

More devolution: an alternative road?

Rachel Ormston & John Curtice

Evidence from
Scottish Social
Attitudes



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Summary

The option of a more powerful Scottish Parliament that is still part of the United Kingdom will not appear on the referendum ballot paper in autumn 2014. However, proposals for extending the existing devolution settlement are being developed by a number of organisations and all three of the principal unionist parties have indicated a willingness in principle to introduce such a change. This paper examines public attitudes towards the prospect of more devolution.

Giving the Scottish Parliament responsibility for all policy areas apart from defence and foreign affairs is the most preferred option of around three in ten Scots. This group constitutes around half of all those opposed to independence.

But although more devolution is not the single most preferred option of a majority of Scots, a clear majority are in favour of the Scottish Parliament being responsible for making the key decisions about tax levels and welfare benefits – that is, the two areas of domestic policy in Scotland still primarily reserved to Westminster. This is because the 50% or so of unionists who would like more devolution are joined in that view by the vast majority of those who would prefer independence. The further devolution option would thus seem to have the potential to generate a majority consensus in its favour.

However, contrary to the emphasis of most of the proposals for further devolution that have been developed to date, the level of support for devolving key decisions about welfare benefits appears to be at least as high as that for giving

the Scottish Parliament principal responsibility for determining tax levels.

A majority of Scots appear to accept one of the key implications of devolving responsibility for tax levels – that is that the Scottish Parliament would be expected to fund public services out of revenues raised in Scotland. However, well under half seem to accept the prospect that the basic rate of income tax or the level of the state old age pension might be different in Scotland than in England. If decisions about tax levels and welfare benefits were to be devolved there might still be an expectation that Scotland would normally make much the same decisions as England, as has been the case with the devolution of welfare benefits in Northern Ireland.

Optimism about the impact that introducing much more devolution might have on life in Scotland is quite limited – Scots' expectations of the potential of further devolution to deliver benefits for Scotland are no higher than they are for independence. However, noticeably fewer people fear that devolving taxation and welfare benefits would have a deleterious effect than express such concerns about the prospect of independence.

It would appear that in the absence of any consensus amongst policy makers about the extent of further devolution that might be introduced in Scotland, the Scottish public, although sympathetic to the principle, have yet to be persuaded of the practical benefits it might bring.

Contents

4 Introduction

6 How popular is more devolution?

9 Looking at powers

12 Ready to bear the consequences?

15 Hopes and fears

17 Conclusion

18 Annex

Introduction

1. See Electoral Commission (January 2013) *Referendum on independence for Scotland: Advice of the Electoral Commission on the proposed referendum question*, available at: http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/153691/Referendum-on-independence-for-Scotland-our-advice-on-referendum-question.pdf

2. See <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/constitution/a-national-conversation>

3. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0040/00404789.pdf>

4. Scottish Liberal Democrats (October 2012) *Federalism: the best future for Scotland – the report of the home rule and community commission of the Scottish Liberal Democrats*, available at: <http://scotlibdems.org.uk/files/Federalism%20-%20the%20best%20future%20for%20Scotland%20web.pdf>

5. See David Cameron's speech in Edinburgh on 16 February 2012 at <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/transcript-pm-scotland-speech/> and Ruth Davidson's speech

In a little over a year and a half, Scotland will vote on whether it wants to remain part of a 300 year union with the rest of the UK, or whether it wishes instead to become an independent, sovereign state. The referendum, due to be held in the autumn of 2014, will ask only one question: 'Should Scotland be an independent country?'¹. Yet since the Scottish Government began its National Conversation on Scotland's constitutional future in 2007², there has been mounting evidence that there might be a third option – going beyond the status quo, but stopping short of full independence – that is better able to satisfy the aspirations of a majority of Scots. Such an option - variously dubbed 'devo max', 'devo more' or 'devo plus' – would involve extending the tax raising powers of the Scottish Parliament beyond those about to be introduced following the passage of the Scotland Act 2012. It might also include devolving aspects of the welfare system – a key area currently reserved to Westminster.

The agreement concluded in October 2012 between the UK and Scottish Governments on the form of the Scottish referendum ruled out asking people their views on more devolution on the ballot in 2014.³ Nonetheless, during the last twelve months, various possible schemes for extending devolution beyond the Scotland Act have begun to emerge, both from the unionist political parties and from other stakeholders. The Scottish Liberal Democrats have outlined plans for 'home rule' for Scotland as part of a move towards a federal system across the UK. The Scottish Labour Party is due to unveil its initial ideas in April, while both the Prime Minister and the Scottish Conservative leader, Ruth Davidson, have indicated their willingness to revisit the division of powers between Holyrood and Westminster.⁵ Think tanks on both the left and the right have been developing proposals. Reform Scotland has sponsored, researched and promoted 'Devolution Plus', a proposal whereby the money spent by the Scottish

Parliament would eventually be funded wholly out of revenues raised in Scotland.⁶ Meanwhile, the think tank IPPR is engaged in a project aimed at 'developing a model of enhanced devolution for Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom as a clear alternative to independence'⁷. In an initial paper the devolution expert, Alan Trench has outlined a proposal for devolving to the Scottish Parliament responsibility for raising just over half of what it spends from taxes collected in Scotland.⁸

However, to date, most of the work on the extension of devolution has focused primarily on what is legally possible and technically sensible. In this paper, we point the searchlight of enquiry in a different direction – on the voter. What do ordinary citizens think of the possibility of the Scottish Parliament having more powers and responsibility while remaining within the framework of the Union? Is it an idea that they support, what shape do they think it should take, and what do they hope it might achieve? Understanding the answers to these questions is vital, for while it is clear that any proposal for more devolution has to be legally and technically competent, any such scheme is unlikely to provide the basis for a widely accepted and stable basis for governing Scotland unless it meets the aspirations and expectations of its people.

Our evidence is taken from the Scottish Social Attitudes survey (SSA), a high quality survey conducted annually by ScotCen Social Research. By interviewing each year probability samples of 1200-1500 people, SSA aims to provide robust, independent data on public attitudes in Scotland and how those attitudes might be changing over time. Since its inception in 1999, the survey has particularly focused on attitudes to politics and devolution. Funding for questions on independence and devolution in our most recent survey, conducted in 2012, came from the Economic and Social Research Council, the

of 25 January 2013 at: <http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2013/01/scotland-first/>
6. See the publications at <http://www.devoplus.com/downloads/> and especially, Devo Plus (2013), A Stronger Scotland within the UK (Edinburgh: Devo Plus).

