macwhirter bemoaned a campaign 'filled with the sound of dogs not barking', in which the manifesto pledges offered by the mainstream parties came 'boxed with the same standard features' (Macwhirter, **Sunday Herald** 13 April 2003). Ian Bell criticised manifesto 'wish lists [that] bear a family resemblance so strong they might have been issued from the same pen' (**Holyrood Magazine** 22 April 2003, cited in Burnside, et al., p.25). Ideological differences remain between the mainstream parties. For example,

Attitudes Towards the Scottish Parliament

the parties are split over the use of private finance to fund public services, with the SNP continuing to oppose the Private Finance Initiative. While Labour, the SNP and the Conservatives championed a conservative approach in their criminal justice policies, the Liberal Democrats retained their social liberalism in this sphere. However, these distinctions never emerged to become significant issues at stake in the contest for government. Even the debate over Scotland's constitutional future, in which the SNP stands alone among the big four parties in its commitment to independence, was more muted in this campaign than it had been in 1999. Instead, the mainstream parties converged on the middle ground, promising a similar package of increased teachers, police and nurses, and less crime and waiting time for hospital treatment. The minor distinctions that remained were in arithmetic rather than ideology. The convergence on the middle ground appeared designed to appeal to as many voters as possible. If this was the strategy, it clearly backfired, not only in failing to inspire electors to cast their ballot, but also in pushing many of those who did vote towards parties and independent candidates outside of the political mainstream. This was to the detriment of Labour and especially the SNP – the two principal contenders for government – who each suffered big losses in the constituency and list votes (Burnside, et al. 2003, p.5⁴).

A third factor influencing election turnout concerns the political salience of the particular election, with respect to the closeness of the contest and the influence electors feel their votes can have. Voter turnout tends to be higher when the election is a closely-fought contest, where the influence of an individual's vote is potentially greater (Franklin 1999; 2002; Blais and Dobrzynska 1998). In the 2003 Scottish election, the likelihood of a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition was never in much doubt. Even when polls in the early part of the campaign suggested that the SNP was running a close second to Labour (Enyon and Martin 2003), the Liberal Democrats had all but ruled out forming a coalition with the Nationalists as long as the latter remained committed to holding an independence referendum. The predictability of a Labour victory, with Liberal Democrat support, may have acted as a deterrent to some voters. In addition, although voters' perceptions of the influence they hold is usually heightened in a proportional representation system where fewer votes are 'wasted', perceived influence diminishes when the contest is fought between a large number of parties. The greater the number of parties,

⁴ See also the article by David Denver in this issue of *Scottish Affairs*.

Scottish Affairs

the more likely that policy compromises will have to be made between would-be coalition partners. This confuses the link between an individual's vote and the subsequent programme for government (Blais and Dobrzynska 1998). All eight regions were contested by the six major parties as well as the Scottish People's Alliance and the UK Independence Party. In some regions, they were joined by additional minor parties, including the Scottish Senior Citizens Unity Party, the Pensioners' Party, the Socialist Labour Party and the Fishermen's Party, as well as a large number of independents (SPICe 2003). Although the larger number of parties offered potentially greater choice, cross-national election surveys suggest that too much choice acts as a deterrent, diminishing the extent to which individuals feel their votes are going towards the election of a government (Blais and Dobrzynska 1998).

Finally, turnout varies depending upon the political salience of the institution for which the election is being held. Turnout tends to be higher in elections to national Parliaments and lower in elections to sub-state or local institutions and in elections to the European Parliament. Sub-state institutions and the European Parliament are considered less important, diminishing the perceived significance of voter participation (Franklin 1999; Lijphart 1998). This rule is less evident in sub-state elections to strong regional parliaments, where the territorial distinctiveness of the party and electoral systems is more marked (Hough and Jeffery 2003). Indeed, the salience attached to an institution is in part subjective, and voters within sub-state nations often perceive their sub-state political institutions to be more important than state-wide institutions. For example, in Quebec, where there is a strong territorial identity and a strong attachment to sub-state institutions, turnout has tended to be higher in elections to the Quebec National Assembly than in federal elections (Leduc and Pammet 2003). Do voters' perceptions of the political importance of the Scottish Parliament shed light on the decline in the number of Scots turning out to vote in the Scottish election? Curtice suggested that the sharp drop between 1999 and 2003 could be traced to a shift in the perceived status of the Scottish Parliament. In the 2001 Scottish Social Attitudes survey, two thirds of Scots believed that the UK government had most influence over Scotland, compared to only 15% who believed that the Scottish Parliament had most influence. This contrasts with the 1999 election survey, which suggested that more Scots believed that the new Parliament, not Westminster, would have the most influence over Scottish affairs (Curtice 2003). The declining stature of the Scottish Parliament in the eyes of many Scots may have diminished the perceived importance of casting a vote in the election.

