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**The Dynamics of Public Opinion on Scottish  
Independence: from the 2014 Referendum  
to Brexit and beyond**

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## ABSTRACT

The twenty-first century is marked by globalization and the rise of pro-independence movements all over the world. The Scottish Independence movement is situated in this context, and it is a clear example of how the interaction of politics and economics influences a nation's desire for self-determination. This study examines the evolution of the independence movement in Scotland from the years before the 2014 referendum and the impact of the 2016 Brexit referendum outcome for this country until the present day. Given that the UK's decision to leave the European Union does not represent the will of Scotland's electorate, support for independence was expected to grow. However, the dynamic of Scottish independence is not linear and is influenced by different aspects. In this process, analysing the role of the Scottish National Party (SNP) is a central aspect. It has successfully mobilised a large part of the Scottish population through the promotion and dissemination of their independence aspirations. Moreover, this project examines the role of the main political forces in the United Kingdom such as the Conservative Party and the Labour Party. Their persuasive strategies have altered the public perceptions demonstrating that the public opinion in the Scottish political sphere is volatile and dynamic.

**Key words:** Scotland, Independence, 2014 Referendum, 2016 Brexit referendum, Scottish National Party (SNP), political campaigns, Conservative Party, Labour Party.

## RESUMEN

El siglo XXI está marcado por la globalización y el surgimiento de movimientos independentistas alrededor de todo el mundo. El movimiento nacionalista escocés se sitúa dentro de este contexto, siendo un claro ejemplo de cómo la interacción de la política y la economía influyen en el deseo de autodeterminación de un país. Este trabajo examina la evolución del movimiento independentista en Escocia desde los años previos al Referéndum de Independencia de 2014 y el del impacto del Brexit para el país hasta el día de hoy. Teniendo en cuenta que la decisión del Reino Unido de abandonar la Unión Europea no representa al electorado escocés, se esperaba un crecimiento en el apoyo a la independencia. Sin embargo, la evolución del independentismo en Escocia no ha sido lineal y se ha visto influenciada por diferentes aspectos. En este proceso, es crucial analizar el papel del Partido Nacional Escocés (SNP) ya que ha logrado movilizar a gran

parte de la población escocesa mediante la promoción y difusión de sus aspiraciones independentistas. Además, este proyecto examina la importancia de las principales fuerzas políticas de Reino Unido, como el Partido Conservador y el Partido Laborista. A través de sus estrategias persuasivas, la percepción de la opinión pública se ha ido transformando a lo largo del tiempo. De este modo, se demuestra que la opinión pública en el ámbito político en Escocia es volátil y dinámica

**Palabras clave:** Escocia, Independencia, Referéndum de Independencia de 2014, Brexit referéndum de 2016, Partido Nacional Escocés (SNP), Partido Conservador, Partido Laborista.

## **Content Index**

1. Introduction .....	1
2. Under the English shadow: the Decline of Scottish Politics Autonomy .....	2
3. The Scottish National Identity .....	3
4. The Meaning of Nationalism in the Context of Scotland .....	4
5. The Scottish National Party and the Rise of Scottish Nationalism .....	5
7. The Referendum for Independence 2014 .....	7
7.1. Political Antecedents .....	7
7.3. Opinion Polls on the 2014 Referendum .....	9
7.4. 2014 Referendum Negotiations .....	11
7.5. Referendum Results .....	12
7.6. Regional Perspectives: Voting Patterns in the 2014 Referendum .....	13
8. The Power Dynamics between Scotland's Political Parties in the Aftermath of the 2014 Referendum .....	16
8.1. United Kingdom General Election 2015 .....	16
9. Towards Brexit .....	19
10. The Brexit Outcome and its Implications for Scotland .....	20
10.1. Scotland in the Aftermath: Confronting Brexit's Impact .....	23
10.2. Evolution of Sentiment: Scottish Independence Pre and Post-Brexit .....	24
11. Discussion .....	29
12. Conclusion .....	30
References .....	33

## Figure Index

Figure 1 Scottish Independence Referendum Opinion Poll Findings, January 2012 to September 2014 .....	10
Figure 2 Scottish Independence Referendum 2014 Results .....	13
Figure 3 Referendum 2014 Voting Results by Council .....	14
Figure 4 UK General Election 2015 Results .....	17
Figure 5 Evolution of Party Vote Shares: UK General Election 2010-2015 .....	17
Figure 6 Party Vote Share Breakdown in the 2015 UK General Election in Scotland...	18
Figure 7 Seat Distribution of Political Parties in the UK General Election 2015 .....	18
Figure 8 Brexit Referendum Result 2016.....	21
Figure 9 Proportion of the Votes across the UK .....	22
Figure 10 Survey on Scottish independence after Brexit Referendum until 2014 .....	25
Figure 11 UK General Election Results 2017 in Scotland .....	26

## Table Index

Table 1 Scottish Independence Referendum 2014 Results.....	12
Table 2 Referendum 2014 Voting Results by Council.....	14

## 1. Introduction

Independence is an important issue that has continuously been at the forefront of Scotland's history. From the Union of Crowns in 1603 to the dissolution of the Scottish Parliament by the Act of Union in 1707, Scottish autonomy has been profoundly diminished, which impacted severely its relationship with England (Houston, 2009b). It is important to note that diverse political events and decisions have influenced the political and social sphere of the Scottish nation and are crucial to understand the dynamics politics. Moreover, it is essential to acknowledge the distinction between “British” and “English” since both terms are often used indistinctly without considering that Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland also constitute the United Kingdom. The blurring of identity encouraged Scottish population to affirm their own distinctiveness. Thus, it is accurate to acknowledge the historical interconnectivity, however, given that each nation possesses its own cultural and historical legacy, it is crucial to establish a difference between them (Houston, 2009a). Furthermore, globalisation is also a significant aspect that erodes identities and fosters homogenization. In that regard, Scotland might have perceived the loss of its distinctive features due to the exposition of a large amount of dominant cultural influences. Hence, the emergence of Scottish nationalism can be interpreted as a reaction caused by waning cultural identity and autonomy (Beiner, 1999). In addition, the role of the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) is crucial for the Scottish independence movement. This is so, since it was the main precursor and significantly influenced the political life of the country since the devolution of powers to the Scottish Independence referendum in 2014 and the Brexit referendum in 2016.

In the Brexit referendum 2016, Scotland demonstrated their desire to remain in the European Union. Nevertheless, the referendum outcome underscores the limited influence of Scottish votes in the broader UK political landscape. For that reason, support for Scottish independence was expected to grow after the Brexit referendum, as the outcome highlighted the disparity between the Scottish population's preference to remain in the EU and the overall UK decision to leave.

This Final Degree Project examines the evolution of Scottish independence movement from its origins to the present time. With that objective, a study of the most important political events that shaped the development of the Independence movement

will be presented. First, the devolution of powers in Scotland and the restoration of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 will be presented. This redistribution of power configured the political landscape in Scotland and permitted the nation to recover a certain degree of autonomy. This influenced notably the political discourse and practice in the region.

The analysis of this project will be based on two decisive events of the twenty-first century which influenced considerably the Scottish Independence movement: the 2014 Independence referendum and Brexit in 2016. The outcome of the 2014 Scottish referendum indicated that 55.3% of voters opposed independence (McInnes et al., 2014) and in the 2016 Brexit referendum, 62% of the Scottish electorate voted in favour of remaining in the European Union (Uberoi, 2016). This study focuses on opinion polls, electoral and referendums results to illustrate the fluctuations in Scottish public opinion over the years with respect to independence.

The core objective of this paper is to examine whether these outcomes affected support for independence and the influence of other events from 2014 to Brexit in 2016 and subsequently to the present day. Through an analysis of opinion polls and electorate results, it is expected a better understanding of dynamics of the public opinion on Scottish independence. Thereby, it will be presented a current perspective on one of the most debated themes in United Kingdom politics.

## **2. Under the English shadow: the Decline of Scottish Politics Autonomy**

Over the centuries, Scotland has been a symbol of national identity rooted in a rich history and culture. Before the accession to the throne of James VI of Scotland, who also inherited the English crown as James I, Scotland maintained its status as an independent kingdom. Despite the union of crowns in 1603, both reigns had their own laws, judicial systems, and parliaments. It was not until the Act of Union in 1707 that the formal union of the governments of Scotland and England occurred. As a result of the union, Scotland and its political autonomy merged under the English administration, marking a significant milestone in the history of Scottish nationalism (Houston, 2009b).

According to Harris (2010), the economy played a major role in the Union of 1707 between Scotland and England. This was the result of Scotland's disadvantaged trading position due to a fragile, under-skilled manufacturing sector and a persistent shortage of resources. Consequently, the political stability of Scotland was affected in contrast to

England, whose trading position was unquestionably superior. Raffe (2010) explains that the Anglo-Scottish Union of 1707 had a significant impact on the development of the history of Scotland which helps to understand the current structure and situation of the country. This event was crucial for the lack of autonomy of the country since it meant that the Scottish Parliament ceased to exist and became integrated into the British Parliament.