7. See IPPR's 'Devo More' project pages at: <http://www.ippr.org/research-project/44/10218/devo-more-extending-devolution-and-strengthening-the-union>

8. Trench, A (2013) Funding Devo More: fiscal options for strengthening the union, IPPR, available at: <http://www.ippr.org/publication/55/10210/funding-devo-more-fiscal-options-for-strengthening-the-union>

Electoral Reform Society and ScotCen's own resources. Fieldwork took place between July and November 2012.

The paper starts by summarising trends in people's constitutional preferences and considering whether or not some variety of 'devo max' is really the most popular option. It then looks in more detail not only at what powers people would like to see exercised from Edinburgh rather than London, but also at how people might want those powers to be exercised – do they want Holyrood to make substantially different decisions from Westminster in key areas such as tax and benefits? Finally, it compares people's expectations of the consequences of further devolution – for national pride, the economy, Scotland's voice in the world and other areas – with their expectations of the possible consequences of independence, in order to identify the comparative level of enthusiasm for further devolution as a way of improving the position of Scotland and its people.

How popular is more devolution?

9. For full question and response wording, see Annex.

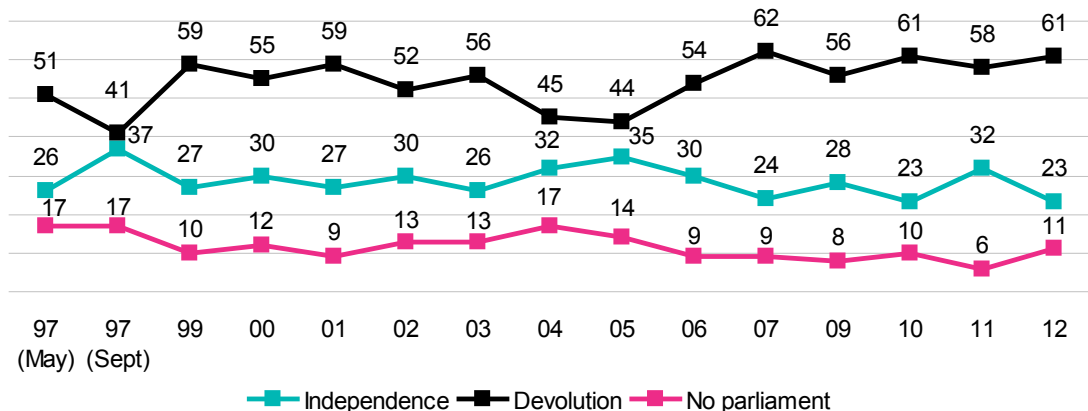
When the SNP first formed a government in Edinburgh in 2007, it hoped that by delivering effective rule from Holyrood, it would be able to convince the public that Scotland was more than capable of running its own affairs as an independent country. However, successive opinion polls have indicated that in practice the SNP has struggled to translate its undeniable popularity as a government into support for its key cause – Scottish independence. Evidence from the latest SSA reinforces this conclusion. The survey has asked the same question about constitutional preferences ever since the advent of devolution, which means we can be confident that any change in the pattern of responses reflects genuine change in the public's views rather than being an artefact of changes in question wording or methods. This question invites respondents to choose between five options: independence outwith the EU; independence within the EU; devolution within the UK with taxation powers; devolution with no taxation powers; and no Scottish Parliament at all.⁹ In Figure 2.1, the first two options are collapsed to show overall support for

independence, while the third and fourth options are combined to indicate the total level of support for devolution.

The figure shows that in the decade before the SNP first came to power in 2007, support for independence oscillated between 26% and 37%, with no consistent trend over time in one direction or the other. Indeed, the differences between one year and the next were often no more than might be expected to arise as a result of the sampling variation to which any estimate derived from a social survey is subject. However, since 2007 support has been lower than 26% on no less than three occasions, including most recently in 2012 when it dropped for a second time to a record low of 23%. Meanwhile, devolution has always been more popular than independence, but with around three in five now in favour the gap has clearly widened in recent years. It thus comes as little surprise that to date opinion polls that ask people how they will vote in the 2014 referendum on independence find something like a 3:2 majority in favour of saying No.

Figure 2:1 Constitutional preferences (traditional measure), 1997 – 2011

Source: Scottish Social Attitudes



Notes: Data from 1997 comes from the Scottish Election (May) and Referendum (September) studies, run by the National Centre for Social Research Scotland (which became ScotGen) using identical methods to SSA.

Still, while this evidence raises questions about the popularity of independence it tells us nothing about the popularity or otherwise of the idea of giving the Scottish Parliament more power and responsibility within the framework of the Union. Crafted as it was in the 1990s, SSA's long running question focuses on the options being discussed twenty years ago rather than those that are the subject of debate and discussion now. It asks about an option that is no longer on the table at all – a parliament with absolutely no tax raising powers – while it fails to include any reference to a radical extension of the powers of the Scottish Parliament within the framework of the Union as encapsulated by 'devo max', 'devo plus' and 'devo more'. With this in mind, in 2010 SSA introduced a new question that aimed to tap people's constitutional preferences by asking them to choose between four options for dividing power and responsibility between the devolved institutions and Westminster. These options read as follows:

- The Scottish Parliament should make all the decisions for Scotland

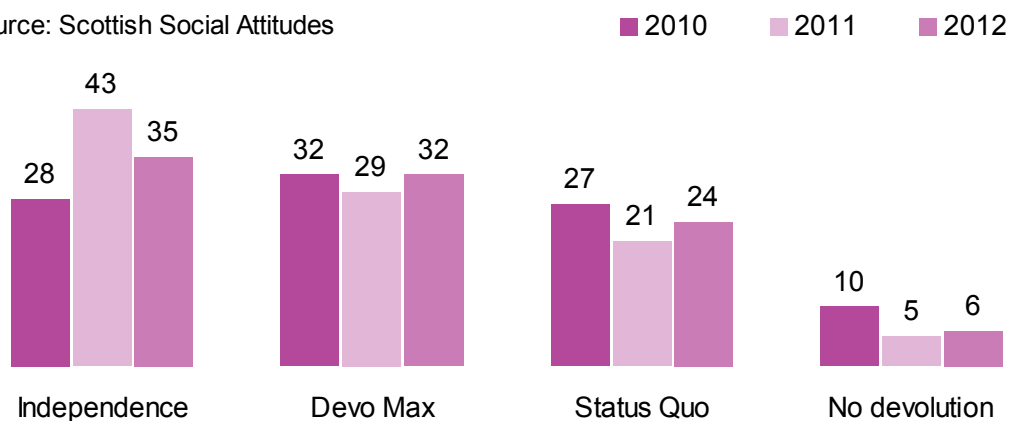
- The UK government should make decisions about defence and foreign affairs; the Scottish Parliament should decide everything else
- The UK government should make decisions about taxes, benefits and defence and foreign affairs; the Scottish Parliament should decide the rest.
- The UK government should make all decisions for Scotland.

