



2018

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Recommended Citation

Wilcox, Lincoln (2018) "The Price of Scottish Independence: Why Remaining a Part of the UK Still Makes Sense in the Wake of Brexit," *Sigma: Journal of Political and International Studies*: Vol. 35 , Article 9.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/sigma/vol35/iss1/9>

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The Price of Scottish Independence: Why Remaining a Part of the UK Still Makes Sense in the Wake of Brexit

Lincoln Wilcox

Introduction

On 23 June 2016, the citizens of the UK voted to leave the EU in a historic referendum. The “Leave” camp obtained a mostly unexpected victory by a narrow margin of 52 percent to 48 percent. The results shocked the EU, since the UK was one of its most powerful member states. Analysts began providing various explanations as to how the “Brexit” would occur and what it would mean for the UK and the European community.

Although Great Britain as a whole voted to leave, a regional breakdown of the voting revealed a more complicated story. Majorities voted to leave the EU in both England and Wales—but Northern Ireland, and especially Scotland, voted strongly in support of remaining. Scotland in particular had a 62 percent majority vote to stay, suggesting the Scot’s interests diverged from those of their southern neighbors.

These results are particularly significant given the recent independence referendum held in Scotland in September 2014 to decide whether Scotland should become an independent country, which resulted in a victory for the proponents of staying a part of the UK. The margin of victory, though clear, was not high, with 55 percent voting to stay and nearly 45 percent advocating Scotland’s exit from Great Britain. The high voter turnout of 84 percent of the population signaled that people broadly and passionately cared about the consequences.

The results of the Brexit referendum may have changed the game for many Scottish voters. In the previous Scottish independence referendum, Scots decided whether the benefits of independence outweighed the costs of leaving the UK; however, they made this decision under the assumption of remaining a part of the EU in either case. Scottish voters have demonstrated their desire to remain a part of the EU, and Brexit forces them to weigh this desire against the costs of leaving the UK. Scottish politicians have, there-

fore, declared that Scotland ought to have a right to another referendum. Scotland's secession from the UK has the potential to cripple or perhaps dissolve the entity altogether. On the other hand, a second defeat in an independence referendum would likely put the debate surrounding independence to rest for a long period into the future.

A number of issues have dominated Scottish political discussion surrounding the possibility of leaving the UK. If Scotland wishes to become independent in hopes of rejoining the EU, it must consider the implications of separating from the UK. Issues to consider include economics, defense, energy, international relations, healthcare, nationalism, family and cultural ties, and the timing of a new independence referendum. In this paper, I analyze each of these issues in turn. Altogether, the optimal present solution is for Scotland to focus on maintaining unity with its UK neighbors until the Brexit negotiations take place and policy implications become clearer.

The Evolution of Scotland's Independence Movement

The original events that precipitated the current manifestation of Scottish nationalism and independence reform have roots that stretch back for centuries in British history (Broun 2007, p. 1). While these events will become more relevant in the discussion of nationalism later in the paper, this section's outline of relevant events will focus only on the more recent period leading up to the call by Nicola Sturgeon, the current first minister of Scotland and the leader of the pro-independence Scottish National Party (SNP), for a second Scottish independence referendum. This period began in 1997, when a successful devolution referendum won a significant victory for the Scottish independence movement. The referendum demonstrated wide support for the idea of increased autonomy for Scotland, and the British Parliament thereafter agreed to the 1998 Scotland Act, which created the Scottish Parliament (Flamini 2013, p. 61).

A push for independence grew in popularity in the following decade. The SNP, which promised an independence referendum as part of its electoral platform, became the largest party in the Scottish Parliament after the 2007 elections and won an overall majority in 2011. At that time, First Minister Alex Salmond negotiated with the British Parliament to hold an independence referendum, which London agreed to authorize. The referendum caused a sharp divide along a number of issues and ultimately amounted to the previously mentioned result of 55 percent to 45 percent in favor of remaining part of the UK.

The nature and dimensions of the Scottish push for independence have evolved over time. According to Mikesell and Murphy, the political aspirations of minority groups within a state can fall anywhere along a spectrum ranging from recognition, access, and participation to separation, autonomy, and independence (1991, p. 582). Within the context of this framework, one can observe how Scottish ambitions have developed. As full UK citizens, Scots have always enjoyed participation and access to British government and resources. Scotland's main aspirations during the 1990s fall under the categories of representation and autonomy, as it pushed for and successfully created a Scottish parliament that operated to direct some domestic affairs, albeit under the jurisdiction of the UK.

During the most recent years, however, Scottish sentiments have escalated to a large-scale push for separation and independence.