### **3. The Scottish National Identity**

To understand the Scottish sense of identity, it is important to differentiate it from the British identity. Despite the misconceptions and difficulties frequently encountered in understanding Scottish identity, it is crucial to highlight that it is not a variety of English and acknowledge that British is not merely English culture. The distinction between these two cultures relies on history since the social, political and cultural features of Scotland have developed separately and in parallel within the broader context of British and European culture (Houston, 2009b). Moreover, cultural differentiation contributes to avoiding cultural homogenisation and preserving Scotland's cultural uniqueness and autonomy within the wider political structure of the United Kingdom.

Globalisation played a significant role in the homogenisation of culture, enabling the mass dissemination of ideas, values, and practices through global media. This phenomenon erodes cultural identities through the promotion of homogenisation of consumption patterns and trade practices. Furthermore, mass migration and cultural mixtures, in addition to the diffusion of a uniform global culture through information and communication, result in the formation of new hybrid or transnational identities. Consequently, there is a reduction in self-esteem and authenticity in individual identity (Mordini, 2006).

The influence of globalization on Scottish identity has been a crucially important fact for the evolution of nationalism in Scotland. According to the perspective of the political philosopher Tom Nairn, quoted by Beiner (1999), globalisation vivifies Scottish nationalist aspirations regarding “metropolitan” England and inspires them to politicise their cultural identity via campaigns for national sovereignty. This vision suits Scottish civic nationalism, which emphasises inclusive values and institutions over cultural or linguistic identities. This is explained by the fact that the effects of the Westminster administration also affected the Scottish government. For instance, the 2008 financial crisis caused by Westminster's neoliberal policies, the Scottish Government implemented



alternative economic policies to alleviate its impact. This reinforced confidence in its own economic management and encouraged nationalism. Thus, together with the shared history with Europe and the perception that the European Union is central to Scotland's development as an independent nation has created a willingness among Scots to embrace European integration. Moreover, European support for regional autonomy and civic nationalism coincides with the inclusive nature of Scottish nationalism. In short, globalisation has shaped Scottish nationalism, influenced its economic policies, and promoted regional autonomy (Boulter, n.d.).

As Fligstein et al. (2012) argue, identities can be both locally and nationally, which does not necessarily cause the two identities to conflict. In fact, they can coexist at the same time and often reinforce each other. This is particularly relevant in the case of Scottish independence, as its desire to remain part of the EU after Brexit plays a key role in reinforcing Scottish national sentiment. Indeed, despite the efforts European Union to foster a common identity, there was an emergence of secessionist movements in certain member States. This is one of the main causes of its disintegration, especially with the imminent departure of the United Kingdom. In this sense, Clavell (2017) explains that the stronger regional integration implies less national integration. This means that the integration of the region is prioritised over that of the state itself which should not be a problem in unified states with a single national identity. However, it might present a conflict in states with different national identities that do not identify themselves equally in the process of European regional integration — namely, the case of Scotland and England being part of the United Kingdom.

#### **4. The Meaning of Nationalism in the Context of Scotland**

The question of what constitutes a nation and nationalism has been a matter of debate among scholars. On the one hand, the concept of nation is acknowledged to be a complex one, which goes beyond the academic definitions which encompasses ethnicity, territory and culture. On the other hand, nationalism can be defined as a diverse phenomenon, encompassing both national and political sentiment and ideological movements. The foundation of nationalism is conceived as a movement which sought autonomy and cultural authenticity. Moreover, nationalism is aimed at securing freedom and the union of peoples in a shared identity, rooted in history and culture (Hutchinson & Smith, 1994).

The concept of the 'right to statehood' is relevant to understand nationalism, with a particular focus on the Scottish movement. As Joseph Nye from Harvard University defines it, this right refers to the ability of a people to form their own government and determine their own political future. Despite its clear principle, the practical application is not easily achieved. For a secession to occur two possible scenarios exist. It must either be preceded by a case of oppression directed towards a cultural or ethnic group, or achieved through negotiation, consensus, and legal agreement between the interested parties. In the case of Scotland, the British Prime Minister David Cameron was obliged to permit a referendum on Scottish independence in 2014 in order to ensure effective governance since the Scottish National Party (SNP) obtained a majority in the Scottish Parliament in 2011. However, the majority of constitutions do not permit independence, and in some countries, such as Spain and Turkey, its prohibition is explicitly stated in the constitution (Campanella, 2017).

### **5. The Scottish National Party and the Rise of Scottish Nationalism**

The Scottish National Party (SNP) was established in 1934 to advocate Scottish independence and the establishment of self-government. Throughout its history, it has experienced significant growth, from being a party with minimal support to becoming a dominant force in Scottish politics in the twenty-first century. During the 1970s, they defended a social democratic position to address the problems of the working classes. For that purpose, the basis for their economic case was the North Sea oil as a crucial revenue source to sustain the economic viability of a possible independent Scotland. Furthermore, it aimed to establish a collective bargaining system for Scotland with the Scottish Trades Union Congress in order to facilitate better representation of Scottish workers' interests and improve their working conditions. During the 2000s, the SNP experienced a significant rise in popularity due to the party's political agenda on the social and political transformations in Scotland during those years. Moreover, the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 allowed the party to flourish since factors such as secularization and de-industrialisation, weakened traditional parties. Thereby, the Scottish Conservative Party and particularly, the Labour Party, led the SNP to engage dissatisfied voters (Baldi, 2023).

## **6. The Scottish Devolution: from the Failure of the 1979 Referendum to the Restoration of the Scottish Parliament in 1999**

The first attempt to establish a devolved government in Scotland was in 1979. It was the result of a process which began in 1969 with the establishment of the Royal Commission on the Constitution which aimed to examine the structure of the United Kingdom (Scottish Parliament, n.d.). It emerged as consequence of the persistent demand from the Scottish population for greater autonomy in political affairs albeit within the framework of the United Kingdom rather than pursuing full independence, as the SNP claimed (Perman, 1980).

According to Houston (2009b), the decision of the Labour Party of holding a referendum on the devolution of a number of powers in 1979 was influenced by different aspects. Among them, SNP's pression exerted on the London government to ensure funds for employment and social infrastructures since the expenditure in Scotland had been twenty per cent higher than the average in England. However, the referendum did not fulfil the SNP'S desires of devolution as it failed to reach the required support. The reason was that the Scotland Act 1978, enacted by the Labour Government, stipulated that a minimum of forty percent of the total electorate must vote in favour of devolution for its implementation. (Scottish Parliament, n.d.). This was highly improbable given the general disengagement in the electoral processes in the United Kingdom, observed in the historically low voter turnout in the country. Nevertheless, the devolution of authority formally took place in 1999 in light of different facts. One of the determinant factors was the dissatisfaction felt by the Scottish population with the economic and social policies implemented by Margaret Thatcher and John Major. For instance, events such as the 1984 miner's strike against the closure of the mines paved the way for the privatisation of more industries and public services (Morris, 2024). Moreover, the poll tax (or community charge), is considered the largest mistake of Thatcher's government, as it provoked protests and divisions even within the Conservative Party. Although it was originally designed to improve the funding of the local council, it resulted in civil disorder and riots since it imposed a flat rate on every adult, regardless of income or wealth which disproportionately affected those with the lowest incomes. Nevertheless, it was the unexpected opposition of conservative supporters which affected the perceptions of the central government and fuelled public mistrust (Higham, 2016).

Furthermore, the Scottish population felt deprived of their resources such as oil or major companies including United Distillers. Besides, the open market vanquished the remaining Scottish industry which generated fifteen per cent of unemployment. Hence, the confidence in the government was decreasing. It was considered that dealing with multinational capital and the European Community (now the EU) was the best alternative as Ireland had done previously (Houston, 2009b).

## **7. The Referendum for Independence 2014**

### **7.1. Political Antecedents**

Based on Mullen's analysis (2014), the 2014 Scottish independence referendum and the preceding process are essential to comprehend the evolution of the nationalist movement in Scotland. Over the course of several decades, several political and social events had an impact on how the position of Scotland within the United Kingdom is perceived. These events include the first parliamentary seats won by nationalist parties in the 1960s and the Scotland Act of 1998. These events not only did reinforce Scottish identity but also enhanced the independence movement, thus paving the way for the 2014 referendum. The SNP's victory in the Scottish Parliament in 2007 and the creation of a minority rule facilitated the debate about Scotland's future. Eventually, the Calman Commission was created, and the Scotland Act 2012 was passed, strengthening the desire for independence in Scotland and laying the groundwork for the referendum in 2014. Furthermore, the unpopularity of the central government politics, especially during Margaret Thatcher's government (1979-1990) aggravated the unrest of the Scottish population. Most Scots perceived that the central government implemented politics that they had not voted for, contributing to the decline in support for the Conservative Party in Scotland and raising the support for Scottish nationalism. These factors, together with Scotland's growing political autonomy since the 1999 elections, have reinforced Scots' preference for their national identity over their British one.

These facts had a long-lasting impact in the whole British politics, resulting in debates on the devolution of power and balance, and the relationship between the different nations that constitute the UK. All in all, the path towards the 2014 referendum has been characterised by profound shifts in the current political and social landscape.