Support for the first option is taken to imply support for the principle of independence. As taxation and welfare benefits are the two most important aspects of domestic policy that are still primarily reserved to Westminster, the second and third options are intended to represent 'devo max' and the status quo respectively. The fourth option implies that the Scottish Parliament should be abolished.

This alternative measure reveals two important facts (Figure 2.2). First, support for independence is rather higher when the issue is framed in terms

Figure 2:2 Constitutional preference (alternative measure), 2010 – 2012

Source: Scottish Social Attitudes



of the Scottish Parliament making all decisions for Scotland, with no mention of either the word 'independence' or of being 'separate from the UK'. In 2012, 35% backed independence on this alternative measure, compared with 23% on the 'traditional' measure discussed above. Second, none of the four options emerges as overwhelmingly the most popular. In particular, it is certainly not the case that 'devo max' is the first preference of a majority of Scots – in fact, only 32% choose this option, slightly fewer than back independence. It seems that Scotland is in fact a nation of minorities when it comes to attitudes towards the country's constitutional future, suggesting it will be far from easy to find any option that will provide a stable constitutional settlement. We certainly need to dig a little deeper if we are to understand whether some scheme of more devolution might be capable of satisfying the aspirations of most Scots .

Looking at Powers

SSA's newer question invites people to choose one of a set of constitutional packages defined with reference to who has responsibility for defence, taxation and welfare benefits. There is, of course, a logic to focusing on these areas. Having responsibility for a nation's defence and foreign affairs is a defining feature of an independent sovereign state; power over a whole range of domestic issues may be devolved to the constituent 'regions' of a country, but ultimate responsibility for defence and foreign affairs always lies with the central state. Meanwhile, because taxation and welfare benefits are the two areas of Scottish domestic policy that remain primarily the responsibility of Westminster, the elite level debate about more devolution has focused on how much further responsibility the Scottish Parliament should have for setting and raising its own taxes to fund public spending in Scotland, and on whether Edinburgh should be able to make its own decisions about welfare benefits. However, we should not assume that this is the way the issue is seen by the Scottish public. Perhaps for them the crucial dividing lines are different?

SSA has asked people on four occasions since 2007 who they think should make the most important decisions for Scotland about five broad areas of policy. Two are areas already devolved to Holyrood, the health service and schools. The remaining three are areas that are still wholly or primarily reserved to Westminster, that is the two domestic policy areas of welfare benefits and levels of taxation, together with the defining responsibility of an independent state, defence and foreign affairs. As Table 3.1 shows, the pattern of response to this line of questioning has been remarkably consistent from year to year – and suggests that so far as public opinion is concerned the current constitutional settlement does not draw the line appropriately between what is decided by Westminster and what is determined by Holyrood. As we might anticipate almost two-thirds say that responsibility for both

the health service and schools should lie with the devolved institutions (and in so far as people think that responsibility for schools should not lie at Holyrood that is more often because they think that local councils should be making the key decisions rather than because they believe Westminster should). However, the proportions who feel that the Scottish Parliament should make most of the decisions for Scotland about welfare benefits have consistently been almost the same as those for the health service and schools. Meanwhile, although support for giving responsibility for the key decisions about taxation levels to the Scottish Parliament appears to be somewhat lower than for welfare benefits, it has still been consistently over half, with only just over a third saying the UK government should have this responsibility. In contrast, when it comes to defence and foreign affairs, the picture is very different. Only around a third feel responsibility should lie with Holyrood while three-fifths or so think it should remain with Westminster.

We can now see why 'devo max' appears to be a popular option. While most Scots would prefer responsibility for foreign policy to continue to lie with Westminster, it seems that a majority believe that Scotland should make most of the important decisions about any of its own domestic affairs for itself. This popularity arises because pretty much everyone who is in favour of Scotland becoming independent and thus making its own decisions about defence and foreign affairs believes that Scotland should be able to make its own decisions about tax levels and welfare benefits, and they are joined in that latter view by many 'unionists' who would oppose giving Holyrood responsibility for defence and foreign affairs. Thus, for example, according to the most recent SSA 81% of those who think the Scottish Parliament should be responsible for defence and foreign affairs also take the same view about welfare benefits. However, so too do 57% of those who think it is the UK government that should be making decisions about defence

Table 3.1 Who people think should make most of the important decisions for Scotland about various policy areas, 2007-2012

		The Scottish Parliament	The UK government at Westminster	Local Councils in Scotland	The EU	Sample size
Health Service						
2007	%	63	25	10	*	1594
2009	%	65	25	6	1	1482
2010	%	66	26	5	*	1495
2012	%	66	24	8	*	1229
Schools						
2007	%	62	13	23	*	1594
2009	%	65	12	19	1	1482
2010	%	62	14	23	*	1495
2012	%	63	11	24	*	1229
Welfare benefits						
2007	%	63	18	16	1	1594
2009	%	60	19	16	1	1482
2010	%	62	25	9	1	1495
2012	%	64	19	13	*	1229
Taxation						
2007	%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1594
2009	%	59	33	4	1	1482
2010	%	57	37	3	*	1495
2012	%	56	36	4	*	1229
Defence and Foreign Affairs						
2007	%	33	58	*	4	1594
2009	%	31	61	1	3	1482
2010	%	31	63	1	3	1495
2012	%	34	59	*	4	1229

Source: Scottish Social Attitudes

Notes: * indicates that <0.5% of respondents chose this answer. n/a: not asked.

10. 7% of those who think the Scottish Parliament should decide defence and foreign policy believe local councils in Scotland making decisions about welfare benefits, while 6% of those who back independence say councils should make most decisions about taxes.

and foreign affairs. Similarly not only do 84% of those who back independence on our traditional measure agree that the Scottish Parliament should decide tax levels, but so also do 52% of those who prefer devolution.¹⁰ In contrast as many as 71% of advocates of devolution believe Westminster should still be running defence and foreign affairs while 67% of supporters of independence believe it is Holyrood that should be doing so. In short, some scheme of enhanced devolution looks capable of satisfying the aspirations of most Scots because for some it would be more or less exactly what they want while for others it would at least be a lot closer to the status they would prefer for their country. To that extent it would seem to be an option around which a majority consensus might be capable of being built.