Mikesell and Murphy's model suggests that Scottish notions of self-determination have become extreme over time, but it remains to be seen if these sentiments will continue their upward trend or whether future Scots will look back on the recent calls for independence as a passing fad of the early twenty-first century. The trend of nationalism faces a defining moment in which it must decide whether its desire for autonomy will push it into a new era of independence or whether the price of such a move will ultimately make separation untenable.

The Issues Surrounding Scottish Independence

Without a doubt, the advent of Brexit has changed the political landscape for Scottish voters with regard to Scottish independence. A key issue during the debate leading up to the referendum surrounded whether Scotland would gain EU membership if it were to secede from the UK. The fact that the UK has voted to leave the EU means Scotland must leave, unless it can create a new option of gaining independence and then reentering the EU. As will be discussed in the upcoming sections, it remains entirely unclear whether or not such an option will ever become available. What is clear, however, is that Scotland no longer has the choice to retain membership in both the EU and the UK, as it did during the last referendum. This would create a new dilemma for Scottish voters in a hypothetical second referendum.

Despite this new development, most of the issues surrounding Scottish independence have not changed since the most recent referendum. Just as before, pivotal and divisive issues, such as defense, healthcare, citizenship, energy, culture, international status, and various economic concerns, will dominate discussion and ultimately determine Scottish popular opinion. This section will outline the details of these issues that sit at the center of the Scottish independence dilemma.

Defense

A clear issue involved in the creation of any new state is the management of its defense. Scots wish to remain a part of the EU but cannot do so as part of the UK due to Brexit. Scottish leaders must separate from the UK's defense system if it hopes to rejoin the EU. Scotland exists in a relatively safe neighborhood of states, but as a longstanding part of the UK—one of the region's most dominant military powers—it has to deal with carryover from its military involvement as part of Great Britain (Dorman 2014, p. 679). The primary defense issue that complicates a potential Scottish transition to independence is the location of the UK's Trident nuclear submarine bases in Scottish waters. Moving the bases would represent a large cost for the UK, but it seems unlikely that the UK would allow a separated Scotland to continue to operate its naval shipyards. Furthermore, the possibility of the creation of a new European state with nuclear capability, or the process of transferring or disarming nuclear weapons, invokes the participation of the international community in what would otherwise be a simpler independence transition.

The SNP's vision argues that an independent Scotland would have no need for nuclear weapons and advocates the removal of Trident. Scotland currently contributes tax revenue to the UK's nuclear program, and the SNP government estimates that Scotland would have to devote a further £100 billion in lifetime spending to updating its nuclear weapons were Scotland to remain a nuclear state (Scottish Government 2013, p. 232). The SNP argues that Scotland could make much better use of these funds were it to allocate them to other public needs, such as healthcare and education. On a practical and moral level, too, Scottish politicians have pointed to the example of a large number of European states—especially Nordic countries, which operate peacefully and effectively in the international community without any nuclear weapons (Bailes and Ingram 2013, p. 62).

One major complication with the SNP's vision remains its conflicting desires to join NATO while lowering its defense spending and military capability. The Government's White Paper report on Scotland's future outlines Scotland's membership in NATO as a clear priority of its future defense plan (The Scottish Government 2013, p. 234). The SNP highlights the savings an independent Scotland would accrue should it opt out of its joint support in funding the UK's defense spending. However, it overlooks the fact that NATO will continue to obligate Scotland to spend heavily on defense if it hopes to join (NATO 2016). Additionally, NATO would likely exert pressure to maintain the status quo of nuclear capability from the British Isles. Removal or disarmament of nuclear capability in Scotland would undermine NATO's priorities of maintaining a stable nuclear community, since the UK and France are Europe's only nuclear powers (Bailes and Ingram 2013, p. 63). Due to these pressures, Scotland cannot completely control its nuclear destiny.

Another consideration regarding the Trident nuclear program is the jobs it brings to Scotland's shipyards. While the government might save money in the long run by removing the nuclear facilities, it has to think about the short-term political and economic costs of removing jobs for thousands of Scottish workers (Good 2014). This reality may help explain why—despite perceived long-run benefits in national savings—support for Trident's continued operation has remained as strong as the support for Scottish withdrawal in opinion polls during the last year, with both camps hovering around 40 percent of respondents favoring the respective sides (ScotCen Social Research 2017). These polls show that SNP would have to deal with a significant amount of political backlash were it to move ahead with its plan to remove Trident. Overall, simply stating that an independent Scotland can and will quickly remove nuclear weapons overlooks both the feasibility of such a venture as well as the time frame involved, considering pressures from the UK, NATO, and Scottish workers.