## **7.2. Exploring the 2014 Scottish Referendum Political Campaigns and their Influence on Public Opinion**

Political campaigns play a major role in referendums since they are the primary means by which for and against arguments transmitted to the electorate. Economy perceptions are of crucial importance both personally and nationally. Besides, trusting the political system and institutions are vital to determine voting behaviour. Hence, a campaign can influence the vote by providing information, influencing the opinions of undecided voters, and shaping the final voting decision. In addition, exposure to mass media, such as public television and partisan press, had a significant impact on opinion formation and voting decisions (Semetko & de Vreese, 2004). The role of social media in political campaigns is significant and has grown over time. The strategic use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and mobile apps can be an effective tool for reaching voters, mobilising support, and disseminating targeted messages. Namely, the strategy is known as 'nanotargeting' which consists of targeting specific messages to particular audiences in social media (Smith, 2011). In this way, the strategic use of social media platforms would have been a key tool in the 2014 Scottish referendum campaign.

Neira Cortizas & Ferreira Antunes (2016) explain that the campaign was primarily fragmented into those parties in favour of independence and those in favour of union. On the one hand, the "Yes" campaign, led by the SNP (Scottish National Party) under Alex Salmon advocated for independence on the grounds of economic and social benefits, maintaining the crown and the pound sterling. On the other hand, the campaign 'Better Together', was formed by the Conservative, Labour, and Liberal Democrat parties. The proposal was to enhance the Scottish Parliament's authority in matters of finance and social welfare while reserving certain powers to the UK Parliament. Thus, the question in the 2014 Scottish referendum did not merely involve maintaining the status quo or seeking political independence but also raised questions about granting additional fiscal and welfare powers.

The 'Yes campaign' conducted its strategy by promoting the image of Scotland as an independent and economically solid country, which was perceived as a positive movement by the population. Nevertheless, the 'Better Together Campaign', focused on the uncertainty and negative consequences of voting in favour of independence (Foley et al., 2022b). The main arguments for both sides, addressed issues such as EU membership, with the 'Yes' expressed optimism about the possibility of remaining in the EU, while the

'No' side raised concerns about potential barriers to rejoining the EU. Moreover, the 'Better Together' Campaign argued that an independent Scotland might face difficulties in keeping the pound sterling, whereas the 'Yes' campaign suggested the negotiation of a currency union with the rest of the United Kingdom, to continue using the pound sterling. On the issue of the North Sea oil, the 'Yes' side advocated for the control over oil revenues as a significant benefit of independence. However, the 'No' side argued that the potential decline in oil revenues could weaken Scotland's economic position. Finally, on the issue of pensions, the 'Yes' campaign promised to maintain and improve benefits, while the 'No' campaign warned of the risks and uncertainties involved in maintain the system of the current if Scotland became independent (Neira Cortizas & Ferreira Antunes, 2016).

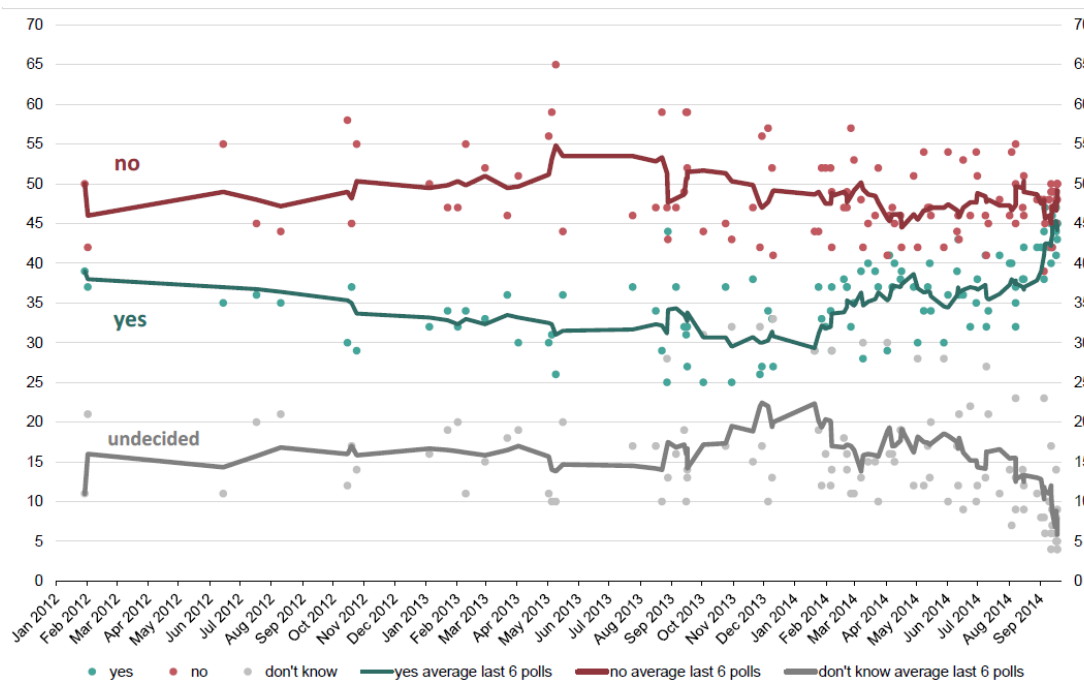
According to Neira Cortizas & Ferreira Antunes, as the Referendum date approached, the 'Yes' campaign gained significant strength, at times even overlapping the 'No' in the opinion polls. The opposition named the Better Together campaign 'Project Fear' due to its negative approach. Its strategy of spreading fear about the political and economic impacts among the undecided voters, generated a negative impression of the campaign. Meanwhile, the SNP led a more inspiring campaign for Scottish independence. As a result, the pro-union forces made a more proactive intervention at the last moment, promising a major devolution of powers in case Scotland remained part of the United Kingdom. Moreover, an emotional speech by the then Prime Minister Gordon Brown revitalised the campaign. It addressed an alternative conception of Scottish identity and the advocacy for Scotland's interests within the United Kingdom (Simpkins, 2015). On the day of the referendum, the Scottish electorate voted to remain part of the United Kingdom. This outcome led to the resignation of Alex Salmond and the establishment of the Smith Commission to discuss the devolution of powers to the Scottish Parliament (Neira Cortizas & Ferreira Antunes, 2016)

### **7.3. Opinion Polls on the 2014 Referendum**

Based on the analyses conducted by McInnes et al. (2014) it can be understood how voting trends evolved over two years with regard to a possible referendum on Scottish independence. For that purpose, a series of surveys were conducted by different research companies from January 2012 to September 2014. The participants were asked whether they would vote in favour of Scotland becoming an independent country. Results are represented by Figure 1 (Gillespie et al., 2013).

**Figure 1**

*Scottish Independence Referendum Opinion Poll Findings, January 2012 to September 2014*



*Note:* the figure represents the evolution of voting trends among Scottish population from January 2012 to September 2014. The rolling average of the polls conducted between that period of time has been employed. Each dot represents the set of answers collected from a specific survey. Retrieved from *Scottish Independence Referendum 2014* (p.18), 2014, by McInnes et al., House of Commons Library.

These polls were a crucial element to comprehend how the Scottish population perceptions and preferences evolved during the period until the referendum was held. This provided insight into how events, campaigns and political discourses influenced people's attitudes towards the question of independence.

The voting trends on Scottish Independence experienced considerable fluctuations from 2012 to 2014. It is observed that during 2012 there was a clear tendency of 'No' responses, consistently ranging between approximately 46% and 50%. The 'Yes' responses indicate a significant decrease between January and December 2012, from 38% to values below 35%. Moreover, the number of undecided respondents increased from 11% to roughly 16%. However, it can be noticed that from January 2014 onwards, these values were more notable, widening the gap between the 'No' and 'Yes' responses. In April 2013, the 'No' responses reached a peak of nearly 55% in contrast to the 'Yes'

responses, which stood at approximately 31%. In September 2013, the number of 'No' respondents decreased, and these votes were distributed between the 'Yes' and undecided options. It is noteworthy that during January and February 2014, there was a 5% decrease in the number of respondents favouring the 'Yes' option. Nevertheless, the number of undecided respondents increased considerably. From March onwards, there was a decline in the number of undecided responses, and it was reflected in the increment of 'Yes' answers. In contrast, the frequency of 'No' responses diminished, leading to a narrowing of the gap between the two options. When analysing the responses of 2013, the proportion of 'No' responses was approximately 50%, 'Yes' responses accounted for 45%, and the proportion of undecided responses decreased to nearly 5%. It is important to contemplate the political context in which the polls were conducted given it was a period of intense debate and political mobilization.

Despite the evolution of polls indicating an increase in support for independence, the latest polls conducted before the referendum revealed a majority against independence.

#### **7.4. 2014 Referendum Negotiations**

The negotiations between the Scottish Government under Alex and Salmon and David Cameron's UK government, concluded with the Edinburgh Agreement on 15 October 2012. The covenant established a single-question referendum on Scottish Independence on 18 September 2014. The Scottish National Party (SNP) aim was to include a second question on an improved form of devolution, namely 'devo-max'<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless, David Cameron, determined that the referendum should be based on a single question: 'Should Scotland be an independent country?'