Ready to bear the consequences?

11. The Scottish Parliament abolished tuition fees in 2000 and scrapped the graduate endowment (or 'graduate tax') in 2008. Meanwhile, English students have seen substantial increases in tuition fees over the same period, with the cap currently sitting at £9,000 per annum.

Still it might be thought to be one thing to want the Scottish Parliament to make decisions about tax levels and welfare benefits, but quite another to appreciate some of the consequences of the devolution of such issues. For example, all of the schemes that have been proposed for devolving power and responsibility for taxation to the Scottish Parliament involve placing a requirement on the institution to fund more of its activities out of revenues raised in Scotland rather than relying on a grant from Westminster that more or less guarantees that any changes made to public spending in England are automatically reflected in the amount of money made available to Holyrood. Equally, if welfare benefits were devolved it might mean that the levels and eligibility rules for such benefits might come to be different in Scotland from what they are in England. We might wonder whether the Scottish public are willing to accept such consequences.

SSA has asked people on a couple of occasions, in 2009 and again in 2012, how they think the public services for which Holyrood is responsible should be funded. The question asks:

Thinking about public services in Scotland, such as health and education, that are nowadays the responsibility of the Scottish Government, how do you think these services in Scotland should be paid for....

...out of a sum of money decided by the UK government and funded out of taxes collected across the UK, or

...out of taxes decided and collected by the Scottish Government in Scotland?

On both occasions just over half (53% in 2009 and 52% in 2012) said that devolved services should be funded out of Scotland only taxes, while rather less than half (40% in 2009 and 44% in 2012) said that they preferred for funding to come from Westminster. However, opinion amongst those who believe that the Scottish Parliament should decide tax levels in Scotland

is much more clearly in favour of funding coming from taxes decided and collected in Scotland. In both 2009 and 2012 no less than 70% of this group believed that funding should come from such taxes. It would thus appear that there is a reasonable level of appreciation amongst the Scottish public that devolving decisions about tax levels also implies devolving responsibility for funding, and that in this respect at least the demand for more devolution is largely based on an acceptance of its likely consequence.

But can the same be said when it comes to the possibility that devolving taxation and welfare benefits would result in different tax rates and benefit levels on the two sides of the border? To assess how far this is the case SSA asked people their views about the possibility that the basic rate of income tax and the level of the old age pension might be different in Scotland than in England. We focused on income tax because it is the most high profile personal tax that most people pay at some point in their adult lives, while everyone hopes that they will live long enough to receive the old age pension. At the same time – and as a point of comparison – we also asked people whether they accepted that university tuition fees could be different in the two countries. This area is, of course, already devolved, and has become an iconic area of policy difference between Scotland and England in the post-devolution era.¹¹

However, in framing these questions we decided to take into account the possibility that people might look less favourably on the possibility that public policy in England might be different from that in Scotland than vice-versa. Some people might be inclined to the view that decisions made in their own country would be more likely to be ones that they would find comfortable than ones made in another country. To test this possibility, the 2012 SSA sample was divided randomly into two. Half were asked whether they thought these key taxes and benefits should always be

12. As we might expect willingness to accept that there might be a difference in welfare benefits (and tax levels) is greatest amongst those who back independence (as indicated by our alternative measure). Even amongst this group, however, only just over a majority (55%) think it is OK for welfare benefits to be different in Scotland than in England. (Amongst supporters of devo max the figure is just 36%.)

the same in Scotland as in England or whether it is OK for them to be different in Scotland – either higher or lower – from what they are in England. The other half was asked whether these taxes and benefits should always be the same in England as Scotland, or whether it is OK for them to be different in England from what they were in Scotland.

As Tables 4.1 and 4.2 show, the order in which the two countries are introduced does make a difference. This is most clearly the case in respect of tuition fees where just over half (54%) are happy for them to be different in Scotland from what they are in England, whereas only 42% believe they should be different in England from what they are in Scotland. But there is a similar twelve point gap in people's responses to the prospect of a difference in the basic rate of income tax – 44% are willing to see the rate be different in Scotland than in England, whereas only 32% accept it might be different in England than in Scotland. Only in the case of the level of the old age pension is the difference in the pattern of response to the two scenarios rather smaller. Here 34% are happy for it to be different in Scotland than in England while 27% say it is OK for it to be different in England than in Scotland, a difference of seven points.

Still, what is perhaps more striking about these findings is that even in Table 4.1 there appears to be significantly less appetite for policy variation than there is support for idea that the Scottish Parliament should be making decisions about education, tax levels or welfare benefits. Whereas 64% think the Scottish Parliament should make most decisions about welfare benefits, only 34% would be happy with the idea of having a different old age pension in Scotland than in England. And while 56% back giving the Scottish Parliament the principal responsibility for making decisions about taxes, only 44% would be happy with the idea of the basic rate of income tax varying between the two countries. Even on

tuition fees, an area where there is already wide policy variation between Scotland and England, only just over half say it is OK for a different policy to be pursued in Scotland than in England.

True, those who think that responsibility for decisions should lie with Holyrood are rather more inclined to accept that Scotland might decide to make a different decision. Indeed, amongst those who think that the Scottish Parliament should make the key decisions about tax, as many as 64% say it is OK for the basic rate of income tax to be different in Scotland than it is in England (that is when the two countries are presented in the order indicated in Table 4.1). However, the proportion of those who think that the Scottish Parliament should make the key decisions about welfare benefits who say it is OK for the old age pension to be different in Scotland than in England is still no more than 44%. Here at least, it seems that Scots are rather less willing to accept the possible consequences of devolving decision making.