Economy

Perhaps the most significant issues of Scottish independence, at least those that matter most in the minds of the Scottish voters, have been and will continue to be questions involving the future state of the Scottish economy. The SNP and other pro-independence

campaigners argue that UK headquarters in London has shortchanged Scotland on public spending, Scotland will benefit from increased economic autonomy, and it will maintain the British pound as its currency, ensuring stability and continuity. Upon closer analysis, however, economic uncertainty seems a more likely result than these supposed positive outcomes.

The border will likely prove one of the most obvious complications of Scottish separation from the UK. For businesses on both the north and south side of the dividing line, increased border security will raise the costs of transactions with businesses that serve customers in another country (Good 2014). The disruption the border will likely cause will simultaneously decrease Scottish support for independence in these regions while increasing the UK's political resolve not to allow a referendum. If Scotland wishes to avoid these issues it will need to negotiate an opt-out of the Schengen Area while applying for EU membership. This outcome seems possible, but since this agreement remains a fundamental value of the EU project, it still provides yet another complication on the pathway to membership (Banks 2014, p. 1).

One argument of the pro-independence camp has relied on the idea that the UK, centered in London and removed from Scottish interests, has inevitably led to unequal treatment in terms of public spending. In reality, Scotland actually benefits from spending arrangements that favor a smaller population spread over a larger geographic territory, as is the case of Scotland in comparison with its English neighbor. This has led to public spending in Scotland outdistancing England by £1,200 per capita annually (Martin 2014, p. 2). The supposed unequal spending by the UK has actually benefited Scots: If the North Sea oil and gas reserves turn out to be incapable of sufficiently supplementing government revenues, increasing public spending could become complicated.

A critical economic question for the future of an independent Scotland lies with the future of its currency. SNP leaders have often repeated the assurance that Scotland will continue using the British pound in the event of independence (Scottish Government 2013, p. 7). This continuity will bind interest and inflation rates to the rest of the UK and provide stability, while also ensuring continued ease of transaction between Scotland and the rest of Great Britain. However, this assumption of continued use of the British pound seems somewhat cavalier, given the reactions of leaders in Westminster and the potential restriction involved with joining the EU. Only a small handful of countries were allowed to join the EU without switching to the euro currency, suggesting that Scotland may at least run into difficulty negotiating this deal if it reapplies for membership (Flamini 2013, p. 62). British officials, such as Bank of England Governor Mark Carney, have used the example of Europe's troubled currency union to argue that a potential UK currency union with Scotland would be "incompatible with sovereignty" (Inman and Wintour 2014). Without extremely tight restrictions in place, forming a currency union with another country that makes its own financial decisions would put the UK at risk of Scotland undermining its economic stability.

Should the Scottish economy take a downturn upon gaining independence, the pound sterling, used throughout the rest of the UK, would suffer.

Other UK leaders have echoed Carney's concerns, making Scotland's future use of the pound very unlikely in the event of independence (Martin 2014). Without it, Scotland will undergo much greater risk of uncertainty and instability. Besides, polls show that only a small minority of Scottish voters would be willing to support the use of a currency besides the pound, while an even smaller number would be willing to use the euro, suggesting that the SNP will face a major uphill political battle in persuading Scot's to accept an alternative arrangement (ScotCen Social Research 2017). The SNP's oversight with regard to a proper plan for a stable currency was a major weak point leading up to the 2014 referendum and would assumedly receive a similar response in any forthcoming referendum.

The reaction of banks and financial institutions was another of the largest concerns that sank the possibilities of Scottish independence in 2014. During the last decade, Scotland has seen success in attracting large companies and banking institutions. In 2011, Scotland welcomed the entry of more foreign businesses than any other region in the UK, according to a report from Ernst and Young (Flamini 2013, p. 63). In the weeks leading up to the independence referendum, however, several large banks, including the Royal Bank of Scotland and Lloyds Banking Group, threatened to move their headquarters to London should the referendum succeed in producing an independent Scotland (Collinson, Treanor, and Jones 2014). The public statements of the banks' intentions to leave not only transmitted financial insiders' pessimistic opinions of Scottish independence to the public, but it also demonstrated the risk of a potential landslide of capital flight that could occur in a nascent Scottish state. Many wanted independence but fewer seemed willing to undergo the possibility of an economic recession to achieve it.

A case study comparison with Quebec during its 1995 independence referendum confirms that a violent and negative economic response is endemic to independence-related uncertainty. The fears of Scottish voters reflect the lessons learned by Quebec two decades earlier. Quebec, like Scotland, is a region within a larger country that enjoys semi-autonomous control over things like healthcare, education, and welfare. The referendum resulted in a very narrow (50.6 percent to 49.4 percent) defeat for proponents of independence. Despite its failure, it had reverberating economic consequences (Ibid., p. 1).