The decision to restrict the referendum to a single question was a political strategy employed by Cameron. In this manner, the government would prevent voters from having the option of an enhanced form of devolution, which could have split the vote in favour of independence. Although the polls suggested that 'devo max' was supported by the majority of the electorate in Scotland, Cameron excluded that alternative forcing the voters to choose between full independence or maintaining the status quo. Therefore, the

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<sup>1</sup> Devo-max is a scenario in which full fiscal autonomy would be granted to Scotland as an alternative to full independence.



fact that this question was posed in binary terms was perceived as limiting the preferences of the majority of voters (Painter et al., 2014).

### 7.5. Referendum Results

Finally, in the Referendum on Scottish Independence held on 18 September 2014, the proposal 'Should Scotland be an independent country?' was rejected by a margin of 10.6%. The result was 55.3% against independence and 44.7% in favour. The outcome indicated 55.3% against independence and 44.7% in favour. (McInnes et al., 2014). See chart 1 and Figure 2.

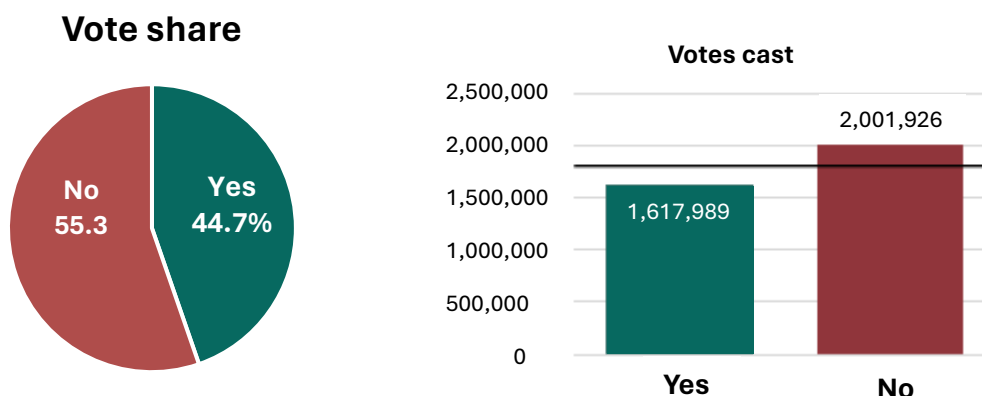
The analysis of the referendum outcome by regions provides a detailed insight into the electoral preferences across different geographical areas of Scotland. First, it is noteworthy that the participation rate standing at 84.5%, signifies a solid engagement and commitment from the electorate throughout the process. When observing regional differences, there are noticeable differences in the voting pattern (Gillespie et al., 2013).

**Table 1**  
*Scottish Independence Referendum 2014 Results*

<b>National result</b>		
	<b>Votes cast</b>	<b>% of valid votes</b>
<b>Yes</b>	1,617,989	44.7%
<b>No</b>	2,001,926	55.3%
<b>Winning margin for 'No'</b>	383,937	10.6%
<b>Total valid votes</b>	3,619,915	100.0%
<b>Rejected papers</b>	4,429	
<b>Total of votes cast</b>	3,623,344	

*Note:* the figure represents the evolution of voting trends among Scottish population from January 2012 to September 2014. The rolling average of the polls conducted between that period of time has been used. Each dot represents the set of answers collected from a specific survey. Adapted from *Scottish Independence Referendum 2014*, (p.3), by McInnes et al., House of Commons Library.

**Figure 2**  
*Scottish Independence Referendum 2014 Results*

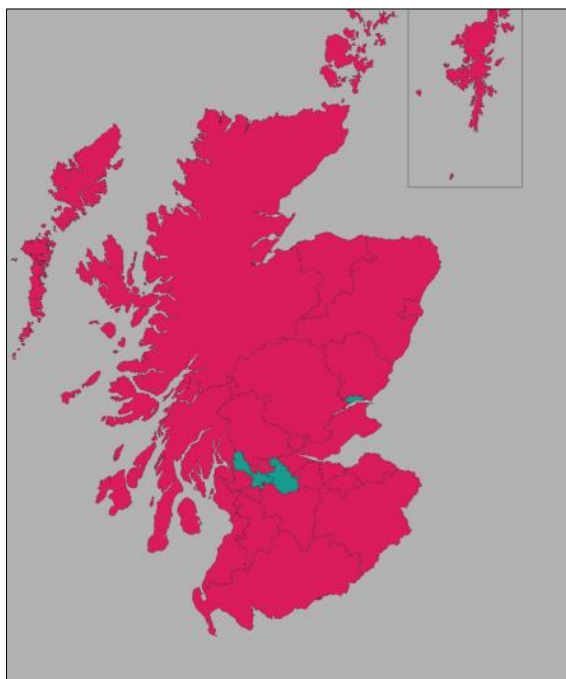


*Note:* the figure represents the evolution of voting trends among Scottish population from January 2012 to September 2014. The rolling average of the polls conducted between that period of time has been employed. Each dot represents the set of answers collected from a specific survey. Adapted from *Scottish Independence Referendum 2014*, (p.3), by McInnes et al., House of Commons Library.

#### 7.6. Regional Perspectives: Voting Patterns in the 2014 Referendum

Regarding the decision on independence, the majority of areas, including Edinburgh, voted 'no' with a significant margin of 61.1%. This tendency against independence was particularly pronounced in the northernmost regions of Scotland, for example, Orkney and Shetland. Moreover, the border areas with England, such as the Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway the vote against independence exceeded 65%. Nonetheless, some areas demonstrated an important support of 'yes'. Dundee, West Dunbartonshire, Glasgow and North Lanarkshire voted in favour of independence, albeit with narrower percentages, ranging from 51.1% to 57.3%. The distribution of vote share across Scotland is represented in Figure 3.

**Figure 3**  
*Referendum 2014 Voting Results by Council*



	Votes	%
NO	2,001,926	55.30
YES	1,617,989	44.70

Note: from *Scottish independence referendum – Results*, by BCC News  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/events/scotland-decides/results>

**Table 2**  
*Referendum 2014 Voting Results by Council*

COUNCIL	ELECTORATE	YES	NO
Dundee City	118,729	57.35%	42.65%
West Dunbartonshire	71,109	53.96%	46.04%
Glasgow	486,219	53.49%	46.51%
North Lanarkshire	268,704	51.07%	48.93%

Note: from *Scottish independence referendum – Results*, by BCC News  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/events/scotland-decides/results>

Overall, the analysis by area reveals the geographical division of electoral preferences, with rural and border areas tending to vote 'No' and urban areas tending to vote 'Yes'. Thus, the political dynamics in the different areas are complex and therefore, it is crucial to consider the local context when interpreting the results.

The following analysis based on Ayres (2014) explains the vote variations according to regional characteristics. To this end, different regional data used by the author, such as benefit claimant rates, age and birthplace will be examined.

Considering economic factors, there is a positive relationship between the rates of unemployment benefit recipients and the "Yes" vote. This can be seen in the Glasgow City, West Dunbartonshire, Dundee City and North Lanarkshire areas where there is a majority 'Yes' vote. See Chart 2.

Additionally, age serves as a determinant demographic factor that can be related to the support for a "Yes" vote. This is attributed to the fact that those areas with a higher proportion of residents aged 65 and above, typically exhibit lower support for independence. In contrast, the four areas where "Yes" secured a majority correspond to the lowest percentages of the population aged 65 and over. These are the cities of Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and West Lothian ("Building a new Scotland", n.d.).

According to Ayres, there is a negative correlation between the proportion of the population born in other parts of the UK and the "Yes" vote in the referendum. This suggests that those areas with a higher proportion of population born outside of Scotland tend to show less support for Scottish independence. For instance, the Scottish Borders Dumfries and Galloway regions, share a border with England and have a considerable proportion of individuals born in other parts of the UK.

After considering the demographic factors mentioned above, it can be concluded that geographical location can significantly influence voting preferences due to a series of variables such as demography, and economic and social reasons. As described above, urban areas might have different independence perspectives in comparison to rural areas. This disparity accounts for differences in the demographic structure and unemployment rates. Additionally, the population born in other parts of the United Kingdom and the historical connections with Scottish independence are crucial

variables. Likewise, border areas might have a distinctive sensitivity towards national sovereignty due to their geographic proximity to England. Hence, understanding the local context is essential to interpreting and comprehending voting patterns in Scotland.