True, those who think that responsibility for decisions should lie with Holyrood are rather more inclined to accept that Scotland might decide to make a different decision. Indeed, amongst those who think that the Scottish Parliament should make the key decisions about tax, as many as 64% say it is OK for the basic rate of income tax to be different in Scotland than it is in England (that is when the two countries are presented in the order indicated in Table 4.1). However, the proportion of those who think that the Scottish Parliament should make the key decisions about welfare benefits who say it is OK for the old age pension to be different in Scotland than in England is still no more than 44%. Here at least, it seems that Scots are rather less willing to accept the possible consequences of devolving decision making.¹²

Perhaps we should not be too surprised by this apparent disjunction between people's

Table 4.1 Views on whether levels of taxes and benefits should be the same or vary between Scotland and England, 2012

	Tuition fees	Basic rate of income tax	Old age pension
	%	%	%
Always be the same in Scotland as it is in England	38	51	63
Or, is it OK for it to be different in Scotland (either higher or lower) than it is in England?	54	44	34
(It depends)	4	2	1
(Don't know)	4	2	2
Unweighted sample size	623	623	623

Source: Scottish Social Attitudes

Table 4.2 Views on whether levels of taxes and benefits should be the same or vary between England and Scotland, 2012

	Tuition fees	Basic rate of income tax	Old age pension
	%	%	%
Always be the same in England as it is in Scotland	49	62	70
Or, is it OK for it to be different in England (either higher or lower) than it is in Scotland?	42	32	27
(It depends)	6	2	1
(Don't know)	3	4	2
Unweighted sample size	606	606	606

Source: Scottish Social Attitudes

aspirations for decisions to be taken in Edinburgh and a reluctance to countenance these decisions being different from those taken in London. After all, social security has long been a devolved responsibility in Northern Ireland yet in practice Stormont has almost always implemented the same framework as in the rest of the UK. People's views about who should make decisions about welfare benefits are apparently

simply an indication of who they think should have the ultimate right to make decisions for their part of the UK rather than necessarily a wish to see different decisions made across the UK. The feeling that the right to make decisions should lie in Edinburgh seemingly co-exists with an expectation that those decisions will – and perhaps should – be the same as those taken in London.

Hopes and fears

13. For full question and response wording, see Annex.

People's motivations for wanting constitutional change are, however, rarely just about process, that is who should take decisions and how. They are also usually bound up with hopes and expectations about what benefits – or harm – change might bring. In order to understand what hopes and expectations people have of 'devo max', in 2012 SSA asked people what impact they thought its introduction might have on a range of aspects of life in Scotland, ranging from material issues such as the economy and the standard of living to less tangible considerations such as the amount of pride people have in their country and the strength of Scotland's voice in the world. As it happens exactly the same questions were asked about independence, so we therefore can compare the range of hopes and expectations vested in the prospect of a Scottish Parliament that is responsible for

everything apart from defence and foreign affairs and those associated with a fully independent state.¹³

In most cases, expectations of devo max are not much more favourable than those of independence (Table 5.1). For example, while 51% thought that having more devolution would give people in Scotland more pride in their country, 55% said the same about independence. Exactly the same proportion (34%) said devo max would deliver a better economy as thought independence would. And Scots are apparently sceptical about the likelihood of either constitutional scenario doing anything to narrow the gap between rich and poor in Scotland – just 17% said devo max would result in a smaller gap, while only 19% thought independence would achieve this.

Table 5.1 Expectations of devo max and independence, 2012

	Devo max			Independence		
	More/ better %	No difference %	Less/ worse %	More/ better %	No difference %	Less/ worse %
People in Scotland's pride in their country	51	42	3	55	39	3
Scotland's voice in the world	42	41	15	42	32	22
Scotland's economy	34	33	25	34	23	34
The standard of living in Scotland	31	46	17	32	36	24
The gap between the rich and poor in Scotland*	17	53	23	19	47	25
Taxes in Scotland**	6	36	49	8	27	57

Sample size: Questions on devo max = 1,229 (all 2012 respondents), questions on Independence = 1,180 (everyone who completed the self-completion section of the survey)

* For the questions on the gap between rich and poor, the 'less/worse' column contains those who say the gap will be bigger and the 'more/better' column those who say the gap will be smaller

** For the questions on taxes, the 'less/worse' column contains those who say taxes will be higher and the 'more/better' one those who say taxes will be lower.

Source: Scottish Social Attitudes 2012

However, if people are no more likely to think that devo max would bring about a better Scotland than they are to think that independence would, they are slightly less likely to think that it would result in negative consequences. For example, a quarter (25%) thought Scotland's economy would be worse under devo max – significantly less than the third (34%) who expect independence would have a negative impact. On this evidence, devo max is not so much an option that excites more enthusiasm than independence, as one that raises fewer worries.

This picture is confirmed by the answers to a further pair of questions in which respondents were asked how they would *feel* if (a) the Scottish Parliament were to be made responsible for all decisions apart from defence and foreign affairs and (b) if Scotland were to become independent. In the case of the latter, just 21% said they would feel confident about the prospect of independence while as many as 59% indicated they would be worried. In contrast, only 32% said they would be worried if devo max were to be introduced while rather more, 38%, indicated they would feel confident if that were to happen.

So expectations of devo max are in many respects quite limited; the prospect gives rise to less concern than independence but no greater enthusiasm. In part this is because those who would prefer independence (as identified by our alternative measure) are, unsurprisingly, somewhat less likely to be optimistic about what would happen under devo max than they are about independence. This is simply balanced out by a rather greater optimism about devo max than independence amongst those who feel the Scottish Parliament should make all decisions apart from defence and foreign affairs. Even so, it is striking that those who would like the Scottish Parliament to make all decisions for Scotland are still more optimistic about what would happen under devo max than are those who would like the Parliament to make all decisions apart

from defence and foreign affairs. For example, no less than 53% of the former group believe that Scotland's economy would be better under devo max compared with just 37% of the latter. It would appear that while many people in Scotland are sympathetic to the prospect of a more powerful Scottish Parliament within the framework of the Union, they still have to be convinced that such a prospect would make a material difference to their lives.

Conclusion

14. Sir Kenneth Calman (chmn.) (2009), *Serving Scotland Better: Scotland and the United Kingdom in the 21st century*, Edinburgh: Commission on Scottish Devolution

More devolution is often described as the most popular option for Scotland's constitutional future. That is at risk of being an exaggeration. Remaining within the Union but giving the Scottish Parliament responsibility for everything apart from defence and foreign affairs is certainly not the first preference of a majority of people in Scotland, and may not even be the single most popular option. However, it does appear to be capable of securing the consent of a majority of people in Scotland. This is because most people who would prefer independence certainly believe the Scottish Parliament should acquire principal responsibility for deciding tax levels and welfare benefits, and in this view they are joined by many who wish Scotland to remain part of the United Kingdom. Thus we find almost as much support for the Scottish Parliament to be the body that makes most of the important decisions for Scotland about tax levels and welfare benefits as there is for it to be in charge of schools and the health service in Scotland.