Attitudes Towards the Scottish Parliament

Thus, there are many explanations for the decline in voter turnout within and beyond Scotland. Finding ways to make politics and elections seem more relevant and worthwhile, especially to the young and the urban working class, is a challenge facing politicians in many democratic countries. These are challenges for democracy, not challenges for devolution. There are, however, some factors which may specifically contribute to our understanding of the low turnout in the Scottish Parliament election. These include the predictability of the election outcome, the very wide range of parties and candidates standing for election, and the lack of salient issues which could have prompted the interest and engagement of the electorate. These are not problems specific to devolution, but are contingencies associated with the nature of the 2003 election and the decisions taken by the parties contesting it. It remains to be seen whether these factors will be replicated in future Scottish elections. Only the final factor, the perceived lack of importance that voters attach to the Scottish Parliament vis-à-vis Westminster, makes the specific association between low turnout and devolution. The decline in influence that Scots feel the Scottish Parliament has over Scottish affairs may suggest some disappointment with the devolution project.

DEVOLUTION AND DISAPPOINTMENT

At the time of the devolution referendum in 1997, expectations that the Scottish Parliament would make a substantial difference to Scottish political life were very high. Survey evidence suggested that the Yes-Yes vote in the referendum could to a large degree be explained by the expectation that the new Parliament would bring about improvements in the NHS, education, social services and the economy (SurrIDGE and McCrone 1999, pp.47-8; Brown et al. 1999, pp.113-37). These expectations were fuelled by the home rule movement. Advocates of home rule often couched the defence of social democracy and the welfare state within a Scottish nationalist discourse. In its final report, the Scottish Constitutional Convention promised that the Parliament would make 'a real difference' to the economy and social welfare:

Scotland has consistently declared through the ballot box the wish for an approach to public policy which accords more closely with its collective and community traditions. The frustration which has arisen as that wish is disregarded should be a source of concern to all who hold democracy dear. Scotland's Parliament will provide the means for the will of the

Scottish Affairs

people of Scotland, however it may develop, to be acted upon.
(Scottish Constitutional Convention 1995, pp.2-3).

The establishment of a Scottish Parliament came to be regarded and promoted, not just as a vehicle for the expression of Scottish national identity, but as a pre-requisite for better public services and progressive social and economic change in line with Scottish policy priorities (McEwen 2002; Mitchell and Bennie 1996).

Table 2
Policy Expectations of the Scottish Parliament 1997 - 2002

| | 1997 (ref) | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|---|---------------|------|------|------|------|
| Expect economy to be... | | | | | |
| A lot/little better | 64 | 43 | 36 | 43 | - |
| No difference | 24 | 37 | 45 | 43 | - |
| A lot/little worse | 12 | 13 | 13 | 10 | - |
| Expect quality of education to be...^a | | | | | |
| A lot/little better | 70 | 56 | 43 | 27 | 25 |
| No difference | 25 | 36 | 49 | 58 | 58 |
| A lot/little worse | 4 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 6 |
| Expect standards in NHS to be... | | | | | |
| A lot/little better | 65 | 49 | - | 45 | - |
| No difference | 28 | 41 | - | 42 | - |
| A lot/little worse | 6 | 4 | - | 9 | - |

Note: (a) question from 1999 asks if Scottish Parliament is going to increase, reduce or make no difference to standards in education. Responses indicating don't know/not answered have been excluded.

