

# Democratic Deficit or the Europeanisation of Secession? Explaining the Devolution Referendums in Scotland

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This article deals with the variation in the demand for self-government in Scotland – as measured by the vote in the two referendums – between 1979, when devolution was rejected, and 1997, when devolution was endorsed. The existing literature mainly deals with each of the two referendums in isolation and does not offer an explicitly comparative analysis of them. However, implicit comparisons contained in analyses of the 1997 referendum tend to identify as the main cause of the variation the ‘democratic deficit’ created by Conservative rule between 1979 and 1997, which was consistently rejected in Scotland. I take issue with this explanation on theoretical and empirical grounds and advances an alternative account grounded in an explicit comparison of the two referendums. Based on a rationalist approach, the analysis presented here identifies three key elements in the voting dynamics at the two points in time – a gap between support for self-government and the actual vote in the referendum; an interaction effect between attitudes to devolution and to independence; and the role of the European context in shaping perceptions of independence. I argue that significant change in these three variables (rather than a ‘democratic deficit’) appear to have been the most important determinants of the different results of the two referendums.

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Scottish devolution is one of the most far-reaching changes in the British constitution since the secession of southern Ireland in the 1920s.<sup>1</sup> Despite its importance, it has not attracted the level of scholarly interest, especially outside Scotland, that it deserves. This is even more surprising since the dynamics of the demand for self-government in Scotland present an intriguing puzzle for political science analysis. On the one hand, public opinion was extraordinarily stable throughout the post-war period, with support for home rule – as measured by opinion polls – consistently above 60 percent.<sup>2</sup> On the other, the two crucial moments of the post-war history of devolution – the 1979 and 1997 referendums – produced starkly different results: in 1979 devolution was rejected while in 1997 it was emphatically endorsed.<sup>3</sup> Analyses of the Scottish demand for self-government thus face a two-fold task. First, to explain why devolution was rejected in the 1979 referendum despite the fact that opinion polls suggest there was 60 percent support for self-government and, second, to explain why devolution was endorsed in 1997 after having been rejected in 1979. The present analysis is also informed by, and intends to contribute to, the growing literature on the peculiarities of referendum voting behaviour in comparison to parliamentary elections and, in particular, on explaining referendum outcomes at odds with well-established patterns of public opinion

(for a summary see LeDuc, 2002). Of particular interest are referendums held on similar questions at different points in time, such as those on Scottish devolution and Quebec's independence. Yet, while the latter have been subjected to comparative analysis (Pammett and LeDuc, 2001) this has not yet been done in the Scottish case.

Existing studies of Scottish devolution deal with each of the two referendums in isolation and as yet there is no explicitly comparative work addressing the puzzle outlined above. This article does so by proposing a theoretical model able to explain the puzzle and by presenting evidence supporting it. The model is centred on the interaction between attitudes to devolution and attitudes to independence and on the role of the European dimension in framing perceptions of independence. The results indicate that the argument advanced here is able to take up the two-fold task mentioned above and to provide a more robust explanation for the variation between 1979 and 1997 than those currently advanced in the literature, in terms of both theoretical coherence and empirical substantiation. The article proceeds as follows. The first section reviews and provides a critique of the literature. The second section introduces the theoretical and methodological framework of the research. The third section presents the results of the analysis and the fourth section concludes by discussing them in relation to the research questions and pointing to the relevance of these findings for the scholarly debate on both Scottish devolution and referendum voting.

## A Review and a Critique of the Literature

Though no explicitly comparative study of the two referendums has so far been carried out and no comprehensive explanation for the difference in results has been advanced, it is possible to identify three main explanatory accounts in the literature. The first is centred on the content of the two devolution packages as represented by the Scotland Act 1978 and the *Scotland's Parliament 1997 White Paper*, respectively. According to this thesis, the former was perceived as an overwhelmingly partisan document intended to entrench Labour domination in Scotland through an assembly elected by the first-past-the-post system. In contrast, the 1997 White Paper was the product of a wide consensus within Scottish society, symbolised by the agreement on a proportional electoral system. The partisan nature of devolution in 1979 produced a partisan pattern of voting whereby non-Labour pro-devolutionists – notably Conservative identifiers – turned against the Scotland Act in the run up to the referendum. In contrast, the consensual nature of the 1997 proposals ensured a broad and steady support for devolution up to and at the referendum (Balsom and McAllister, 1979, pp. 402–5; Mitchell, Denver, Pattie, Bochel, 1998, p. 168).

The second explanation focuses on the degree of unity and the popularity of the Labour party and the effectiveness of the pro-devolution referendum campaign. It points out that Labour was divided and deeply unpopular in 1979 and that the Yes campaign was divided and underfunded relative to their opponents.<sup>4</sup> In contrast the Labour party was united and at the peak of its popularity in September 1997, the Yes campaign was also united and it enjoyed higher financial resources than the No side.<sup>5</sup> These differences determined that in 1979 Labour's unpopu-

larity and the ineffective campaign undermined support for devolution while in 1997 the situation was reversed.

The third, and currently most influential, argument focuses on the role of the so-called 'democratic deficit' created by 18 years of Conservative rule at the UK level that was consistently rejected in Scotland. According to this theory, demand for self-government was 'soft' in the 1970s and was thus easily defeated by the Conservative policy of supporting devolution in principle but opposing the Scotland Act 1978 in practice (Bochel and Denver, 1981, p. 144; Brand, 1986, p. 38). In contrast, the 1979–1997 'democratic deficit' had transformed home rule into the 'settled will of the Scottish people', which was reflected in a very stable public support for devolution.<sup>6</sup> Different authors account for this either in terms of a convergence of the 'class' and 'identity' cleavages or as the 'mobilisation of the middle classes'.<sup>7</sup> In all these accounts, the connection between attitudes to devolution and attitudes to independence is almost totally neglected while the European dimension receives some attention but is not analysed in detail (Brown, McCrone, Paterson, 1998, pp. 64–5).