In crafting proposals for giving the Scottish parliament more power and responsibility, most of the emphasis to date has been on the devolution of tax powers and responsibilities rather than on welfare benefits. Many of those who researching and developing proposals for more devolution appear to accept the view of the Calman Commission that having a common system of welfare benefits is an integral part of the 'social citizenship' that all who are British should share in common.¹⁴ Yet at first glance it is far from clear that this distinction is one that the Scottish public readily recognises. Support for giving the devolved institutions the principal responsibility for making the key decisions about welfare benefits appears if anything to be somewhat higher than it is for giving them responsibility for making decisions about levels of taxation.

Not that there is wild enthusiasm for the prospect that the level of a welfare benefit such as the old

age pension might be different in Scotland than in England. Perhaps there is a wish that Scotland should have the right to make a different decision if it wanted to, but a hope that in practice things would remain much the same. But then the mood in respect of income tax appears to be not dissimilar. As has proven to be the case with the Scottish Parliament's existing power to vary the basic rate of income tax by up to three pence in the pound, it may not prove easy in practice to persuade Scots that rates of taxation should be substantially different from what they are south of the border.

Given this reluctance to embrace differences in the level of taxation and welfare benefits on the two sides of the border, it is perhaps not surprising that expectations of the impact that devo max might have on life in Scotland are quite limited – and that in fact optimism is highest amongst the supporters of independence (who are also most willing to embrace the prospect of policy difference) rather than amongst those who say they would most prefer devo max. Perhaps in the absence as yet of any consensus about what further powers and responsibilities the Scottish Parliament might have in the event that voters in Scotland opt to remain within the Union, voters have heard too little about the benefits that such a change might bring to have been convinced that it would make much difference. The task facing those who would like Scotland to go down this path is to convert people's apparent sympathy for the idea of more devolution into an enthusiasm that it would result in a difference worth making.

Annex – methods and questions

15. Like many national surveys of households or individuals, in order to attain the optimum balance between sample efficiency and fieldwork efficiency the sample was clustered. The first stage of sampling involved randomly selecting postcode sectors. The sample frame of postcode sectors was also stratified (by urban-rural, region and the percentage of people in non-manual occupations) to improve the match between the sample profile and that of the Scottish population.

Technical details of the survey

The Scottish Social Attitudes series

The Scottish Social Attitudes (SSA) survey was launched by ScotCen Social Research in 1999, following the advent of devolution. Based on annual rounds of interviews of between 1,200 to 1,500 people drawn using probability sampling (based on a stratified, clustered sample)¹⁵, it aims to facilitate the study of public opinion and inform the development of public policy in Scotland. In this it has similar objectives to the British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey, which was launched by ScotCen's parent organisation, NatCen Social Research in 1983. While BSA interviews people in Scotland, these are usually too few in any one year to permit separate analysis of public opinion in Scotland (see Park, et al, 2012 for more details of the BSA survey).

SSA has been conducted annually each year since 1999, with the exception of 2008. The survey has a modular structure. In any one year it typically contains three to five modules, each containing 40 questions. Funding for its first two years came from the Economic and Social Research Council, while from 2001 onwards different bodies have funded individual modules each year. These bodies have included the Economic and Social Research Council, the Scottish Government and various charitable and grant awarding bodies, such as the Nuffield Foundation and Leverhulme Trust. 2012 funders were the Economic and Social Research Council, the Electoral Reform Society, the Nuffield Foundation, the University of Edinburgh and the Leverhulme Trust.

The 2012 survey

The 2012 survey contained modules of questions on:

- Constitutional change (funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, the Electoral Reform Society Scotland and ScotCen)
- Attitudes to Gaelic (funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and undertaken jointly with Lindsay Paterson and Fiona O'Hanlon at the University of Edinburgh)
- The 2012 Local Council Elections (funded by the Nuffield Foundation)
- National identity (funded by the University of Edinburgh and the Leverhulme Trust and led by Lindsay Paterson, David McCrone and Frank Bechhofer).

Sample design

The survey is designed to yield a representative sample of adults aged 18 or over, living in Scotland. The sample frame is the Postcode Address File (PAF), a list of postal delivery points compiled by the Post Office. The detailed procedure for selecting the 2012 sample was as follows:

1. 87 postcode sectors were selected from a list of all postal sectors in Scotland, with probability proportional to the number of addresses in each sector for addresses in urban areas and a probability of twice the address count for sectors in rural areas (i.e. the last 3 categories in the Scottish Government's 6 fold urban-rural classification). Prior to selection the sectors were stratified by Scottish Government urban-

16. See <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/07/29152642/7> for details.

rural classification¹⁶, region and percentage of household heads recorded as being in non-manual occupations (SEG 1-6 and 13, taken from the 2001 Census).

2. 28 addresses were selected at random from each of these 87 postcode sectors

3. Interviewers called at each selected address and identified its eligibility for the survey. Where more than one dwelling unit was present at an address, all dwelling units were listed systematically and one was selected at random using a computer generated random selection table. In all eligible dwelling units with more than one adult aged 18 or over, interviewers had to carry out a random selection of one adult using a similar procedure.

In 2012, a further 140 addresses were randomly selected after fieldwork began to prevent a shortfall in the target number of interviews.

Fieldwork

Fieldwork for the 2012 survey ran between July and November 2012, with 77% of interviews completed by the end of September. An advance letter was sent to all addresses and was followed up by a personal visit from a ScotCen interviewer. Interviewers were required to make a minimum of 6 calls at different times of the day (including at least one evening and one weekend call) in order to try and contact respondents. All new interviewers attended a one day briefing conference prior to starting work on the study, while interviewers who had worked on the survey before were required to read detailed instructions and complete practice interviews before commencing work.

Interviews were conducted using face-to-face computer-assisted interviewing (a process which

involves the use of a laptop computer, with questions appearing on screen and interviewers directly entering respondents' answers into the computer). All respondents were asked to fill in a self-completion questionnaire which was either collected by the interviewer or returned by post. The table below summarises the response rate and the numbers completing the self-completion section in 2012.

17. See: Bromley, C., Curtice, J., and Given, L. (2005) *Public Attitudes to Devolution: the First Four Years*, London: The National Centre for Social Research.

Given, L and Ormston (2006) *Scottish Social Attitudes survey 2005: Scottish Executive Core module – technical report*, Edinburgh: Scottish Executive Social Research.

Cleghorn, N, Ormston, R & Sharp, C (2007) *Scottish Social Attitudes survey 2006: Core module technical report*, Edinburgh: Scottish Executive Social Research.

Ormston, R (2008) *Scottish Social Attitudes survey 2007 Core module: Report 1 – Attitudes to government in Scotland*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government Social Research.