The build-up to the referendum in Quebec produced different kinds of uncertainty. First, people were unsure of the outcome. Second, people were unsure of what independence would mean should it obtain a victory in the referendum. This uncertainty produced a powerful economic response. Interest rates, exchange rates, and bond market ratings suffered for Canada as a whole, while Quebec-based businesses' performance decreased on the Toronto Stock Exchange. In fact, during the 1995 referendum campaign, the Toronto Stock Exchange suffered the sixth-largest drop in its history up until that point (Sayers 2014, p. 2).

The uncertainty created by Scotland's independence bid, as well as its potential success, could mirror the economic consequences of uncertainty that followed Quebec's independence referendum. These consequences will potentially cost Scotland in terms of financial instability and capital flight. Because of questions surrounding public spending, currency, and uncertainty, it seems clear that, at least economically, Scotland will remain in a better place if it maintains the status quo, rather than seeking for another independence referendum.

Energy

The critical components of the energy debate as it relates to Scottish independence fall into two categories: the production of renewable energy and the use of oil and natural gas. In both cases, pro-independence politicians have advocated separation from the rest of the UK as the best step forward in achieving maximum productivity and efficiency in these categories. Critics, however, have pointed out that independence may not provide the simple and immediate answers that the SNP and others have promised.

Scotland has emphasized its energy future as a key component of its independence bid, arguing that it has much more to gain than to lose in terms of energy production were it to become an independent country. The SNP government has stated that years of underinvestment in the field of renewable energy has harmed the UK's prospects going forward, and Scotland has an opportunity to become a regional leader in the industry. The long-term goal put forward by the SNP is to grow capacity in renewable energy production until Scotland can become an energy exporter, providing a boost for government revenue, jobs, and the economy as a whole, following the example of its North Sea neighbor Norway (The Scottish Government 2013, p. 296).

While the outcomes from renewable energy development described by the SNP government would likely produce excellent results for the Scottish economy, the SNP overlooks the possibility for increasing Scotland's energy productivity while remaining within the UK. The only real changes that need to take place in order for it to achieve its renewable energy goals are increased autonomy on energy policy and decreased regulations from London. Scotland could likely achieve both through negotiations with London without needing to obtain complete independence (Ibid., p. 295).

The second and more significant energy concern involved with Scottish independence is the future of the UK's oil and natural reserves in the North Sea. If Scotland separates from the rest of the UK, initial estimates suggest that upward of 19 percent of the oil and natural gas fields fall in offshore Scottish waters (Flamini 2013, p. 63). Although Scotland plans to rely heavily on its renewable energy in the future, these natural resources would provide an important source of energy security and, more importantly, revenue for the government, with which it could supplement tax revenue and make up the losses involved with leaving the much larger UK tax pool.

Scotland's rights to the North Sea's natural resources have provided one of the most convincing arguments for Scottish independence. Currently, the reserves belong to all of

the UK, meaning Scotland has to share resources that fall almost entirely within Scottish territory. Some estimate the offshore resources amount to as much as twenty-four billion barrels of oil, which could go a long way in subsidizing the government's expenditures in Scotland's transition to independence (Martin 2014, p. 3). It seems only fair for Scotland to receive a greater share of the resources that lie within its territory.

Some experts have cautioned that the estimates of pro-independence politicians may be over-optimistic. Sir Ian Wood of the Wood Group, which works in the North Sea oil industry, warned that he would place estimates of the reserves closer to fifteen or sixteen billion barrels, an estimate that has since been backed by British Petroleum and Royal Dutch Shell (Martin 2014, p. 3). While still a significant amount, the smaller estimate would force the SNP and others to work out far more austere measures for government spending without the additional income from oil and gas revenue. Others have gone on to point out that the North Sea oil fields have been harvested of their resources for many years, and the oil left, while still a large amount, will become increasingly difficult and more expensive to extract than it was previously (Good 2014).

Beyond the issues surrounding the SNP's overestimates of the North Sea oil and gas reserves, other critics have cited international law as another potential barrier to Scotland's unrestricted access to the resources. Estimations for Scotland's share of the oil and gas reserves are based on current administrative boundaries, but John Paterson, chair of law at the University of Aberdeen, has counseled the Scottish government to be wary of using estimates as the given reality of what will be the case after a Scottish separation. International law surrounding claims to the North Sea reserves, he says, will remain a matter of negotiation between countries, and the UK may well make a larger claim on the oil than it has previously. Because the conversation concerning the UK's natural resources will take place within the context of a much broader discussion concerning the division of debts and assets throughout the country, deciding who has the rights to the North Sea oil may not be as straightforward as some have imagined (Good 2014). Should Scotland attempt to retain complete possession of what have been the entire UK's oil reserves, the UK will argue that simply dividing resources based on geographic lines overlooks historical claims to the resources. British leaders can maintain that, just like two states would divide national debt equitably between them in the event of referendum, the UK and Scotland ought to divide its energy resources proportionally as well (Armstrong 2014, p. 299).