While most of these explanations certainly point to important factors in the dynamic of the demand for devolution in Scotland between 1979 and 1997, they are unable, either individually or collectively, to provide a satisfactory general explanation for the different results of the two referendums, either empirically or theoretically. The claim that the Scotland Act 1978 was rejected because non-Labour identifiers perceived it as Labour-biased is not confirmed by the pattern of referendum voting by party identification. Although a significantly larger proportion of Conservative than Labour identifiers voted No, Liberal identifiers displayed a voting pattern not very different from Labour's and Nationalist identifiers voted overwhelmingly Yes (table 5).<sup>8</sup> Nor is it consistent with the fact that a substantial proportion of Labour identifiers themselves also voted No. Put another way, only 51 percent of those voters who, despite favouring devolution in principle, voted No to the Scotland Act 1978 were Conservative identifiers (Dardanelli, 2002, p. 336). Moreover, the voting patterns of non-Labour identifiers were very similar in the two referendums. This evidence is inconsistent with the claim that the Scotland Act 1978 was rejected because it was perceived as biased in favour of Labour while the White Paper 1997 was not. Likewise, the hypothesis that devolution did not get enough support in 1997 because it was associated with an unpopular government does not find support in the data. The fundamental problem here is that the claim of Labour's unpopularity derives from UK-wide opinion surveys rather than data relative to Scottish opinion (Denver, Mitchell, Pattie, Bochel, 2000, p. 159). As the 1979 general election results relative to October 1974 indicate, Labour's popularity *increased* in Scotland, with the party gaining five percent in votes and three additional MPs. Moreover, attitudes towards the Labour government – as proxied by support for Prime Minister Callaghan – were not significantly correlated with the referendum vote and did not have an independent impact on the latter (Table 16).

It is more difficult to validate or refute the hypothesis that devolution was rejected in 1979 because of the fragmentation and lack of resources of the Yes campaign and endorsed in 1997 on the strength of the Yes campaign. It is likely that the

relative strength of the campaigns had a significant influence on the outcomes. However, this explanation misses the crucial point that, notwithstanding a decline in support during the campaign in January and February 1979, support for self-government was *still* above 60 percent at the time of the referendum (Table 3). Like the previous one, this account thus fails to explain why a large proportion of Scots who were theoretically in favour of devolution voted No and why almost half of them did so despite identifying with parties supporting devolution.

Lastly, the 'democratic deficit' thesis itself does not fully stand up against the empirical evidence. If we accept that support for devolution was higher in 1997 than in 1979 as a result of the democratic deficit, we should expect four phenomena to have occurred between 1979 and 1997: a sharp decline in satisfaction with the UK government among non-Conservative identifiers, dissatisfaction with the UK government being a stronger determinant of demand for self-government in 1997 than in 1979, a higher importance of self-government as a political issue and, most of all, higher support for devolution itself. However, there is no evidence that these phenomena occurred. First, the second sharpest decline in satisfaction with the UK government took place among Conservative identifiers while Nationalists were actually more satisfied in 1997 than in 1979 (Table 14). Secondly, trust in the UK government was not an independent determinant of the demand for self-government in 1997 (Table 17). Thirdly, the perceived importance of self-government as a political issue actually declined between 1979 and 1997 across all groups of party identifiers (Tables 1 and 2). Lastly, but most importantly, support for devolution fell from 54 to 43 percent (Tables 3 and 4).

In sum, though it is certainly true that the White Paper 1997 was a more consensual document than the Scotland Act 1978, that the pro-self-government campaign was more compact and better organised in 1997 than in 1979 and that there was a distinct feeling of 'democratic deficit' at elite level in the 1990s,<sup>9</sup> these factors do not explain why the perceived importance of self-government at mass public level did not increase, nor why support for devolution actually fell, let alone why a Scottish assembly was rejected in 1979 when 60 percent of voters favoured it in principle.

**Table 1: Importance of Self-government by Party Identification (column %) 1979**

*Q. When you were deciding about voting, how important was the general issue of the form of government for Scotland?*

	<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Liberal</i>	<i>Nationalist</i>	<i>All</i>
Not important	44	37	30	9	36
Important	29	36	39	23	32
Extremely important	14	15	22	56	20
Don't know	13	12	9	12	12

*Note: the 'important' category here was labelled 'fairly important'; for ease of comparability with 1997 I have relabelled it. Source: Scottish Election Study 1979.*

**Table 2: Importance of Self-government by Party Identification (column %) 1997**

*Q. When you were deciding about voting in the general election, how important was this issue – Scottish Parliament – to you? Was it ...*

	<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Liberal</i>	<i>Nationalist</i>	<i>All</i>
Not important	62	47	56	16	46
Important	26	36	34	39	33
Extremely important	8	15	8	41	16
Don't know	4	2	2	4	4

*Note: for ease of comparability with 1979, the 'not important' category here also includes the category 'not at all important'. Source: Scottish Election Survey 1997.*

**Table 3: Support for Self-government by Party Identification (column %) 1979**

*Q. Here are a number of suggestions\* which have been made about different ways of governing Scotland. Can you tell me which one comes closest to your own view?*

	<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Liberal</i>	<i>Nationalist</i>	<i>All</i>
<b>Status quo</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>26</b>
<i>Devolution</i>	46	62	66	45	54
Assembly	29	31	33	9	28
Parliament	17	31	33	36	26
<i>Independence</i>	3	4	2	37	7
<b>Self-government</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>61</b>
Don't know	11	14	8	13	13
N	222	274	67	75	729

*Note: \*No devolution or Scottish assembly of any sort; Have Scottish Committees of the House of Commons come up to Scotland for their meetings; An elected Scottish assembly which would handle some Scottish affairs and would be responsible to Parliament at Westminster; A Scottish Parliament which would handle most Scottish affairs, including many economic affairs, leaving the Westminster Parliament responsible only for defence, foreign policy and international economic policy; A completely independent Scotland with a Scottish Parliament. I collapsed the first two categories under the category 'status quo' as there is a wide consensus in referring to devolution as to the establishment of an elected body. Source: Scottish Election Study 1979.*