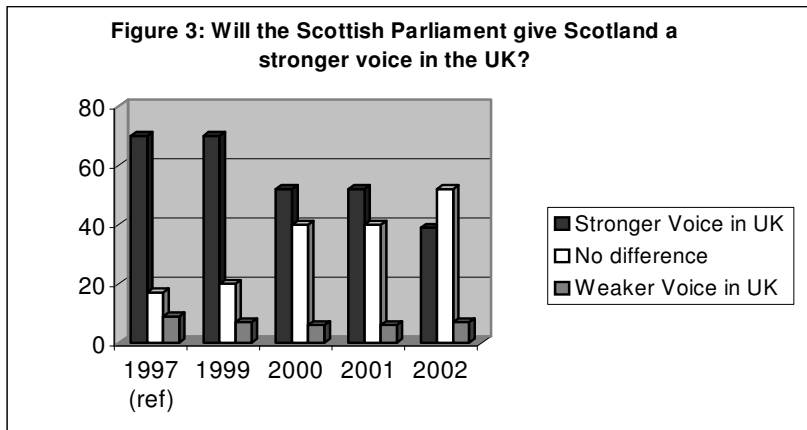
Source: Scottish Referendum Survey 1997; Scottish Election Survey 1999; Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2000-2002.

Attitudes Towards the Scottish Parliament

Table 2 underlines the high policy expectations invested in the Scottish Parliament, particularly in the wake of the referendum. Some 70% expected that the Scottish Parliament would improve standards in education. Respectively, 65% and 64% believed that health care and the economy would be similarly improved. The survey evidence since the Parliament's establishment suggests that these expectations have yet to be fulfilled, though care must be taken in the interpretation of this data. Whereas the data from 1997 and 1999 indicates expectations of what would be achieved under devolution in the future, later surveys ask respondents to consider their expectations of the Parliament in light of what they had 'seen and heard so far'. We might expect that the evaluative nature of these questions would diminish expectations to some extent. Nevertheless, there is some evidence to suggest a degree of disappointment in the policy achievements of the Parliament, and diminishing expectations about what it would achieve in the future. This is most apparent in the case of education, with progressively fewer respondents believing that the Parliament will raise standards. There is little evidence to suggest that Scots believe the new Parliament has made things worse. Rather, the surveys suggest that an increasing proportion of Scots are of the view that devolution will make little difference to the economy and the quality of public services.

Developing public policies in line with Scottish priorities was not the only objective of devolution. The establishment of a devolved Scottish Parliament was also a new way of accommodating Scotland's distinctiveness within the United Kingdom, enhancing Scotland's voice and giving institutional expression to Scottish national identity. At the time of the referendum, some 70% believed that the new Parliament would give Scotland a stronger voice in the UK. However, later surveys suggest that this expectation diminished once the Parliament was up and running. By 2002, only 39% believed that the Parliament would give Scotland a stronger voice in the UK. Once again, the surveys suggest that few Scots believe devolution has made things worse – even in 2002, only 7% said that the Parliament would weaken Scotland's voice. Rather, an increasing number appear to believe that devolution has had little impact in this regard.

Figure 3
Will the Scottish Parliament give Scotland a stronger voice in the UK?



Note: Responses indicating don't know/not answered have been excluded.

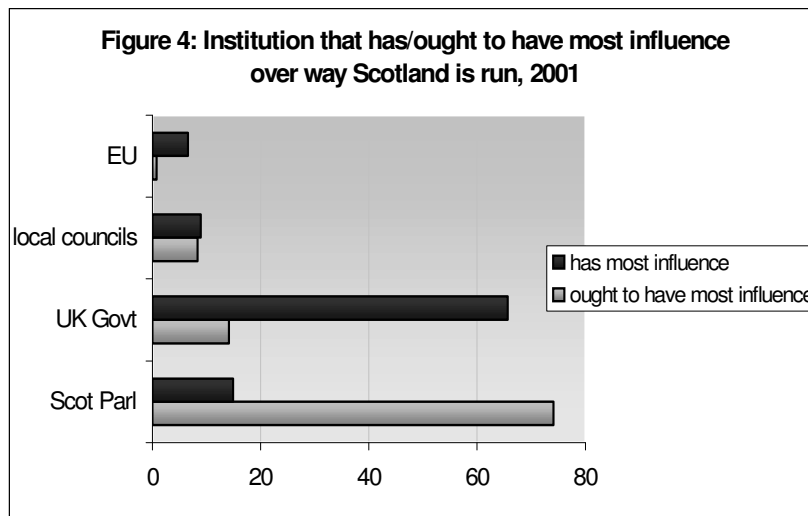
Source: Scottish Referendum Survey 1997; Scottish Election Survey 1999; Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2000-2002.