## **8. The Power Dynamics between Scotland's Political Parties in the Aftermath of the 2014 Referendum**

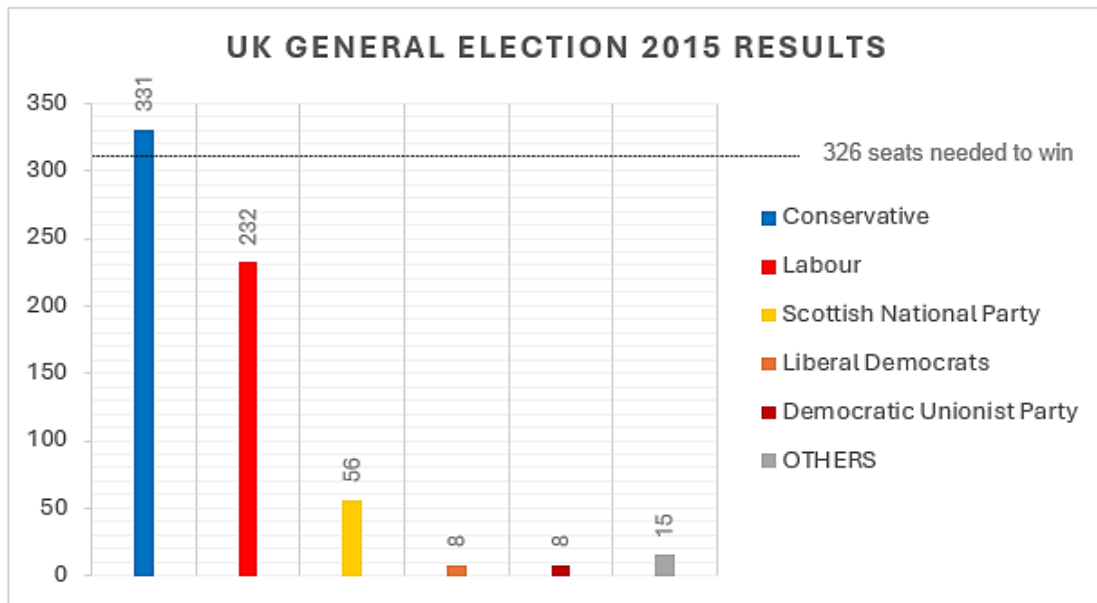
### **8.1. United Kingdom General Election 2015**

The United Kingdom General Election 2015 was a crucial moment for Scottish Politics. The Scottish Labour Party faced a pivotal challenge since it lost most of its seats in the Parliament contrasting with the rising popularity of the Scottish National Party.

This event constituted a turning point for the party within the dynamics of Scottish politics in the UK Parliament (Foley et al., 2022a). This section aims to explore the evolution of the political landscape in Scotland in the aftermath of the 2014 referendum, both in terms of its position within the UK and its internal development. It will analyse the 2015 general election's impact on the political landscape of Scotland and the trajectory of Scottish Labour Party.

As it can be observed in Figure 4, the United Kingdom General Election 2015, resulted in a significant victory for the Conservative Party, which secured an absolute majority. The Conservatives obtained 331 seats, followed by the Labour Party with 232 seats and the Scottish National Party (SNP) with 56 seats.

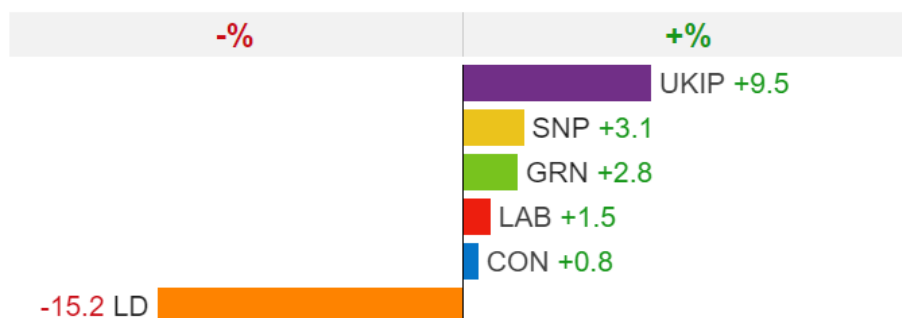
**Figure 4**  
UK General Election 2015 Results



Note: the figure represents the number of seats obtained by each political party in the UK General Election 2015. Adapted from *Election 2015*, by BCC News (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election/2015/results>).

The Labour Party garnered the second-highest vote percentage at 30.4% while the Conservative percentage stood at 36.9%. The proportion of votes obtained increased by merely 1.5% compared to the previous election in 2010. See Figure 5.

**Figure 5**  
Evolution of Party Vote Shares: UK General Election 2010-2015

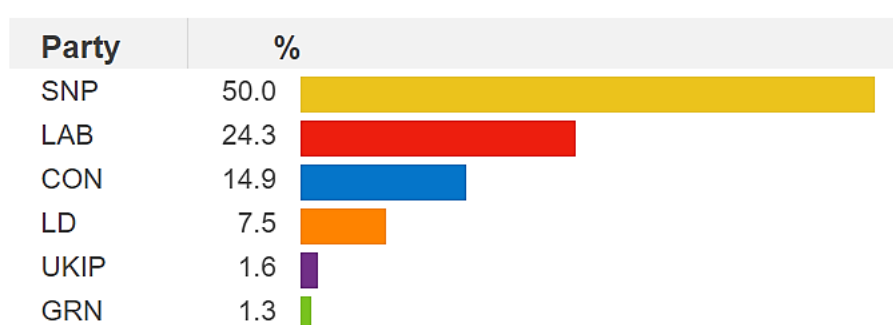


Note: the figure represent the share of votes gained by each party since 2010 in the 2015 UK General Election. Adapted from *Election 2015*, by BCC News (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election/2015/results>).

When analysing the SNP's percentage growth, it is observed that the party experienced an increase of 3.1%. While this increase might not seem substantial at first glance, it evidences almost the total dominance of the SNP in Scottish politics in this election. The SNP obtained 56 of the 59 seats in Scotland, representing a 50% share of the vote in Scotland. Despite being the second most voted party across the UK, the Labour Party only secured 24.3% of the vote. This reflects strong support from the Scottish electorate for the SNP and its policies. (BBC News, 2015). See Figure 6 and 7.

**Figure 6**

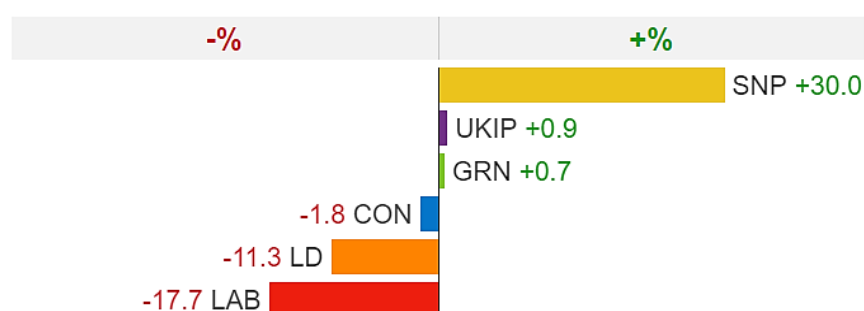
*Party Vote Share Breakdown in the 2015 UK General Election in Scotland*



Note: the figure represents the vote share obtained by each political party in the UK General Election 2015 in Scotland. Adapted from *Election 2015*, by BCC News (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election/2015/results>).

**Figure 7**

*Seat Distribution of Political Parties in the UK General Election 2015*



Note: The figure represents the vote share, indicating both the percentage of votes gained and lost by each party in the UK General Election 2015. Adapted from *Election 2015*, by BCC News (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election/2015/results>).

In essence, the 2015 United Kingdom general election constituted a pivotal moment in the history of Scottish politics. Although the party secured the second-highest percentage of votes overall, its share of the vote in Scotland only saw a marginal increase compared to previous elections as observed in Figure 7. In contrast, the Scottish National Party demonstrated a notable increase in its electoral influence and popularity. These events signified a turning point in the Scottish political landscape as a result of the substantial ongoing changes in the country.

## **9. Towards Brexit**

The 2014 referendum in Scotland established a significant precedent in British politics, creating a crucial context for the path towards Brexit.

According to Leigh & Marshall (2017), Brexit was the consequence of a series of decisions and events that took place in the United Kingdom. The authors assert that the completion of the process cannot be considered inevitable. One of the events that influenced the outcome was the promise on the in-out referendum in the electoral manifesto of the Conservative Party in 2015. Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron delivered a significant speech outlining his vision and plans to address concerns and reform the United Kingdom's relationship with the European Union. However, what originally was an attempt to mitigate tensions of Eurosceptics, resulted in a contentious and polarised debate. This paved the way for a majority of voters in favour of leaving the European Union in the Referendum 2016.

Subsequently, on 13 January 2013, the Prime Minister announced that a referendum on the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union (EU) would be held. Cameron argued that after 40 years since the referendum conducted in 1975 on the membership of the European Economic Community (EEC), it was considered appropriate to allow the British people to express their views again. Moreover, it is important to note the fact that Cameron had successfully led previous referendums such as the 2011 referendum on electoral reform (in which the public rejected the adoption of an alternative voting system) and the 2014 referendum on Scottish independence (in which the majority voted for Scotland to remain part of the UK). Those events served to reinforce his conviction that he could achieve the UK's permanence in the EU (Dorey, 2021).



Moreover, the 2015 Conservative election manifesto on Brexit reflected their commitment to conduct a Brexit referendum in 2016 and fulfil the outcome. The Conservatives promised to negotiate a withdrawal agreement with the European Union that would protect the interests of the United Kingdom and its new trading relationship. They also agreed to subject the final agreement to a vote in Parliament and to complete the transition period by December 2020 at the latest. Furthermore, they reaffirmed their intention not to participate in the EU customs union and to pursue independent trade agreements with other countries (Allen & Bara, 2017).