Ormston, R (2010) *Scottish Social Attitudes survey 2009: Core Module – Attitudes to government, the economy and public services*, Scottish Government Social Research.

Ormston, R & Reid, S (2011) *Scottish Social Attitudes survey 2010: Core module – Attitudes to government, the economy and public services in Scotland*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government Social Research.

Response rates

The Scottish Social Attitudes survey involves a face-to-face interview with respondents and a self-completion section (completed using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing in 2012). The numbers completing each stage in 2012 are shown in the next table. Technical details of previous SSA surveys are to be found in earlier reports.¹⁷

2012 Scottish Social Attitudes survey response

	No.	% of 'eligible' (in scope) sample
Addresses issued	2576	
Vacant, derelict and other out of scope ¹	291	N/A
Achievable or 'in scope'	2285	
Unknown eligibility ²	36	1.7
Interview achieved	1,229	53.7
Self-completion completed	1,180	51.6
Interview not achieved		
Refused ³	743	32.5
Non-contact ⁴	116	5.1
Other non-response ⁵	163	7.1

Notes to table

- This includes empty / derelict addresses, holiday homes, businesses and institutions, and addresses that had been demolished.
- 'Unknown eligibility' includes cases where the address could not be located, where it could not be determined if an address was residential and where it could not be determined if an address was occupied or not.
- Refusals include: refusals prior to selection of an individual; refusals to the office; refusal by the selected person; 'proxy' refusals made by

someone on behalf of the respondent; and broken appointments after which a respondent could not be re-contacted.

- Non-contacts comprise households where no one was contacted after at least 6 calls and those where the selected person could not be contacted.
- 'Other non-response' includes people who were ill at home or in hospital during the survey period, people who were physically or mentally unable to participate and people with insufficient English to participate.

Sample size for previous years

The table below shows the achieved sample size for the full SSA sample (all respondents) for all previous years.

Scottish Social Attitudes survey sample size by year

Survey year	Achieved sample size
1999	1482
2000	1663
2001	1605
2002	1665
2003	1508
2004	1637
2005	1549
2006	1594
2007	1508
2009	1482
2010	1495
2011	1197
2012	1229

Ormston, R. and Reid, S. (2012), *Scottish Social Attitudes 2011: Core Module: Attitudes to government, the economy and public services in Scotland*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government Social Research

Weighting

All percentages cited in this report are based on weighted data. The weights applied to the SSA 2012 data are intended to correct for three potential sources of bias in the sample:

- Differential selection probabilities
- Deliberate over-sampling of rural areas
- Non-response.

Data were weighted to take account of the fact that not all households or individuals have the same probability of selection for the survey. For example, adults living in large households have a lower selection probability than adults who live alone. Weighting was also used to correct the over-sampling of rural addresses. Differences between responding and non-responding households were taken into account using information from the census about the area of the address as well as interviewer observations about participating and non-participating addresses. Finally, the weights were adjusted to ensure that the weighted data matched the age-sex profile of the Scottish population (based on 2011 mid-year estimates from the General Register Office for Scotland).

Survey questions to which reference is made in this report

NOTES:

- 'CARD' indicates that respondents were given a 'show card' from which to choose their answer.

- Options in brackets were not shown on the card but were available to code by the interviewer.

CARD

Which of these statements comes closest to your view?

- 1 Scotland should become independent, separate from the UK and the European Union
- 2 Scotland should become independent, separate from the UK but part of the European Union
- 3 Scotland should remain part of the UK, with its own elected parliament which has some taxation powers
- 4 Scotland should remain part of the UK, with its own elected parliament which has no taxation powers
- 5 Scotland should remain part of the UK without an elected parliament
- 8 (Don't know)
- 9 (Refusal)

CARD

Which of the statements on this card comes closest to your view about who should make government decisions for Scotland?

- 1 The Scottish Parliament should make all the decisions for Scotland
- 2 The UK government should make decisions about defence and foreign affairs; the Scottish Parliament should decide everything else
- 3 The UK government should make decisions about taxes, benefits and defence and foreign affairs; the Scottish Parliament should decide the rest.
- 4 The UK government should make all decisions for Scotland
- 8 (Don't know)
- 9 (Refusal)

CARD

Thinking about the institutions on this card, which do you think ought to make most of the important decisions for Scotland about... ..the levels of welfare benefits?

- 1 The Scottish Parliament
- 2 The UK government at Westminster
- 3 Local councils in Scotland
- 4 The European Union
- 8 (Don't know)
- 9 (Refusal)

CARD

(Still thinking about the institutions on this card) And which do you think ought to make most of the important decisions for Scotland about.....the National Health Service?

- 1 The Scottish Parliament
- 2 The UK government at Westminster
- 3 Local councils in Scotland
- 4 The European Union
- 8 (Don't know)
- 9 (Refusal)

CARD

(Still thinking about the institutions on this card, which do you think ought to make most of the important decisions for Scotland about...) ...schools?

- 1 The Scottish Parliament
- 2 The UK government at Westminster
- 3 Local councils in Scotland
- 4 The European Union
- 8 (Don't know)
- 9 (Refusal)

CARD

(Still thinking about the institutions on this card, which do you think ought to make most of the important decisions for Scotland about...) ...defence and foreign affairs?

- 1 The Scottish Parliament
- 2 The UK government at Westminster
- 3 Local councils in Scotland

- 4 The European Union
- 8 (Don't know)
- 9 (Refusal)

CARD

(Still thinking about the institutions on this card, which do you think ought to make most of the important decisions for Scotland about...) ...the level of taxes?

- 1 The Scottish Parliament
- 2 The UK government at Westminster
- 3 Local councils in Scotland
- 4 The European Union
- 8 (Don't know)
- 9 (Refusal)

Questions on policy variation

Half the sample were asked version A and the other half version B.

VERSION A

Thinking about the tuition fees that university students might be asked to pay, should these... READ OUT...

- 1 ...always be the same in Scotland as they are in England
- 2 or, is it OK for them to be different in Scotland - either higher or lower - than they are in England?
- 3 (Depends - Write In)
- 8 (Don't know)
- 9 (Refusal)

And the basic rate of income tax? Should this... READ OUT...

- 1 ...always be the same in Scotland as it is in England
- 2 or, is it OK for it to be different in Scotland - either higher or lower - than it is in England?
- 3 (Depends - Write In)

- 8 (Don't know)
- 9 (Refusal)

Finally what about the old age pension paid out by the government? Should this... READ OUT...