**Table 4: Support for Self-government by Party Identification (column %) 1997**

*Q. Which of these statements\* comes closest to your view ... Scotland should?*

	<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Liberal</i>	<i>Nationalist</i>	<i>All</i>
<b>Status quo</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>19</b>
<i>Devolution</i>	27	53	53	25	43
Parliament no tax	11	8	18	5	9
Parliament with tax	16	45	35	20	34
<i>Independence</i>	9	36	8	72	35
Independence in EU	8	26	8	54	26
Independence out EU	1	10	0	18	9
<b>Self-government</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>78</b>
Don't know	2	4	4	9	3
N	123	336	51	122	676

*Notes: \*Scotland should remain part of the UK without an elected parliament; Scotland should remain part of the UK, with its own elected parliament which has no taxation powers; Scotland should remain part of the UK, with its own elected parliament which has some taxation powers; Scotland should become independent, separate from the UK but part of the European Union; Scotland should become independent, separate from the UK and the European Union. I collapsed the second and third categories into the category 'devolution' as they are not separately comparable to the 1979 categories. Source: Scottish Election Study 1979 and Scottish Referendum Study 1997.*

## The Theoretical and Methodological Framework

The theoretical framework employed in this analysis has a general assumption and four more substantive elements. The general assumption is of voters' decisions being guided by bounded rationality. In this context, voters are assumed to be interested in maximising their expected utility (in both material and ideational terms), to rank their preferences accordingly, to select their actions on the basis of their estimated probability that a given action will produce the intended outcome and to do so under conditions of uncertainty (Kato, 1996). The substantive elements are, first, the distinction between support for self-government as expressed in opinion polls and the referendum vote. Second, the peculiar nature of voting behaviour in referendums, defined in the literature as 'referendum dynamic'. Third, the specific dynamic identified in this case, that is, of the referendum vote being determined by an 'interaction effect' between attitudes towards devolution and attitudes towards independence. Lastly, the role played by perceptions of the UK and the EU in shaping support for devolution and attitudes to independence. I briefly discuss each of them.

### *Public Support and Referendum Vote*

Referendum votes such as the Scottish ones are often held to gauge public support for a given policy issue. As such support is usually estimated in the period leading

up to the referendum through opinion polls, public opinion on the question tends to be 'well tracked' prior to the vote. Nonetheless, not infrequently the referendum result is at odds with public opinion as measured by surveys. For our purposes here, we can thus think of the demand for self-government as conceptually distinct between two variables. On the one hand, support for devolution or independence as measured in opinion polls: on the other hand, the actual referendum vote. We would normally expect the two variables to be highly correlated but significant gaps between them can be present. The hypothesis here is that gaps between the two are caused by voting dynamics that are more likely to be at play in a referendum than in an election.

### *The Referendum Dynamic*

Significant discrepancies between attitudinal support for a given issue, as measured by opinion polls, and voting outcomes have been observed in several referendums. The Irish divorce vote of 1986 and the Australian republic vote of 1999 are two prominent cases in point (Darcy and Laver, 1990; Higley and McAllister, 2002). Comparative study of these instances has generated a number of theoretical propositions about 'voting dynamics' in referendums as opposed to elections. The general point is that in referendums voters often lack the simplifying 'frame' given by ideological stance and party identification. This opens up a potentially greater role for campaigners to influence public opinion in directions that were unexpected shortly before the start of the campaign. Two main kinds of 'referendum dynamic' have been identified in the literature. The first is produced when campaigners are able to manipulate public opinion by exploiting the fact that the issue put to the vote is relatively new or previously had a low salience in public opinion and on which party positions and ideological alignments are unclear. When two referendums are held on the same issue at different points in time, we can expect this dynamic to be distinctly stronger at the time of the first referendum. The second dynamic occurs when new variables are introduced in the campaign leading to a 'change of the subject' of the referendum, so that the latter is decided on issues that are different from the one put on the ballot paper. In this case the referendum outcome can be very different from the distribution of opinions on the subject put to the vote (Le Duc, 2002, especially pp. 713–17). As discussed in the following section, there existed the potential for a form of 'referendum dynamic' in the Scottish votes in the shape of an 'interaction effect' between attitudes to devolution and attitudes to independence.

### *The 'Interaction Effect'*

The demand for self-government in Scotland was composed of two discrete elements: demand for devolution and demand for independence. The two elements could be kept distinct at the level of opinion surveys but not at the level of referendum vote, as independence was not an option in the referendums. Depending on the shape of the preference order, one obtains different models of the interaction between attitudes to devolution and attitudes to independence when translating support into an actual Yes vote. Let us consider these factors at the two points in time, on the assumption outlined above that attitudes to devolution and to

Figure 1: Preferences and the Vote 1979

*Preference order*

**D > SQ > I** = devolution preferred to status quo and status quo preferred to independence

**I > D > SQ** = independence preferred to devolution and devolution preferred to status quo

**SQ > D > I** = status quo preferred to devolution and devolution preferred to independence

*Interaction effect*

$$\mathbf{Rv} = \mathbf{Si} + (\mathbf{1} - \mathbf{p})\mathbf{Sd}$$

Referendum vote equal to support for independence plus support for devolution discounted by the perceived probability that devolution would lead to independence

independence were a function of the perceived utility of these constitutional statuses relative to the status quo. In 1979 supporters of devolution preferred it to the status quo and the latter to independence, while supporters of independence preferred it to devolution and the latter to the status quo.<sup>10</sup> Supporters of the status quo had devolution as second preference and independence as the third one. In this case, the Yes vote is determined by the sum of support for independence plus support for devolution *discounted* by the perceived probability that devolution would lead to independence (Figure 1). Supporters of devolution would vote Yes *only* in so far as they perceived that the risk deriving from devolution facilitating independence would not outweigh the expected benefits associated with the former. Their vote would thus be determined by two variables: attitudes to independence and perceived probability that devolution would facilitate independence. This leads to three predictions. First, the higher the perceived probability that devolution would lead to independence, the higher the likelihood that the referendum vote would in fact be determined by attitudes to independence. Second, the lower the degree of self-government supported, the more negative the attitudes to independence. Third, the more negative the attitudes to independence relative to the status quo and/or the higher the perceived probability that devolution would facilitate independence, the more likely that support for devolution would not be translated into a Yes vote. In contrast, in 1997 supporters of devolution had independence as second preference and the status quo as third. This change in their preference order effectively neutralised the interaction effect as they no longer needed to assess whether devolution would be likely to lead to secession as *both* outcomes were preferred to the status quo. The number of Yes votes would simply