International Relations

A highly significant concern of a newly independent Scotland will be its relationship with both its neighbors and the international community as a whole. Scotland may have the highest stakes in play if it bids for independence, but its actions will interact with vital interests for the UK, the EU, and even the U.S., which would prefer not to see the strength of its close political and military ally undermined (Flamini 2013, p. 63). Scotland will have to decide the role it wishes to play, as well as plan strategically for the reactions other actors will have, should it separate from Great Britain.

Scotland will have to tread carefully to ensure that it does not permanently damage its relationship with England and the rest of the UK, since it will have to maintain important economic and cultural ties with its neighbors going forward. As previously mentioned, Prime Minister Theresa May has repeated her opinion that Scotland needs to focus, along with the rest of the UK, on unity as they negotiate with the EU, and any referendum on independence should occur after the negotiations with the EU take place. Sturgeon and other leaders will have to decide how far they can push London officials on the Scottish independence issue without alienating them, since a UK without Scotland will still maintain a stronger economic and political bargaining position compared to its new northern neighbor (Bailes and Ingram 2013, p. 42).

One of the biggest issues to decide with regard to the rest of the UK will be that of citizenship, as a large number of those born in Scotland now live elsewhere in the UK, and many from the UK now live in Scotland. Families extend across potential future borders. Scotland will face a tricky situation in deciding how to handle the citizenship of these people. It will likely end up having to let people decide for themselves but many will not be satisfied choosing to be only Scottish or only British (Flamini 2013, p. 62). The two countries could attempt to reach some kind of compromise that would allow citizens of each country to retain dual citizenship, but it seems unlikely that London will feel overly generous in doling out the benefits of citizenship to Scottish nationals very soon after they declare independence.

Scots will also have to decide their potential political relationship with the British royal family and whether they will follow the path of countries like Canada and Australia, who still maintain the British monarchy as the head of state (Martin 2014, p. 4). While the role of the monarchy would remain symbolic, the issue has divided Scots. Some wish to continue the traditional tie to Great Britain, while others think the British monarchy undermines Scottish nationalism (ScotCen Social Research 2017).

Arguably, the most pivotal outside actor in relation to Scotland's potential independence bid is the EU. The UK's vote to leave the EU remains the primary catalyst in the SNP's renewed call for independence so close on the heels of the 2014 referendum. The SNP has suggested that entry into the EU will prove a relatively simple process. Scotland will simply tweak a few treaties and reenter in the place that the UK will vacate. Some European officials, such as Guy Verhofstadt, the European Parliament's chief Brexit negotiator, have expressed sympathy for Scotland's cause, saying that it should not have to leave the EU when it voted strongly in favor of staying (Carrell 2017). Most, however, have maintained that a clear standard for application to the EU is set out under Article 49 of the European Treaties, and Scotland would have to join the queue of other applicant states, such as Bosnia, Serbia, and Montenegro. While Scotland would likely move through the process of application more quickly than some of these other states due to its ability to meet EU member criteria more easily, it would most likely still have to start in the same place and complete the same steps as any other applicant. Scotland would also have to apply as a new member to join the UN (Flamini 2013, p. 60).

While it seems unlikely that Scotland would achieve a simple and immediate entry into the EU as SNP leaders have suggested, the bigger problem it faces remains the question of whether the EU member states will be willing to let it enter at all. The EU requires unanimous approval of all member states in order for a new state to join. Both Spain, with Catalonia, and Belgium, with Flanders, combated secessionist movements within their territories and would rather not allow a precedent for successful secession to take place within the EU, which might encourage their respective separatist populations. These states could easily use their veto power to prevent Scotland from achieving EU membership (Flamini 2013, p. 60). After Sturgeon and May's meeting in late March 2017 to discuss a second Scottish referendum, Spanish Foreign Minister Alfonso Dastis made a public statement that "Spain supports the territorial integrity of the UK and doesn't encourage secessions or divisions in any of the member states" (Torres 2017). The Spanish government in Madrid moved quickly and decisively to repress the recent attempt of Catalanian leaders to declare independence by dissolving the regional government headquartered in Barcelona. Were Scotland to rejoin the EU, it would encourage Catalonia's hopes of doing the same. While Spain has yet to make any outright statements affirming it will veto a Scottish entry into the EU, its behavior toward Catalonia signals that it will not take lightly a move for Scottish independence.