Between 15 April and 22 June 2016, the Leave Campaign and the Remain Campaign contributed to the outcome of the referendum by presenting opposing arguments that influenced public opinion. The focus of the Leave Campaign was recovering the control of the economy, immigration, security, and democracy. For them, the EU was considered to be an obstacle and it was argued that the financial resources for the UE could be utilised to improve other matters such as the National Health Service (NHS), agriculture or addressing unemployment. Conversely, the Remain Campaign, asserted that the membership of the European Union provided considerable benefits in different aspects. For instance, the Single European Market was considered to be a significant advantage for the United Kingdom, as it has the potential to enhance exports and trade. Moreover, they argued the uncertainty due to the absence of strategies which could mitigate the potential negative effects of Brexit (Gherghina & O'Malley, 2019).

Overall, it can be said that Brexit was the result of a process which had different implications. It is important to contemplate facts such as the 2015 Conservative electoral manifesto which expressed the commitment to hold a referendum on the membership in the EU. Moreover, the outcome of previous referendums, particularly the Scottish Referendum in 2014 resulted in the call for the Brexit referendum in 2016.

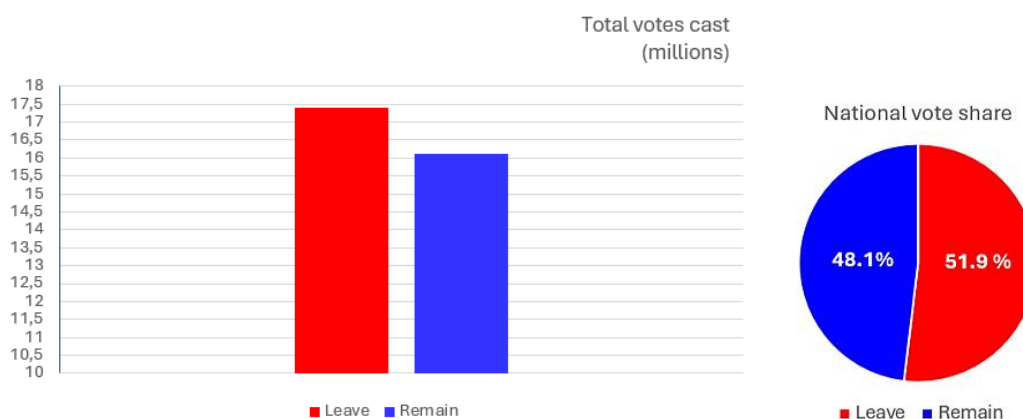
## **10. The Brexit Outcome and its Implications for Scotland**

The following will focus on the analysis of the results of the Brexit referendum in June 2016. First, it will exhibit the distribution of votes and specifically, its importance for Scotland. Moreover, it will study how the decision of the United Kingdom to abandon the EU affected the political and economic landscape of Scotland, where votes cast expressed support for the United Kingdom's membership within the European Union.

This fact reflects the strong European sense of identity that prevails in Scotland and the implications of significant challenges for the future of the country.

In the Referendum hold on 23 June 2016 the population of United Kingdom were asked whether they wished to withdraw from the European Union or remain a member. The outcome represented a milestone in the history of the nation with 17.4 million votes (51.9%) in favour of leaving the European Union and 16.1 million votes (48.1%) in favour of remaining. See Figure 8. Nevertheless, the votes were not evenly distributed across the land. Whereas the majority of votes supporting withdrawal originated from England and Wales, the prevailing position in Scotland and Northern Ireland was in favour of remaining (Uberoi, 2016). See Chart 2 and Figure 9.

**Figure 8**  
*Brexit Referendum Result 2016*



*Note: the figure represents the results of the Brexit Referendum. The graph on the left shows the percentage of votes cast. The graph shows the number of total votes for and against. Edited from *European Union Referendum 2016* (p.5), by Uberoi, 2016, House of Commons Library.*

## Chart 2

### *Proportion of the Votes across the UK*

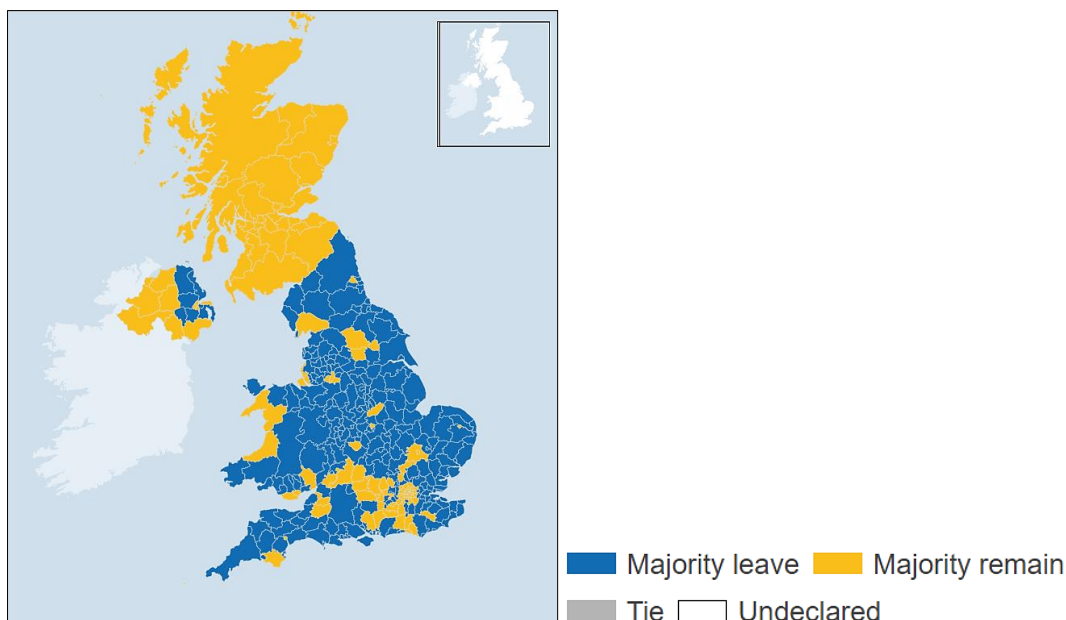
	Leave (%)	Remain (%)
England	53.4%	46.6%
Wales	52.5%	47.5%
Scotland	38.0%	62.0%
Northern Ireland	44.2%	55.8%

Note: the chart represents the distribution of votes across the UK.

Retrieved from *European Union Referendum 2016* (p.5), by Uberoi (p.5), by 2016, House of Commons Library.

## Figure 9

### *Proportion of the Votes across the UK*



Note: the figure represents a map of the distribution of votes across UK. Retrieved from *UK votes to leave the EU*, by BBC News, 2016

([https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/politics/eu\\_referendum/results](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/politics/eu_referendum/results)).

As previously demonstrated, Scotland exhibited a contrary tendency regarding Brexit in comparison to the rest of the United Kingdom. The referendum results indicated that the majority of the Scottish population voted in favour of remaining in the European Union, whereas the general result of the United Kingdom was to abandon the European entity.

Consequently, Brexit revived the debate over Scotland's position within the UK, raising the possibility of a reconsideration of the 2014 referendum. Uncertainty about Scotland's future outside the European Union and its relationship with the United Kingdom has presented major challenges. For instance, the possibility of Scotland being an independent nation and a member of the EU and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). In addition, this could raise concerns about the emergence of a 'hard border'<sup>2</sup> between Scotland and England, which would probably make independence more challenging. The following section will examine these factors and their impact on public opinion regarding Scottish independence after the Brexit Referendum (McEwen, 2018).

### **10.1. Scotland in the Aftermath: Confronting Brexit's Impact**

The UK's exit from the European Union on 31 January 2020 marked a historic milestone. This followed the ratification of the withdrawal agreement by the EU and the European Parliament, with lasting implications ("Consilium", n.d.).

The most relevant repercussions for Scotland following its exit from the EU according to Angus Robertson, Cabinet Secretary for Constitution are examined. In his view, it has constrained economic growth, restricted trade, increased the cost of food and reduced opportunities for Scotland's young people, published by The Scottish Government (2023). Scotland faces an expected loss of approximately £3 billion in public revenue annually. This compromises its capital and disrupts the funding for essential public services. Moreover, inflation has reached its highest level in 45 years which affects food costs and Brexit is one of the main causes of this, representing approximately one-third of the overall impact. Consequently, this has a direct impact on Scottish consumers, who deal with the effects of a cost-of-living crisis due to rampant inflation. Trade has also been severely affected. Around forty-four per cent of Scottish businesses identified Brexit as the primary obstacle to participating in international trade. Trade barriers have impeded the import and export of goods from the EU, thereby limiting Scottish businesses to operate efficiently with the international market. Furthermore, Brexit has directly affected workforce and labour mobility in Scotland and as a result, there is a shortage of personnel in vital sectors such as the National Health System (NHS), agriculture and hospitality industry. Thus, the shortfalls not only imperil the ability of these industries to meet demand but also limit employment opportunities for Scottish citizens. Furthermore,

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<sup>2</sup> In the context of Brexit 'hard border' refers to a physical frontier with custom controls and immigration between United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

regarding the academic and research fields, Scotland has lost access to important support funds, such as the EU's Horizon research programme and the Common Agricultural Policy. This has had a negative impact on sectors such as scientific research and agriculture, depriving Scotland of resources and development opportunities.