Figure 2: Preferences and the Vote 1997

*Preference order*

**D > I > SQ** = devolution preferred to independence and independence preferred to status quo

**I > D > SQ** = independence preferred to devolution and devolution preferred to status quo

**SQ > D > I** = status quo preferred to devolution and devolution preferred to independence

*Interaction effect*

**Rv = Si + Sd**

Referendum vote equal to the sum of support for independence and support for devolution

be the sum of supporters of devolution and supporters of independence with no distorting ‘interaction effect’.

*The Intra-State and Extra-State Dimensions*

As the demand for self-government included significant support for independence and the latter crucially influenced the referendum vote via the interaction effect, I hypothesise that the referendum vote was determined not only by attitudes to the UK but also by attitudes to the international environment. The latter, as discussed in the first section, is neglected in the existing literature. Because of the strategic use of ‘Europe’ made by the Scottish National Party (SNP), and the availability of survey data, I utilise attitudes towards the European Union as a proxy for attitudes to the international environment. I thus argue that the perceived costs of secession were primarily determined by the perception of the European environment, bearing in mind that Scotland’s status as a nation and the ‘union’ nature of the British state meant that Scotland had always enjoyed an ‘implicit’ right to secede from the United Kingdom (Kellas, 1999, p. 224). The impact of the European dimension can thus be measured by two variables. First, whether voters demanding self-government for Scotland had a positive or negative perception of the European Union and, second, whether an independent Scotland would be part of the EU or not. As discussed below, both these variables varied between the first and second referendum. I hypothesise that a rejection of the European dimension – as defined by negative attitudes towards the EU and the placing of an independent Scotland outside it – reduced the proportion of voters supporting secession while embrace of it led to more voters favouring independence.

## *Methods and Data*

The analysis is based on a comparison of public opinion at the time of the two referendums in 1979 and 1997. The dependent variable is the referendum vote while the main independent variables employed are support for self-government, attitudes towards independence, importance of self-government as a political issue in the 1979 and 1997 general elections, attitudes towards the UK political system and attitudes towards the EU. The main control variable is party identification. These variables are analysed through comparison between descriptive statistics and through logistic regression models of voting in the two referendums. Two regression models for each referendum are presented. In each case, the first is a fully specified model testing the impact of up to 11 independent variables – those for which there are good theoretical reasons to expect a meaningful association – while the second model includes only those variables proved significant in the first model so as to maximise explanatory power in the most parsimonious way possible. The raw data are provided by the Scottish Election Study 1979 and 1997 and the Scottish Referendum Study 1997, which are the most comprehensive data sets available on Scottish public opinion at the two points in time.<sup>11</sup> I have tried to use the most comparable measures, though some questions vary from one study to the other. I used responses to the survey question on whether and how the interviewee voted in the referendums as a proxy for actual voting behaviour.

## **Results**

This part presents results of the analysis of the connections between the demand for self-government, attitudes towards the UK and attitudes towards the EU at the two points in time. The results show that the variables that most dramatically changed between 1979 and 1997 were those related to support for independence and attitudes towards the EU while most other measures changed much less significantly or not at all.

### *The Demand for Self-Government*

On the basis of its saliency as a political issue in the general elections, self-government was less important to Scottish voters in 1997 than it was in 1979. Moreover, the perceived importance of devolution declined across the board, regardless of party identification (Tables 1 and 2). Support for self-government was higher and more clearly defined at the time of the second referendum. It rose from 61 to 78 percent while preferences for the status quo dropped from 26 to 19 percent with 'don't knows' declining from 13 to three percent. However, this overall rise in support was a combination of two opposite trends. While support for devolution declined from 54 to 43 percent, support for independence increased five-fold from seven to 35 percent. This dramatic increase was almost entirely due to the popularity of the new 'independence in the EU' option, not available in 1979, which became the second most preferred constitutional option with 26 percent support. Not only did independence in Europe become the majority preference among Nationalist identifiers but it also attracted a substantial 26 percent of Labour identifiers while in 1979 independence was not even the first choice of

Nationalist identifiers. This compares to an increase of only two points in support for the option of independence outside the EU.<sup>12</sup> These data indicate that the higher overall support for self-government in 1997 was entirely due to the rise in popularity of independence rather than to greater support for devolution. One could go even further and say that, essentially, demand for self-government was raised by the availability of the ‘independence in Europe’ option that was not offered in 1979 (Tables 3 and 4).

The higher level of demand for self-government in 1997 relative to 1979 was most starkly in display in the results of the two referendums. The Yes vote increased by more than 20 points while the No vote declined by 15 percentage points. Moreover, those who did not vote in 1979 were almost twice as likely to favour the No side than the Yes side. This seems to indicate that a substantial proportion of the electorate abstained in the knowledge that – under the ‘40 percent rule’ – their abstention would favour the No side. It is reasonable to assume that without the rule the referendum result would have been negative as negative was overall public opinion about the Scotland Act 1978. The change in the referendum vote was thus much stronger than the change that took place at the level of opinion poll support. The data disaggregated by party identification show that the voting patterns of Conservative, Nationalists and, to a lesser extent, Liberal identifiers stayed remarkably stable between 1979 and 1997 while a sharp ‘swing’ took place among Labour identifiers. The latter’s Yes vote increased by 27 percentage points while the No vote dropped by 17 points (Tables 5 and 6).<sup>13</sup>

**Table 5: Referendum Vote by Party Identification (column %) 1979**

*Q. Did you vote in the recent referendum on Devolution for Scotland? If Yes did you vote ‘Yes’ or ‘No’. If no did you favour the ‘Yes’ side or the ‘No’ side?*

	<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Liberal</i>	<i>Nationalist</i>	<i>All</i>
<b>Voted No</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>33</b>
Didn’t vote, favoured No	12	12	15	4	11
<i>(Total No)</i>	<i>(68)</i>	<i>(36)</i>	<i>(51)</i>	<i>(7)</i>	<i>(44)</i>
Didn’t vote, no pref.	4	8	5	4	6
<b>Voted Yes</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>33</b>
Didn’t vote, favoured Yes	13	7	6	11	6
<i>(Total Yes)</i>	<i>(28)</i>	<i>(46)</i>	<i>(37)</i>	<i>(80)</i>	<i>(39)</i>
Don’t know/na	10	11	7	9	11
N	222	274	67	75	729

Source: *Scottish Election Study 1979*.