In summary, Scotland faces, at best, a large degree of uncertainty regarding if or when it would join the EU. In the best-case scenario, it may well achieve membership, but it could only come after a long process of negotiations and will likely hinge on the status of secessionist movements elsewhere in Europe. If reentry into the EU remains one of the primary objectives of a second Scottish independence referendum, Scotland can only hope to find a way of placating the secessionist concerns of Spain and Belgium. This negotiation process will remain difficult as long as secessionist movements remain a concern for these countries, which seems unlikely to change in the near future. Scotland faces a long battle to become a member of the EU, if membership is indeed attainable at all.

Healthcare

A primary debate regarding Scottish independence in 2014 involved Scotland's National Healthcare System (NHS), and this debate will remain just as relevant in light of a new independence bid post-Brexit. Scotland gained independent control of its healthcare system and policy in 1999, during the same devolution agreements that saw the creation of a Scottish Parliament. The UK, however, still exerts some command over the system because it maintains control over the budget and spending on healthcare in all of Great Britain, including Scotland (Mathieson 2014). The healthcare debate, consequently, concentrates mainly on finances.

The argument of those supporting independence suggests that Scotland and the rest of the UK have begun to pursue increasingly divergent paths when it comes to healthcare. The British Parliament's policies have begun to focus more on privatization and competition within the industry, while the Scottish Parliament remains a strong propo-

ment of public healthcare. Leaders of the SNP and other pro-independence-minded politicians have warned that Scotland could face budget cuts for its healthcare in the future due to financial decisions and austerity measures made exclusively in London. They suggest that Scotland ought to have the ability to dictate its future with regard to both its healthcare policy and its budget (The Scottish Government 2013, p. 172). Without this power, Scotland's healthcare priorities will suffer from underfunding, and the country will have to adopt policy measures against its values.

This line of reasoning, however, remains subject to many critiques. To begin with, Scotland enjoys significantly higher spending per capita on healthcare by the UK government than England. According to a report during 2012–13, English residents were the recipients of £1,912 in annual government spending on health care on average, compared to £2,115 per person in Scotland, making it difficult to argue that Scotland is getting as bad of a deal as some politicians would like it to appear (Mathieson 2014, p. 3). More significantly, an independent Scotland would plan to obtain most of its tax revenue from North Sea oil (see section on Energy and resources). Between the depletion of these natural resources going forward, as well as a small population and an aging demographic, Scotland's ability to support its own healthcare system in the long run seems far less viable than its possibilities were it to stay connected to the tax revenue of all of Great Britain (Ibid., p. 4).

This argument not only undermines the SNP's logic for healthcare gains from independence but also provides a strong argument for the benefits of remaining a part of a larger, wealthier country. The climate among those involved in the healthcare industry prior to the 2014 referendum was one of pessimism and skepticism. A study surveyed 311 doctors, finding that 60 percent planned to vote against independence, with only 33 percent supporting independence (Rimmer 2014, p. 1). The doctors cited concerns over an economic downturn that would prevent an independent Scotland from recruiting enough medical professionals, while encouraging many to move south of the border to practice.

Others have raised concerns over waiting lists for operations or organ transplants. If Scotland must rely solely on its own healthcare system and a smaller population to sustain it, the logistics involved could increase wait times for life-saving surgeries and organ donations. Since EU health cards ensure access to healthcare in any EU member country, some pro-independence politicians have concluded worries about access to such emergency operations would not be a real concern were Scotland to rejoin the EU and regain access to the medical resources of other EU members. They argue that Scottish citizens have no need to rely on British healthcare (Good 2014). This argument provides little certainty for a country that may not rejoin the EU; the loss of access to the medical resources of its closest neighbor would certainly cause logistical problems for Scotland when it comes to issues like organ donations and emergency transplant operations. The country will take on more risk in this area if it chooses independence.

Nationalism

Scotland will evidently undergo heavy costs if it wishes to obtain independence. History, however, shows that this may not be entirely surprising. The bloody American Revolution, among others, demonstrates that nations seeking for independence sometimes value freedom even at high costs. Even though economics and political liberties matter to voters, it is possible that people might still view independence as more valuable than the sacrifices it will entail because of nationalism (Van Evera 1994, p. 5). If the feeling of nationalism remains strong enough within Scotland, its voters may continue to support independence, even at a high cost.

The roots of Scottish nationalism in relation to its southern neighbors stretch back centuries into British history. In A.D. 128, the Roman emperor Hadrian built a wall to keep out northern marauders, while the Scottish Wars of Independence in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries gave rise to legends in Scottish national lore, like William Wallace (Broun 2007, p. 24). Unlike these wars in past centuries, the modern manifestations of Scottish nationalism have remained peaceful, but Scots clearly still feel nationalist sentiments. Still, Scotland would theoretically have to experience a widespread notion of nationalist Scottish identity in order to be willing, together as a nation, to sacrifice in order to obtain statehood (Nietschmann 1994, p. 241).