Given the above, Brexit has generated a complex and profound effect on Scotland, in terms of its economy, society and international relations. Thus, there is an evident necessity to implement strategies to facilitate recovery and growth.

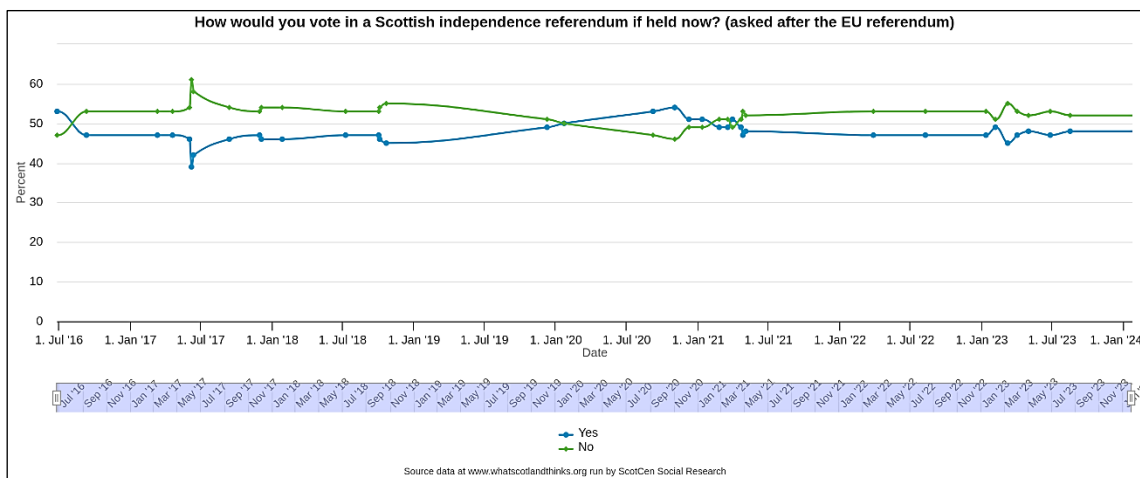
### **10.2. Evolution of Sentiment: Scottish Independence Pre and Post-Brexit**

Curtice (2021), examined three opinion polls published at the beginning of 2021 on how Scottish population would vote in a future referendum on Independence following United Kingdom withdrawal from the European Union. The findings indicate a continuous debate and an evolution concerning independence attitudes in Scotland.

Curtice affirms that the polls conducted since Brexit indicated a preference for Scottish independence. Although not all the increase in support for independence can be attributed to Brexit, polls indicated that those who voted in favour to remain in the EU in 2016 were more likely to support independence. Therefore, the connection between support for independence and the position on Brexit reflects the persistent division in Scottish society. Furthermore, Brexit has fuelled the perception that an independent Scotland would have handled the COVID-19 pandemic more effectively. This fact also influenced the support for Independence even among those who voted against independence in 2014. Figure 4 depicts the peak of support for independence during the 2020 year of the pandemic.

**Figure 10**

*Survey on Scottish independence after Brexit Referendum until 2014*



*Note:* The graphic represents the evolution of attitudes of Scottish population towards independence from July 2016 to January 2024. The data are based on surveys conducted by the opinion polling company Survey. Retrieved from *How would you vote in a Scottish independence referendum if held now? (asked after the EU referendum) in what Scotland thinks, by Scottish Centre for Social Research, 2024, (<https://www.whatscotlandthinks.org/questions/how-would-you-vote-in-the-in-a-scottish-independence-referendum-if-held-now-ask/?removed=removed&pollster%5B%5D=survation>).*

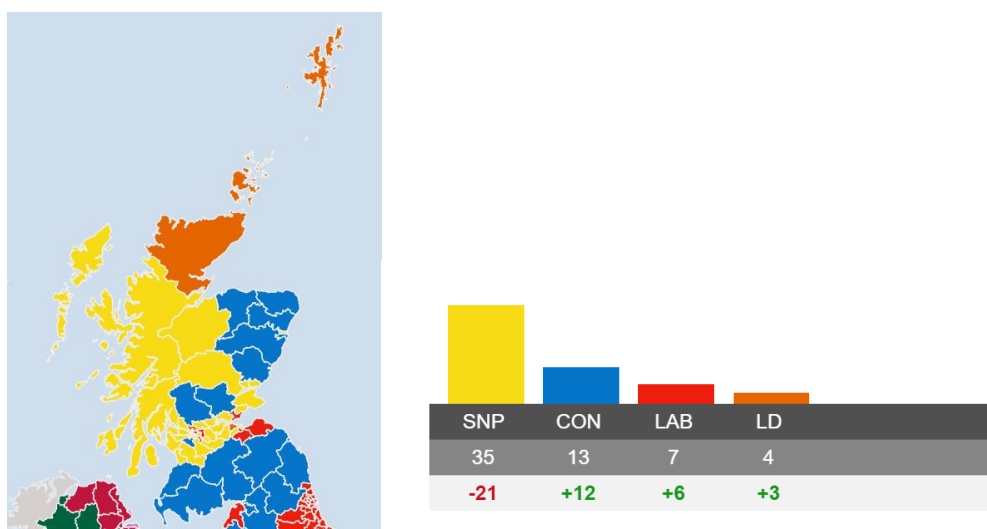
In 2017, the Prime Minister, Theresa May, called an early general election with the purpose of consolidating their majority in the parliament and strengthen their authority in order to negotiate terms for the withdrawal of the European Union. This decision took place within a context in which the government faced a narrow majority in the House of Commons which complicated the approval of the legislation. It was argued that it was the appropriate moment to establish a government to secure the optimal Brexit deal for the UK and end the post-referendum uncertainty (Kavanagh, 2018).

Figure 10 illustrates the dynamics of support for independence after the Brexit referendum. For this analysis, it was considered thirty-nine polls conducted by the polling company Survey. Given the EU referendum results in Scotland, it was expected an increase in support for independence. However, it was noted that in 2017, there was a notable decline in the level of support for independence. The shift in attitudes is evidenced in the 2017 UK General Election. The SNP lost 21 seats which is translated in the 13.1% of the vote share (see Figure 11), whereas the Conservative Party garnered 12 seats. This

was the result of the Conservative campaign which adopted a national and united message. This could have attracted Scottish voters concerned by the future of United Kingdom and Scotland after Brexit. Furthermore, the Scottish Labour Party lead a more active campaign, offering an appealing alternative for Scottish electorate. Consequently, the Scottish Labour Party also augmented its share vote by 2.8 per cent and additionally secured six seats These shifts in the Scottish political landscape suggest a significant impact of Brexit on regional politics which put an end to SNP dominance and established a new multi-party political system (Simpkins, 2018) (Kavanagh, 2018).

**Figure 11**

*UK General Election Results 2017 in Scotland*



Note: this figure represents the distribution of votes in Scotland in the UK General Election in Scotland. Retrieved from *Results of the 2017 General Election*, by BBC News, (2017),

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election/2017/results/scotland>

From 2018 onwards, there was a notable increase in support for independence, rising from 43% in 2018 to its peak of 53% in August 2020. According to Macfarlane's report (2021), the data revealed that respondents who judged the handling of the pandemic positively revealed a higher sympathy for the SNP and Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon. The handling of the COVID-19 pandemic played a crucial role in enhancing the electoral support for the Scottish National Party (SNP) in Scotland. There was a notable contrast between the favourable perception of the pandemic management by the Scottish Government under Nicola Sturgeon and that of the UK government under

Boris Johnson. This disparity strengthened the loyalty towards SNP among those who already supported it and also, brought new sympathisers. Therefore, it can be concluded that the highest point of support of independence was during 2020 in Scotland, primarily due to the efficient management of the Scottish government during the pandemic.

Nevertheless, this was followed by a strong sharp decline in support for independence in May 2022. Kate Forbes, Finance Secretary highlighted the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. She asserted that the human and economic effects were reflected in the energy costs and supply chain restrictions affecting countries all over the world. In light of these circumstances, the United Kingdom is experiencing the highest inflation among G7 countries, which is exacerbated by Brexit. Consequently, a Cost-of-Living Crisis has arisen in Scotland. For that reason, it has been interpreted that there is a connection between both events since the international situation and geopolitical tensions can influence the preferences and political perception of a region (“Resource Spending Review Framework: Ministerial statement”, n.d.).

Moreover, following Macdonald (2022), the cost-of-living crisis caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine also affected the Scottish population. This critical situation led the Scottish citizens to focus their concerns on other issues such as security and stability. For that reason, the measures adopted by the UK government might have influenced the preference for the Scottish population to remain in the union. Among these measures, it was implemented a package of support which included direct payments for subsidizing energy bills. Additionally, an increase in pension payments for was announced that year. Furthermore, financial support was offered to over six million disabled people through a one-off payment of £150 in September. For businesses, it was established that for a period of six months, they would be required to pay the same energy prices as households (“The Scottish Government”, 2022). Thus, these events might have temporarily diverted attention away from the issue of independence and possibly fostered the preference for remaining in the union.