**Table 6: Referendum Vote by Party Identification (column %) 1997**

<i>Q. How did you vote on the first question*?</i>					
	<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Liberal</i>	<i>Nationalist</i>	<i>All</i>
<b>Voted No</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>18</b>
Didn't vote	25	26	22	20	26
<b>Voted Yes</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>55</b>
Don't know/na	2	1	0	1	1
N	123	336	51	122	676

*Note: \*Should there be a Scottish parliament in the UK? Source: Scottish Referendum Study 1997.*

*Support/Vote Gap and Interaction Effect*

The crucial difference between 1979 and 1997 was thus in the size of the gap between support for self-government and the number of Yes votes. In 1979 the gap was large enough to turn a support for self-government of over 60 percent into a rejection of devolution in the referendum whereas it was actually negative in 1997: across all party identifications the percentage of No votes was no greater than that of status quo supporters. Crucially, moreover, only seven percent of supporters of devolution voted No in the referendum while eighteen years before 28 percent did so. Furthermore, if we include those who did not vote but had a preference in the analysis, in 1979 almost 40 percent of supporters of devolution favoured a No vote. In other words, those who were in favour of devolution voted overwhelmingly Yes in the second referendum. The change in the voting pattern of supporters of devolution was clearly the decisive factor as those supporting independence voted as strongly in favour of the White Paper 1997 as they did in favour of the Scotland Act 1978 (Table 7). Responses to the questions about the main disadvantage of devolution indicate that voters consistently perceived, in 1997 as in 1979, that devolution was highly likely to lead to independence (Tables 8, 9 and 10). This explains why secessionists voted strongly in favour of devolution in both referendums. Among supporters of devolution, and those in favour of the assembly option in particular, the crucial difference was that a majority preferred the status quo to independence in 1979 while independence was their second constitutional preference in 1997 (Tables 12 and 13). The existence of an independence/devolution interaction effect is further underlined by the fact that fear of secession was a strong independent determinant of a No vote in 1979. Those who were ‘very much against’ independence were much more likely to have voted No than those just ‘against’ it, let alone those who favoured or strongly favoured it. Likewise, the perception of a ‘break up of the UK’ as the main disadvantage of devolution was a significantly more powerful determinant of a No vote than other perceptions (Table 16).

**Table 7: Referendum Vote of Supporters of Self-government (column %) 1979/1997**

1979: Did you vote in the recent referendum on Devolution for Scotland? If Yes did you vote 'Yes' or 'No' | If no did you favour the 'Yes' side or the 'No' side?  
1997: How did you vote on the first question\*?

	Independence		Devolution		Self-government	
	1979	1997	1979	1997	1979	1997
<b>Voted Yes</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>70</b>
<i>Didn't vote favoured Yes</i>	12	–	8	–	8	–
(Total Yes)	(80)	(75)	(51)	(65)	(57)	(70)
<i>Didn't vote no preference</i>	8	23	7	28	7	25
<i>Didn't vote favoured No</i>	2	–	11	–	10	–
<b>Voted No</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>5</b>
(Total No)	(12)	(2)	(39)	(7)	(36)	(5)
N	50	232	394	289	444	521

Note: \*Should there be a Scottish parliament in the UK? Sources: Scottish Election Study 1979, Scottish Referendum Study 1997.

**Table 8: Most Important Disadvantage of Devolution by Constitutional Preference (column %) 1979**

Q. Which one of these is the most important disadvantage of devolution?

	Status quo	Assembly	Parliament	Indep	All
Break up UK	38	37	23	16	27
Cost of bureaucracy	25	22	25	28	22
Too many levels of govt	16	18	16	16	15
Benefits wrong	5	10	11	8	8
Harm economy	9	6	4	2	5
Loss UK voice	4	6	6	10	5
Others/don't know	3	1	15	20	18

Note: N = 729. Source: Scottish Election Study 1979.

**Table 9: Most Important Disadvantage of Devolution by Vote in the Referendum (column %) 1979**

*Q. Which one of these is the most important disadvantage of devolution?*

	Voted Yes		Voted No	
	Self-gov*	Assembly**	Self-gov*	Assembly**
Break up UK	22	26	37	44
Cost of bureaucracy	27	28	26	19
Too many levels of govt	16	18	19	19
Benefits wrong	11	10	8	8
Harm economy	4	8	1	1
Loss UK voice	9	9	4	4
Others/don't know	11	1	5	5

Note: \*sub-sample of supporters of the three self-government options: assembly, parliament, independence, N = 444; \*\*sub-sample of supporters of the assembly option only, N = 205. Source: Scottish Election Study 1979.

**Table 10: Parliament's Most Important Thing Not to do by Vote in the Referendum (column %) 1997**

*Q. This card shows a few things a Scottish parliament might want to bring about ...  
And which, if any, should a Scottish parliament not try to bring about?  
IF SEVERAL MENTIONED: Which is the most important?*

	Voted Yes	Voted No	All
Leave UK more likely	47	85	56
Stronger voice in UK	3	1	2
Stronger voice in EU	1	1	1
More pride in country	1	2	1
Increase standard of living	1	0	1
None of these	32	5	25
Others/Don't know	15	6	14

Note: N = 676. Source: Scottish Referendum Study 1997.