- 1 ...always be the same in Scotland as it is in England
- 2 or, is it OK for it to be different in Scotland (- either higher or lower -) than it is in England?
- 3 (Depends - Write In)
- 8 (Don't know)
- 9 (Refusal)

VERSION B

Thinking about the tuition fees that university students might be asked to pay, should these... READ OUT...

- 1 ...always be the same in England as they are in Scotland
- 2 or, is it OK for them to be different in England - either higher or lower - than they are in Scotland?
- 3 (Depends - Write In)
- 8 (Don't know)
- 9 (Refusal)

And the basic rate of income tax? Should this... READ OUT...

- 1 ...always be the same in England as it is in Scotland
- 2 or, is it OK for it to be different in England - either higher or lower - than it is in Scotland?
- 3 (Depends - Write In)
- 8 (Don't know)
- 9 (Refusal)

Finally what about the old age pension paid out by the government? Should this... READ OUT...

- 1 ...always be the same in England as it is in Scotland
- 2 or, is it OK for it to be different in England (- either higher or lower -) than it is in

- 3 Scotland?
- (Depends - Write In)
- 8 (Don't know)
- 9 (Refusal)

Expectations of devo max and independence

CARD

Say that Scotland remained part of the United Kingdom, but that the Scottish Parliament made all decisions for Scotland apart from defence and foreign affairs - sometimes called 'Devolution max'.

If that happened, would taxes in Scotland be higher, lower or would it make no difference?

Please choose a phrase from the card.

- 1 A lot higher
- 2 A little higher
- 3 No difference
- 4 A little lower
- 5 A lot lower
- 8 (Don't know)
- 9 (Refusal)

CARD

And thinking again about what would happen if Scotland remained part of the United Kingdom, but the Scottish Parliament made all decisions for Scotland apart from defence and foreign affairs. If that happened, would Scotland's economy become better, worse, or would it make no difference?

(Please choose a phrase from the card)

- 1 A lot better
- 2 A little better
- 3 No difference
- 4 A little worse
- 5 A lot worse
- 8 (Don't know)
- 9 (Refusal)

18. This series of questions – about expectations of the possible consequences of independence – were asked as part of the self-completion (Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing) section of SSA 2012.

CARD

(And thinking again about what would happen if Scotland remained part of the United Kingdom, but the Scottish Parliament made all decisions for Scotland apart from defence and foreign affairs.) And would people in Scotland have more pride in their country, less pride, or would it make no difference? (Please choose a phrase from the card)

- 1 A lot more pride
- 2 A little more pride
- 3 No difference
- 4 A little less pride
- 5 A lot less pride
- 8 (Don't know)
- 9 (Refusal)

CARD

(And thinking again about what would happen if Scotland remained part of the United Kingdom, but the Scottish Parliament made all decisions for Scotland apart from defence and foreign affairs.) Would the standard of living in Scotland be higher, lower, or would it make no difference?

- 1 A lot higher
- 2 A little higher
- 3 No difference
- 4 A little lower
- 5 A lot lower
- 8 (Don't know)
- 9 (Refusal)

CARD

And thinking again about what would happen if Scotland remained part of the United Kingdom, but the Scottish Parliament made all decisions for Scotland apart from defence and foreign affairs. If that happened, would Scotland have a stronger voice in the world, a weaker voice, or would it make no difference? (Please choose a phrase from the card)

- 1 A lot stronger
- 2 A little stronger
- 3 No difference
- 4 A little weaker

- 5 A lot weaker
- 8 (Don't know)
- 9 (Refusal)

CARD

And finally, if Scotland remained part of the United Kingdom, but the Scottish Parliament made all decisions for Scotland apart from defence and foreign affairs, would the gap between rich and poor in Scotland be bigger, smaller or would it make no difference?

- 1 A lot bigger
- 2 A little bigger
- 3 No difference
- 4 A little smaller
- 5 A lot smaller
- 8 (Don't know)
- 9 (Refusal)

Thinking now about what might happen if Scotland were to become an independent country, separate from the rest of the United Kingdom but part of the European Union.¹⁸ Do you think that, as a result of independence, taxes in Scotland would become higher, lower or would it make no difference?

- 1 A lot higher
- 2 A little higher
- 3 No difference
- 4 A little lower
- 5 A lot lower
- 8 (Can't choose)
- 99 (Refusal)

As a result of independence would Scotland's economy become better, worse, or would it make no difference?

- 1 A lot better
- 2 A little better
- 3 No difference
- 4 A little worse
- 5 A lot worse
- 8 (Can't choose)
- 99 (Refusal)

As a result of independence would people in Scotland have more pride in their country, less pride or would it make no difference?

- 1 A lot more
- 2 A little more
- 3 No difference
- 4 A little less
- 5 A lot less
- 8 (Can't choose)
- 99 (Refusal)

As a result of independence would the standard of living in Scotland be higher, lower, or would it make no difference?

- 1 A lot higher
- 2 A little higher
- 3 No difference
- 4 A little lower
- 5 A lot lower
- 8 (Can't choose)
- 99 (Refusal)

As a result of independence would Scotland have a stronger voice in the world, a weaker voice, or would it make no difference?

- 1 A lot stronger
- 2 A little stronger
- 3 No difference
- 4 A little weaker
- 5 A lot weaker
- 8 (Can't choose)
- 99 (Refusal)

As a result of independence, would the gap between rich and poor in Scotland be bigger, smaller or would it make no difference?

- 1 A lot bigger
- 2 A little bigger
- 3 No difference
- 4 A little smaller
- 5 A lot smaller
- 8 (Can't choose)
- 99 (Refusal)

If Scotland were to become independent, would you feel confident about Scotland's future, worried, or neither confident nor worried?

IF CONFIDENT/WORRIED: Is that very or quite confident/worried?

- 1 Very confident
- 2 Quite confident
- 3 Neither confident nor worried
- 4 Quite worried
- 5 Very worried
- 8 (Don't know)
- 9 (Refusal)

And what if Scotland remained part of the United Kingdom, but the Scottish Parliament made all decisions for Scotland apart from defence and foreign affairs - sometimes called 'Devolution max'. Would you feel confident about Scotland's future, worried, or neither confident nor worried?

IF CONFIDENT/WORRIED: Is that very or quite confident/worried?

- 1 Very confident
- 2 Quite confident
- 3 Neither confident nor worried
- 4 Quite worried
- 5 Very worried
- 8 (Don't know)
- 9 (Refusal)

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