The trouble with Scotland, in terms of generating enough sentiment to become independent, remains that it faces division in the degree to which people feel strongly about Scottish identity throughout the country. According to census data, over a third of the country claimed to identify primarily as something other than "Scottish only," indicating the complexity of identity politics in Scotland (Scotland's Census 2011). As discussed previously, people who live close to the border between England and Scotland tend to see themselves as a kind of in-between people who identify with both nationalities, since the border has not been a true cultural barrier for a very long time. Furthermore, people in the border regions will be among those most hurt by Scottish independence and, therefore, will likely oppose nationalist sentiments to a greater degree. People who live far to the north of Edinburgh, in the Shetland Isles, also experience an identity crisis; when interviewed, some felt a greater connection to Norway than Britain, and most claimed to identify first as Shetlanders and second as British (Good 2014). Overall, it currently appears that Scottish nationalism remains too fractured to produce the cohesion necessary for achieving widespread support for independence.

Although Scotland remains characterized by a diversity of sentiments regarding independence at this time, proponents of Scottish independence ought to consider the role of age in identity politics. Data from 1999 to 2010 show that young people are more likely than older generations to support Scottish independence. Over this span, those between eighteen and twenty-four were 10 to 15 percent more likely to support independence as the best form of ruling Scotland (Schneider 2014, p. 56). While one cannot be certain about the causation of the support for independence among Scottish youth, this finding could be evidence of a generational shift that has begun to take place in Scotland

and provides a strong argument in favor of the SNP waiting a few years to carry out a second Scottish referendum, rather than doing so immediately.

Cultural and Familial Ties

Scotland has operated together with its southern neighbors as a single country since the Treaty of Union in 1707, which created the country of Great Britain. Their coexistence has led to the crossover one might expect to happen between neighboring regions of a single country during the past three hundred years, and the delineation between what it means to be Scottish and what it means to be English has become blurred over time.

At the time of the 2011 Scottish census, approximately 500,000 people, over 10 percent of Scotland's population, were born in England, Wales, or Northern Ireland, while approximately 700,000 Scots resided in other parts of the UK (Scotland's Census 2011). This overlap on a massive scale requires pro-independence politicians to account for the difficulty of deciding how to handle immigration and border rights with the rest of the UK were it to seek independence.

The issue of the border will also prove to be a difficult problem for politicians to resolve, primarily because it has not operated as a real border since the distant past. Most people who live in the border region have developed familial and business relationships on both sides of it, and many view themselves as neither English nor Scottish but as simply British (Good 2014). In fact, according to census data, only 62 percent of Scots viewed themselves as "Scottish only," with 18 percent of the population identifying with both "Scottish and British identities," and 8 percent choosing "British only" as their national identity (Scotland's Census 2011).

Furthermore, border-dwellers will have a tremendously difficult time adjusting to the realities of a real border, were Scotland to put it in place, as their livelihoods often require them or their clients to cross borders. Were Scotland to rejoin the EU and the Schengen Agreement, it seems impossible to imagine that Great Britain, which left the EU in large part due to populist opinion against free migration of immigrants into their country from elsewhere in Europe, would leave an open border with Scotland across which immigrants could travel (Good 2014).

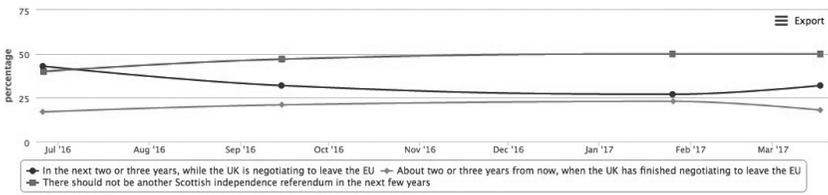
The Timing of a Second Referendum

One of the most basic questions involved in proposing a second Scottish referendum lies in its timing. Nicola Sturgeon has announced her intentions to seek a second Scottish independence referendum, which she hopes will take place between the fall of 2018 and the spring of 2019 (Stone 2017). While the Scottish Parliament in Holyrood will back Sturgeon's appeal, British Prime Minister Theresa May and the UK Parliament in London have the final say in authorizing the referendum. May has repeatedly stated her objection to a second Scottish referendum. She insists that the process of Brexit negotiations call for national unity and that a Scottish referendum would undermine the negotiations' outcomes, creating a less favorable deal for Scotland and the rest of the UK (Taylor 2017).