**Table 11: Attitudes to Independence by Party Identification (column %) 1979**

*Q. For each suggestion\* on the card, could you say whether you are very much in favour, somewhat in favour, somewhat against or very much against that suggestion?*

	<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Liberal</i>	<i>Nationalist</i>	<i>All</i>
Very much against	71	54	69	9	56
Somewhat against	11	17	18	13	15
Somewhat in favour	3	9	1	16	6
Very much in favour	2	7	3	49	9
Don't know/n.a.	13	13	9	12	13
N	222	274	67	75	729

*Note: in this case: 'a completely independent Scotland with a Scottish Parliament'. Source: Scottish Election Study 1979.*

**Table 12: Indices of Attitudes to the Status Quo and to Independence Among Supporters of Devolution 1979**

*Q. For each suggestion† on the card, could you say whether you are very much in favour, somewhat in favour, somewhat against or very much against that suggestion?*

	<i>Assembly</i>	<i>Parliament</i>	<i>Devolution</i>
Status quo 1**	-91	-110	-100
Status quo 2**	17	-30	-3
<b>Independence</b>	<b>-163</b>	<b>-87</b>	<b>-126</b>

*Note: N = 394; †see note at Table 3; indices referred to in the title vary from -200 = 100% of respondents were 'very much against' and +200 = 100% of respondents were 'very much in favour'; \*\*there were two options which largely amounted to maintaining the status quo in the 1979 survey, see note at Table 3. Source: Scottish Election Study 1979.*

### *Attitudes Towards the UK and the EU*

I use three variables to measure attitudes towards the UK political system in Scotland in 1979 and 1997: satisfaction with government, perception of Scotland's welfare *vis-à-vis* the rest of the UK and identification with the UK. They are intended to estimate support for the UK system in its politico-institutional, economic and 'affective' aspects, respectively. As only one variable relative to attitudes to the EU is available for the first referendum, I use a generic measure of support for the EU for both 1979 and 1997.

**Table 13: The Second Preferences of Supporters of Devolution by Party Identification (column %) 1997**

<i>Q. And which would be your second preference?</i>	<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Liberal</i>	<i>Nationalist</i>	<i>All</i>
<b>Independence</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>30</b>
<i>Independence outside EU</i>	0	6	8	4	5
<i>Independence within EU</i>	15	25	32	29	25
Other devolution option*	46	32	24	50	34
<b>Status quo</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>17</b>
Don't know/no answer	12	21	24	17	20
N	33	168	25	24	289

Note: \*with tax-raising powers and vice-versa. Source: *Scottish Referendum Study 1997*.

The three UK variables moved in different directions between the two points in time. Satisfaction with government was, overall, positive in 1979 and became slightly negative in 1997. In contrast, perceptions of Scotland's welfare improved markedly, though were still negative at the latter point in time. Primary identification with the UK was already negative in 1979 and became more so in 1997. Hence, at the time of the second referendum attitudes towards the UK were negative across the three measures.

Disaggregating by party identification, Conservative identifiers are an outlier group but only marginally so. Though their satisfaction with government was positive in 1997, it was significantly less so than eighteen years before. They were also the only group thinking that Scotland was better off than the rest of the UK in 1997 but, somewhat more surprisingly, they primarily identified with Scotland rather than the UK as a whole at the latter point in time. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Nationalist identifiers were consistently negative across variables and over time, but their dissatisfaction with the UK government was much less deep in 1997 than in 1979 (Table 14). Across the three measures, support for the UK system was negatively correlated with support for self-government both in 1979 and in 1997, though, with the exception of national identity in 1997, its measures were not independent determinants of the referendum vote, either in 1979 or in 1997 (Tables 16 and 17).

Attitudes towards the EU evolved in the opposite direction to those towards the UK. Support for membership was, overall, negative in 1979 and was solidly positive in 1997. At the first point in time, there was a split in perceptions between Conservative and Liberal identifiers on the one hand – with positive attitudes – and Labour and, especially, Nationalist identifiers on the other hand, who were hostile. At the time of the second referendum, in contrast, all groups of party

Table 14: Indices of Support for the UK in 1979 and 1997

	1979	1997	Change
<b>Satisfaction with UK government*</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>-41</b>
Conservative party ID – Con ID	87	41	-46
Conservative party ID – Lab ID	26	-4	-30
Labour party ID – Lib ID	46	-14	-60
Labour party ID – Nat ID	-45	-24	+21
<b>Perception of Scotland's welfare**</b>	<b>-66</b>	<b>-28</b>	<b>+38</b>
Liberal Democrat party ID – Con ID	-55	3	+58
Liberal Democrat party ID – Lab ID	-71	-37	+34
Liberal Democrat party ID – Lib ID	-65	-25	+40
Liberal Democrat party ID – Nat ID	-78	-39	+39
<b>Identification with the UK***</b>	<b>-16</b>	<b>-58</b>	<b>-42</b>
Nationalist party ID – Con ID	3	-21	-24
Nationalist party ID – Lab ID	-22	-66	-44
Nationalist party ID – Lib ID	-12	-23	-11
Nationalist party ID – Nat ID	-68	-83	-15

*Note: Satisfaction with government: 1979: How many marks out of ten would you give the following ... the Westminster parliament? 1997: Which of these statements best describes your opinion on the present system of governing Britain? Responses were: Works extremely well and could not be improved; Could be improved in small ways but mainly works well; could be improved quite a lot; needs a great deal of improvement. For the sake of comparability I re-grouped the 1979 categories into four categories on the basis of the following conversion: 9, 10= works extremely well; 6, 7, 8 = could be improved in small ways; 3, 4, 5 = could be improved quite a lot; 0, 1, 2 = needs a great deal of improvement;*

*Perception of Scotland's welfare: 1979: Compared with other parts of Britain, would do you say that Scotland was better off or not so well off? 1997: Compared with other parts of Britain, would you say that these days Scotland is better off, not so well off or just about the same?*