Thus, there appears to be a degree of disappointment with devolution in its early years. This may have influenced voting behaviour in the 2003 election, persuading some voters to switch their allegiance to parties outside of the political establishment, while dissuading others from voting at all. Testing the influence of attitudinal trends on electoral behaviour must await publication of the election survey. While disappointment with devolution has coincided with a reduction in the perceived status of the Scottish Parliament in the eyes of the people, there is little evidence to suggest that it has undermined the credibility of devolution as a political project. Parties supporting either the abolition of the Parliament (UK Independence Party) or a curtailment of its size and power (Scottish People's Alliance) received marginal support in the election, in spite of the evident drift towards parties outside the political mainstream and the latter party's well-publicised efforts to capitalise on dismay with devolution.

Attitudes Towards the Scottish Parliament

As discussed above, a devolved parliament remains the preferred choice of most Scots. Moreover, there is consistent evidence to suggest that a majority of Scots would like to see their Parliament grow in strength and stature. Around two thirds would like the powers of the Parliament to be increased. Although most evident among those who continue to hold the Parliament in highest regard, around half of those who believe it has failed to enhance Scotland's voice, increase standards in education or give ordinary people more say still support an increase in its powers (SurrIDGE 2002, pp.136-7). In addition, although the Parliament's status may have diminished in the eyes of the electorate, there is a clear desire for its importance to be enhanced. As indicated in Figure 4, a large majority now believe that the UK Government has most influence over Scottish affairs, but an even larger majority believe that the Scottish Parliament ought to have most influence.

Figure 4
Institution that has/ought to have most influence over way Scotland is run, 2001



CONCLUSION

Those who challenge or express concern for the credibility of the Scottish Parliament often raise issues of trust, disengagement and disappointment as though they were part of the same problem. This article has sought to demonstrate that these are separate issues, each with distinctive causes and consequences. Some preliminary considerations have been given to the effect they may have had on the election outcome. However, it is important to note that only one of these issues – disappointment with the Parliament's performance and diminishing expectations of what it can achieve – has directly emerged from the first four years of devolution.

Whatever the degree of disappointment we may detect, there is no evidence to suggest that this has weakened the underlying consent for devolution as a political project. On the contrary, the evidence suggests that Scots would like to see their Parliament grow in strength and stature. Of course, it cannot be assumed that the expectations invested in the devolved Parliament at the time of the 1997 referendum would be fulfilled were the Parliament's powers to be enhanced. In an era of globalisation, the autonomy of all governments is being curtailed to some degree. While the changing international order offers opportunities to sub-state governments, it also imposes policy constraints (Rhodes 1996). This may explain the trend within European sub-state nations, including Scotland, to drift away from social welfare issues towards the promotion of economic development and entrepreneurialism (Keating, et al., forthcoming). In any case, there is little appetite within the current Scottish and UK administrations to revisit the Scotland Act with a view to enhancing the Scottish Parliament's powers. There is scope within the existing settlement, however, for the Executive and the Parliament to be more assertive and ambitious in the articulation and defence of the interests of the Scottish people. At least then devolution may fulfil one of its objectives – that of enhancing Scotland's voice within the UK. The future may not be as bleak as some have foretold, but its brightness may rest on the shoulders of those who serve.

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Attitudes Towards the Scottish Parliament

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Scottish Affairs

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Attitudes Towards the Scottish Parliament

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