Inherent to the timing dilemma is an element of risk for the pro-independence advocates. Should Sturgeon somehow succeed in bringing about a second referendum, the results must be final in one direction or another. If she fails in leading Scotland to independence, it becomes difficult to imagine she or any other politician will remain capable of mustering enough political will to push a third independence bid for years to come. This raises the stakes of holding a referendum and prioritizes the need to launch it at the right time.

The following line graph represents the data obtained by asking the question: “When do you think another Scottish independence referendum should be held?” Researchers compiled the data collected during the last nine months.

Table 1



Although a brief moment existed immediately following the Brexit referendum in which Scots narrowly supported holding another referendum before the Brexit negotiations finish, the most dominant group in the polling clearly support not having a referendum in the next several years. Since February 2017, there appears to be some convergence, with those supporting a referendum after the negotiations declining, and those supporting a referendum during negotiations on the rise. Whether this trend will continue, and whether support for no referendum at all will decline, remains to be seen. Still, it seems clear that most Scots oppose Sturgeon’s idea of an immediate referendum.

The data may confirm that Sturgeon’s calculus is not entirely off. The strongest support for a new independence referendum has centered on the time of the Brexit referendum and the build-up to May’s triggering of Article 50 to begin Brexit negotiations, suggesting that perhaps proponents of independence will have the best chance at earning popular support while Brexit remains fresh on voters’ minds. However, even if this proves to be the case, the opportune moment of independence support may have already passed.

Conclusions and Policy Suggestions

The issues that have dominated discussion surrounding Scottish independence will ultimately determine when or if a second Scottish referendum will take place. Even though Scotland now faces the cost of leaving the EU in the wake of Brexit, the cost of leaving the UK is still higher. In the aggregate, the best solution for Scotland remains to wait patiently, and as Prime Minister Theresa May suggested, focus on unity with

the rest of the UK during the Brexit negotiations. While Scotland may well continue to feel that Brexit has changed the nature of its relationship with Great Britain, after the negotiations take place, Scotland will have a better idea of the situation in which it will exist going forward. This will enable voters to make decisions with more certainty than currently possible.

The takeaways from the discussion of most of the issues discussed in this paper—familial and cultural ties, healthcare, defense, energy, and economics—indicate that separation will prove difficult at any point, whether now or in the future. Those living near the border will be worse off in any situation that implements enforced separation between the states. Scotland can achieve its proposed healthcare and renewable energy reforms through negotiations to decrease London’s central authority and increase Scottish autonomy, without needing to go as far as full independence. North Sea oil will remain a point of friction no matter what path Scotland chooses to take and will likely not provide a universal solution to government revenues should Scotland obtain independence. While it would be difficult to imagine London removing its nuclear submarine bases from Scottish waters without Scotland leaving the UK, the Trident nuclear problem will not gain a simple solution through independence either. Finally, all signs suggest that Scotland stands to lose in economic terms if it chooses independence.

Although perhaps less pessimistic in their outcomes than the other issues, the conclusions concerning nationalism, the timing of the referendum, and international relations suggest that the SNP would be wise to wait rather than immediately hurrying into a second independence referendum. Sturgeon does not currently hold the political support necessary, but age demographics and a spike in interest with Brexit events demonstrate that the most likely time for a referendum to find success would come in a few years. If the realities of Brexit’s effects on Scotland are as unfortunate as predicted, then support for independence will only increase. Scotland’s bid to join the EU will necessarily depend on the status of Belgium’s and Spain’s secessionist movements, while negotiations involving nuclear weapons and membership in NATO and the UN will also require a longer timeline. In general, Scotland’s independence bid will likely benefit in these areas if it waits. If Sturgeon gets a referendum approved now, and then it fails, the SNP may take years or decades to build enough political capital to attempt another independence bid.

As a common trend throughout most of these issues, uncertainty remains the biggest issue in the current state of Scottish independence reform. Voters simply do not have the information necessary to make a comfortable decision regarding the future of their country. This information will only become available once the UK and the EU complete Brexit negotiations and the new status quo becomes known.

Scotland’s best option, as things stand, will be to begin by negotiating with London for increased autonomy in its healthcare and energy objectives, especially in terms of budget and financing. Officials in London may be willing to give concessions to Scotland if it agrees to wait on an independence referendum until after the Brexit

negotiations. The time that passes will prove beneficial for Scotland, since more information will become available to voters as Brexit takes place, and Scots will grow more capable of making the decisions necessary to determine the future status of their country. Scottish patience will help the UK maintain stability as it negotiates Brexit, and this in turn will help Scotland maintain a better working relationship with the UK, allowing the SNP to move into a better position to negotiate and attempt a successful referendum.

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