*Identification with the UK: 1979: Do you consider yourself to be British or Scottish or English or Irish or something else? If you had to choose, which would you say you were? 1997: Which, if any, of the following† best describes how you see yourself? Options were: Scottish, not British; Scottish more than British; Equally Scottish and British; British more than Scottish; British not Scottish: I collapsed the first two categories into a primary identification with Scotland and the latter into a primary identification with the UK. \*index varies between -200 = all respondents were very dissatisfied and +200 = all respondents were very satisfied, 1997 data are relative to General Election; \*\*index varies between -100 = 100% of respondents thought Scotland was worse off than the rest of the UK and +100 = 100% of respondents thought Scotland was better off, 1997 data relative to Referendum; \*\*\*index varies between -100 = primary identification with Scotland and +100 = primary identification with the UK, 1997 data relative to Referendum. Sources: Scottish Election Study 1979, Scottish Election Survey 1997 and Scottish Referendum Study 1997.*

identifiers displayed positive attitudes with only minor variations between them. Nationalist identifiers made the most spectacular turnaround in attitudes, from being by far the most hostile to being the second most positive (Table 15).<sup>14</sup> In contrast to attitudes to the UK, support for the EU was thus in negative correlation with support for self-government in 1979 while the reverse was true for 1997. However, as with attitudes to the UK, support for the EU was not an independent determinant of the referendum vote, either in 1979 or in 1997 (Tables 16 and 17).

## Conclusions

These results provide empirical support for the hypotheses advanced in the second section. In particular, they substantiate four key claims. First, there was a large gap between support for self-government and the referendum vote in 1979 whereas the gap was minimal in 1997. The large size of the 1979 gap accounts for the rejection of the Scotland Act 1978 despite self-government still attracting 60 percent support. Second, at both points in time the referendum vote was intimately linked to attitudes to independence as devolution was perceived as likely to lead to secession. However, devolutionists preferred, crucially, the status quo to independence in 1979 and vice versa in 1997. More particularly, those devolutionists who voted No in 1979 were very strongly opposed to independence and fear of secession was as strong a determinant of the No vote as partisanship. This explains the variation in the size of the support/vote gap and, ultimately, the different results of the two

Table 16: Logistic Regression Models of No Voting in the 1979 Referendum

	Model 1	Model 2
<b>Party identification</b> (base: Labour)		
Conservative	1.279***	1.388***
Liberal	0.236	0.455
Nationalist	-1.910*	-1.889*
<b>Constitutional preferences</b> (base: assembly)		
Status quo	2.066***	1.851***
Parliament	-0.840*	-0.822**
Independence	2.566	3.060
<b>Attitudes to independence</b> (base: against)		
Very much against	1.334***	1.325***
Favour	-0.218	-0.276
Very much favour	-2.632	-3.397*
<b>Disadvantage of devolution</b> (base: other/don't know)		
Too many levels of government	0.654	0.657
More bureaucracy	0.813*	0.696*
Break up of the UK	0.994**	0.947**
<b>Scotland's welfare</b> (base: same)		
Better off than the rest of the UK	-0.985	
Not so well off as the rest of the UK	-0.753	
<b>Attitudes to Callaghan†</b> (base: very good)		
Good	0.017	
Bad	-0.57	
Very bad	-0.41	
<b>Attitudes to Westminster†</b> (base: very good)		
Good	0.642	
Bad	0.245	
Very bad	-1.307	
<b>Attitudes to the EU†</b> (base: very good)		
Good	0.278	
Bad	0.373	
Very bad	-0.160	
<b>Class</b> (base: working)		
Middle	0.721	
None/don't know	0.599	
<b>National identity</b> (base: Scottish)		
British	0.132	
<b>Religion</b> (base: Church of Scotland)		
Roman Catholic	0.497	
Constant	-2.642	-2.039
-2log likelihood	384.360	409.945
Pseudo-r <sup>2</sup> (Nagelkerke)	0.596	0.556
Percentage correctly predicted	80.6	80.2

Note: the 'don't know' categories were included in the analysis but results are not reported here for the sake of brevity; † I re-grouped the original ten categories into four categories on the basis of the following conversion: 9, 10 = very good; 6, 7, 8 = good; 3, 4, 5 = bad; 0, 1, 2 = very bad. \*\*\*significant at  $p < 0.001$ ; \*\*significant at  $p < 0.01$ ; \*significant at  $p < 0.05$ . Interaction effects among the explanatory variables were tested for and found not significant, the results are not reported here but are available from the author.

**Table 17: Logistic Regression Models of Yes Voting in the 1997 Referendum**

	Model 1	Model 2
<b>Party identification</b> (base: Conservative)		
Labour	2.554**	2.793***
Liberal Democrat	2.845**	2.765**
Nationalist	4.587**	4.576**
<b>Constitutional preferences</b> (base: status quo)		
Parliament, no tax-raising	4.977***	4.627***
Parliament, tax-raising	6.088***	5.581***
Independence in the EU	6.284***	5.884***
Independence outside the EU	6.141***	5.530***
<b>Scotland's welfare</b> (base: not so well off)		
As well off as the rest of the UK	0.364	
Better off than the rest of the UK	-0.108	
<b>Attitudes to the Labour party</b> (base: none/other/don't know)		
Favour strongly	0.425	
Favour	-0.587	
Against	-0.939	
Strongly against	-1.321	
<b>Trust in the UK government</b> (base: almost never)		
Some of the time	-1.606	
Most of the time	-1.035	
Just about always	-1.800	
<b>Attitudes to the EU</b> (base: neither good nor bad)		
Bad	-1.320	
Good	-0.598	
<b>Class</b> (base: working)		
Middle	-0.349	
None/don't know	-0.277	
<b>National identity†</b> (base: British)		
Scottish	1.117^	0.874^
<b>Religion</b> (base: none/other/don't know)		
Roman Catholic	1.502	
Church of Scotland	-0.15	
Constant	-3.528	-5.379
-2log likelihood	127.591	151.588
Pseudo-r <sup>2</sup> (Nagelkerke)	0.839	0.816
Percentage correctly predicted	95.4	94.9