Since June 2022, there was peak of support for independence that occurred in October 2022, with 49% being surpassed by Unionism by 2% which can be associated with the fact that SNP initiated a stronger political mobilisation. Sturgeon addressed the



crisis declaring that the Scottish people were suffering the impacts of a Brexit that they had not voted for. For instance, she mentioned the soaring cost of living, low growth and increasing inequality or the constrained public finances. Furthermore, Sturgeon stressed that Scotland's status without independence was aggravating daily economic and social problems, and she raised the question of whether Scotland should remain bound to the UK's economic model. The Scottish Prime minister also argued that economic and social outcomes were poor and would worsen after leaving the European Union. It was also claimed that Scotland was rich in resources from which it could only benefit as a fully independent country. In essence, Sturgeon advocated for an alternative and more optimal vision for Scotland which was focused on independence as a means to achieve greater prosperity and fairness (“Building a new Scotland”, n.d).

Falling support for Scottish Independence was evident in late 2022 and 2023 as a result of some events. First, Sturgeon’s failed attempt to call a new referendum on 19 October 2023. The Supreme Court determined that the Prime Minister was not legally permitted to call the referendum. As a result, disillusionment and discouragement was spread among supporters of the independence movement. This was a significant setback which not only did stop the SNP's plans but also exposed the legal and political constraints that the independence movement faced. Moreover, the internal divisions within the ‘Yes’ movement were exacerbated after Sturgeon's departure. The debates over strategy and leadership could have undermined the cohesion and impetus of the movement. Furthermore, it was perceived that the new leader Humza Yousaf failed to provide clear and effective direction which would contribute to the sense of stagnation and insufficient progress in the independence cause. Finally, uncertainty over Scotland's political and economic future, with no definite strategy for independence, may have been a factor in the decline in support among the population during that period (Cochrane, 2023).

Regarding Nicola Sturgeon's resignation, certain events are significant to mention. Crisis issues such as transgender rights, waiting times in emergencies or school strikes have been interpreted as determining factors for her resignation. It represented a major drawback for the Scottish independence campaign, given that she was its principal supporter for almost a decade. Her successor confronted the demanding responsibility of rebuilding and reshaping the independence movement. It was anticipated that in the absence of Sturgeon, support for independence would experience an important decline

(Carrel & Brooks, 2023). In addition to the fact that her proposal to call a new referendum in 2023 was rejected, she was involved in a controversy over the new law aimed at defending the rights of the LGBT+ movement. The objective of the initiative was to facilitate the process of gender self-determination for transgender individuals from the age of 16. Nevertheless, the UK government prevented it from coming into force, marking the first time it invoked its veto power over a Scots law. Furthermore, the proposal was opposed by members of the SNP, which suggested that the party experienced internal instability (Cordero, 2023). It can be concluded that the resignation of Nicola Sturgeon and the controversy over transgender rights, which affected her credibility within the SNP, were reflected in the decline in support for independence during this period.

In August 2023, the independence movement experienced another surge which can be attributed to the new strategy designed by the First Minister, Humza Yousaf, known as 'Building a New Scotland'. According to his proposal, the Scottish Government would favour the creation of a constitution which would have several fundamental aspects. Firstly, it aimed for the recognition of the National Health Service (NHS) in Scotland, guaranteeing the right of free a system, adapted to each individual's need. In addition, it proposed a strengthening of human rights and equality protection, ensuring the right to an adequate standard of living. Another fundamental point was the inclusion of the right of workers to take industrial action in their own defence. Finally, a constitutional ban on the presence of nuclear weapons on Scottish soil reflected Scotland's commitment to peace and security in the region. The new proposals were satisfying pro-independence supporters. Yousaf's words showed his commitment ("Proposals for new constitutional rights for an independent Scotland", n.d.).

## **11. Discussion**

The support of Scottish independence has experienced significant fluctuations since the EU Referendum in 2016. The opinion polls reveal a rise in favour of self-governance, especially among those who voted to remain within the EU. Nevertheless, the evolution has not been regular, and it has been influenced by diverse political and societal facts. For instance, the decline in support for the SNP in the 2017 UK General Election. It was the result of the political mobilization of the Conservative and Labour parties in the light of negotiations for the official withdrawal from the European Union in 2020. Moreover, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Scottish government's successful

crisis management under Nicola Sturgeon reinforced support for the SNP and independence. Nevertheless, the economic and energy crisis due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, has triggered uncertainty and reduced interest in independence temporarily.

With the general election approaching on July 4, 2024, the debate on Scottish independence will probably intensify. Humza Yousaf's proposal for a new constitution, could significantly influence public support, particularly if the party could convince the electorate that an independent Scotland could provide a fairer and more prosperous future. On the other hand, as seen previously, Unionist parties are likely to intensify the mobilisation anti-independence voters by emphasising the risks and uncertainties of separating from the United Kingdom. For that reason, the Scottish government should demonstrate feasible solutions to the economic and energy issues, for the support for independence movement to grow.

Even though political challenges and controversies can temporally affect the support for independence, the movement persists as a central theme in the regional political debate. The forthcoming general election will be crucial in defining the future direction of the independence movement in Scotland.

## **12. Conclusion**

In conclusion, the quest for independence in Scotland has been a recurrent issue throughout history which reflects the national identity and political aspirations of the Scottish population. The nation of Scotland has moved from several states; from originally being a fully independent land to sharing the crown with England in 1603 and finally, becoming a nation governed under the same Parliament since the Act of Union 1707. Exploring important events such as the 2014 Referendum as well as the 2016 Brexit referendum contributed to my comprehension of how dynamics in the Scottish independence support have been changing.

An important aspect to understand the Scottish identity, implies distinguishing it from the British identity. Although the terms British and English have been misunderstood and indistinctly used, it is vital to point out that Britishness is not merely confined to English culture. The distinction is based on a shared but separated history

which has allowed Scotland to preserve and defend their cultural identity within the United Kingdom. Moreover, as it is generally known, globalization influences the homogenization of cultures, however, it also strengthens Scottish nationalism. This is particularly important in the context of Brexit, highlighting the fact that Scotland had to accept a decision they did not voted for within in a globalized context.

For this reason, it was initially expected that after Brexit, the support for independence experienced a notorious rise. Nevertheless, after analysing opinion polls, data reveals that it is not a lineal growth. In fact, the reality shows that politics is dynamic, and its evolution depends on many factors that influence the interests of society.

In this sense, it is evident that political campaigns and mobilization are key in referendums and general elections since the transmission of different arguments can shape the population's perceptions and confidence in the government. It is notably significant that social networks and the media play a crucial role since nowadays it is really easy to reach the target audience. In the 2014 Referendum, both the 'Yes' and 'Better Together' campaigns offered a completely opposed vision. Although at the beginning the 'Yes' campaign led the polls, the outcome was that the Scottish electorate voted against independence. Hence, in the UK General Election 2017, it was expected that the SNP would obtain the majority of the seats for Scotland at Westminster given the outcome of the Brexit referendum the year before. However, due to the Conservative campaign led by Theresa May and also the Labour Party in the light of negotiations for the official withdrawal from the European Union in 2020, the SNP lost considerable support and their votes were split between these two political parties. Therefore, it can be underscored the decisive power of strategic political campaigns.

Through the analysis of polls, it can be perceived that public opinion in Scotland varies according to political and economic developments. For instance, factors such as the perception of the economy based on their own natural resources, such as North Sea oil, also influences this trend. Moreover, in the period following the COVID-19 pandemic, in which the economic recovery was the main focus, the efficient management of the crisis by the Sturgeon, also fuelled the support for independence. Nevertheless, during time of political instability and by the SNP scandals and Sturgeon's resign, affected the independence movement. In addition, the economic crisis caused by the conflict between Ukraine and Russian has reinforced the vision of the Scottish population on the economic security offered by the central government. Given the context of inflation and

uncertainty, many Scottish citizens consider remaining united with the UK to be the best option for support measures. However, the new Scottish Prime Minister, Humza Yousaf created a new proposal of government which could revitalise the movement. All in all, it is concluded that Scottish opinion on independence evolves according to economy and political government. Thus, economic crises strengthen the union with the United Kingdom and new government proposals can invigorate the independence movement.

This study has allowed me to deepen my understanding of the dynamics of Scottish independence. I have long been intrigued by the origins of the independence movement, its evolution, and the contemporary perspective on this crucial issue. I have discovered the political, social, and economic implications of independence and the reasons why it seems that this issue remains unresolved. After analysing the history of Scotland, it can be acknowledged that Scotland has undergone significant changes in its political structure that, rather than being a benefit, have resulted in Scotland being a subordinate nation of England. Given the Scottish history, the sense of loss of identity within the context of the United Kingdom, the fight for independence can be better grasped. In conclusion, as a topic that is currently so influenced by society, it is difficult to determine what might occur in the future.

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