Note: \*\*\*significant at  $p < 0.001$ ; \*\*significant at  $p < 0.01$ ; \*significant at  $p < 0.05$ ; ^significant at  $p < 0.10$ ; †for the sake of comparability with 1979, I re-grouped the original five categories into two categories as follows: British not Scottish = British; British more than Scottish = British; Equally British and Scottish = British; More Scottish than British = Scottish; Scottish not British = Scottish. Interaction effects among the explanatory variables were tested for and found not significant, the results are not reported here but are available from the author.

generated. The 'cleaner' nature of the second referendum also emerges from the logistic regression where a very parsimonious three-variable model is able to correctly predict 95 percent of the cases in the dependent variable while a similar model for 1979 predicts only 80 percent of them.<sup>16</sup> The model presented here is thus able to explain both why devolution was rejected in 1979 despite 60 percent support for it and why it was endorsed in 1997 despite the previous rejection. It shows that attitudes to independence were a crucial variable of the referendum vote and that the European dimension, as exploited by elite political actors, had a deep impact on these attitudes.

These findings also speak to the wider literature on referendum voting and provide additional empirical support for the concept of 'referendum dynamic', whereby elite strategies in referendum campaigns have the ability to 'change the subject' of referendums and manipulate public opinion to the extent that referendums may produce outcomes at odds with public opinion on the matter put to the vote.

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### Notes

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- 1 Given space constraints, it is not possible to give the reader a full background to the Scottish devolution referendums here. See Bogdanor (1999) for an excellent introduction.
- 2 The first ever opinion poll in 1947 registered 76 percent support for a Scottish parliament (Mitchell, 1996, pp. 309–10) while 74 percent voted Yes to a Scottish parliament fifty years later.
- 3 Although the 1979 referendum result was narrowly in favour – 51.6 to 48.5 percent – taking into account those who did not vote but had a preference and the incentives for strategic abstention induced by the '40 percent rule', the majority of the Scottish electorate rejected the Scotland Act 1978 (Table 5). The 40 percent rule stipulated that the Scotland Act 1978 would be implemented if at least 40 percent of the Scottish electorate voted in favour, whereas only 33 percent did so.
- 4 Watt (1979, p. 146); Bochel and Denver (1981, p. 144); Butler and McLean (1999, p. 7); Kellas (1999, p. 225) emphasise the unpopularity of the Labour party; Perman (1979, p. 54); Mitchell (1996, pp. 163–4); Mitchell, Denver, Pattie and Bochel (1998, p. 167) and Denver, Mitchell, Pattie and Bochel (2000, p. 19) stress the divisions and the contradictions within the Yes campaign.
- 5 See Jones, 1997, pp. 3–4; Mitchell, Denver, Pattie and Bochel, 1998, p. 168; Pattie, Denver, Mitchell and Bochel, 1998, pp. 14–15; Pattie, Denver, Mitchell and Bochel, 1999a, pp. 141–2; Denver, Mitchell, Pattie and Bochel, 2000, pp. 49, 75–6.
- 6 See Mitchell, Denver, Pattie and Bochel, 1998, p. 178; Pattie, Denver, Mitchell and Bochel, 1998, p. 14; Pattie, Denver, Mitchell and Bochel, 1999a, p. 140; Denver, Mitchell, Pattie and Bochel, 2000, p. 169; Brown, McCrone and Paterson, 1998, p. 62; Taylor, 1999, pp. xxxix–xl; Surridge and McCrone, 1999, p. 440; Paterson and Wyn Jones, 1999, pp. 179–80; Kellas, 1999, p. 223.
- 7 Denver, Mitchell, Pattie and Bochel (2000, pp. 28–32) emphasise the former while Surridge and McCrone (1999, p. 44); Paterson, Brown and McCrone (1992, p. 634) and Paterson and Wyn Jones (1999) emphasise the latter.
- 8 While these differences may be interpreted as being primarily determined by partisanship, they are also consistent with the fact that Conservative and Liberal identifiers were more strongly opposed to independence than Labour ones (Table 11).

- 9 As one of the journal referees pointed out, other actors such as local governments and some professional associations also switched from hostility to support for devolution between 1979 and 1997. However, their change of position did not increase as such mass support for devolution which, as mentioned, fell between the two points in time. I am nonetheless grateful to him or her for pointing this out to me.
- 10 Supporters of independence preferred devolution to the status quo because they perceived the former to be more likely to facilitate secession.
- 11 As no referendum study was conducted in 1979, the data on the first referendum came from the election study conducted from May to October 1979. They thus reflect public opinion some months after the referendum took place. The possibility that some changes might have occurred, and thus that the data might not faithfully reflect public opinion at time of the referendum, should be borne in mind. However, the close mirroring of the actual referendum results seems to indicate that the data have a high level of validity and no better data are available. Likewise, the data from the 1997 election study were collected between May and July 1997 so they reflect public opinion some months before the 1997 referendum.
- 12 On the basis of the then SNP position, the 'independence' option in 1979 was equivalent to the 'independence outside the EU' option in 1997.
- 13 The impact of these changes in voting patterns on the referendum outcome was, of course, amplified by the changes in the structure of party identification among the electorate, see Dardanelli (2002, p. 352).
- 14 Additional data only available for 1997, not shown here but reported elsewhere (Dardanelli, 2002, p. 351), indicate that, with the exception of Conservative identifiers, there was also support for the 'social dimension' of the EU's policy output, as symbolised by the Social Charter, while there was very little identification with Europe, across all party identifications. The difference between variables at the time of the second referendum shows that voters had a fairly sophisticated perception of the EU and were clearly able to discriminate between its different aspects.
- 15 Other factors may also have contributed to the higher popularity of independence, for example the birth of several new countries out of the collapse of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia and the improved security environment following the end of the Cold War but these effects are not directly testable on the available data so must remain hypothetical. For a wider discussion, see Dardanelli (2005).
- 16 Although they worked on a different dataset, Pattie, Denver, Mitchell and Bochel (1999b, p. 319) arrive at a similar conclusion.

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