1. What aspects of the Union persuaded Scottish voters to support continued membership of the UK in the independence referendum?
   • What aspects of the Union pushed voters towards independence?

For the most part this question can only be answered indirectly. Polling and survey research during the referendum focused on what people thought of independence and its perceived consequences rather than on their evaluations of the Union. Indeed some attempts that the Scottish Social Attitudes (SSA) survey made to try and ask people what they thought were the consequences of being part of the Union suggested that people struggled to evaluate the consequences of the status quo as opposed to a possible change.

All the polling and survey evidence suggests that the strongest correlate with whether people proposed to vote Yes or No in the referendum was the perceived economic consequences of independence as opposed to remaining in the UK.

For example, according to the 2014 SSA, just 1% of those who thought that Scotland’s economy would be ‘a lot worse’ under independence said that they proposed to vote Yes in the referendum, as did just 10% of those who thought that it would be ‘a little worse’. In contrast, as many as 92% of those who said that the economy would be ‘a lot better’ under independence and 83% of those who indicated that it would be ‘a little better’ anticipated voting Yes.

Equally, in response to a question that the company asked regularly during the course of the referendum, ICM found in its final poll conducted just before polling day that, of those who had made up their mind, 99% of those who thought independence would be ‘good’ for the economy proposed to vote Yes, while 97% of those who thought it would be ‘bad’ voted No.

Finally, an internet panel study conducted by the British Election Study (BES), found that just 5% of those who in May 2014 thought it was ‘very likely’ that Scotland’s economy would be worse under independence eventually voted Yes, as did just 20% of those who thought it ‘fairly likely’. In contrast, as many as 95% of those who thought it ‘very unlikely’ that the economy would be worse voted Yes, as did 90% of those who thought it was ‘fairly unlikely’.

All of these exercises found that the link between perceptions of the economic consequences of independence and which way people intended to vote in the referendum was stronger than the link between the perception of any other consequence and referendum vote, including perceptions of whether or not an independent Scotland would be a more equal country.

At the same time, all of these exercises found that more people thought that the economic consequences of independence would be disadvantageous than thought they would be advantageous. In interviewing conducted in early summer 2014, SSA found that 44% thought that the Scottish economy would be worse under independence, while 25% believed it would be better. At much the same time, the BES reported that 46% thought it likely that the economy would be worse under independence, while
just 24% believed it would be better. Meanwhile, in its final poll, ICM found that 38% thought independence would be ‘good’ for Scotland’s economy while 45% believed it would be ‘bad’. In short, it would appear that the key attribute of the Union in voters’ eyes that did most to persuade them to vote No in the referendum was that it was regarded as economically the ‘safer’ option.

2. What does the referendum campaign and other research tell us about public understanding of the Union and devolution?

- How can the Union and devolution be more effectively communicated to, and understood by, citizens across the UK?

I am not sure that the referendum campaign or subsequent research tells us much about ‘public understanding of the Union and devolution’. I am certainly not aware of any attempt to try and measure the ‘accuracy’ of such understanding, let alone to assess the implications of that ‘accuracy’ for attitudes or referendum choice. (There was, in contrast, at least one attempt to assess the level of understanding of the some of the details of the Scottish Government’s proposals for independence, and this found that as of June 2014 typically around 60% were unable to say whether a statement about those proposals was true or not.)

What does seem to be the case is that there is a relatively low level of awareness of the proposals for more devolution prepared by the Smith Commission since the referendum. As of last January, at least, only 55% said to Ipsos MORI that they had seen or heard anything about the Smith Commission report, while just 23% claimed actually to have read any of it.

3. What level of support does the continuation of the United Kingdom have in its four nations?

- What elements of the Union are particularly valued or disliked in England, Wales and Northern Ireland?

Support in Scotland for the maintenance of the Union has probably never been lower. To date, there has never been a period when polls and surveys have consistently pointed to majority support north of the border for leaving the UK. Yet polls conducted since the referendum have on average found that Scotland is now almost evenly divided on the question of its constitutional status. On average four polls conducted in September and October have found that 48% would now vote in favour of independence, while 52% would vote against. These figures are in line with most polling that has been conducted since last year’s referendum.

In contrast, there is little support at present in Wales for leaving the UK. In the most recent reading, obtained by ICM in February 2015, just 6% chose independence as their preferred option when asked to choose between a variety of different constitutional positions for the country. The previous September the same company found that just 3% were in favour.

Only a minority of people in Northern Ireland currently wish to leave the United Kingdom. According to the most recent Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) survey conducted in the autumn of last year just 21% wish to unify with the rest of Ireland (17%) or want Northern Ireland to become an independent state (4%). Support has hovered at around this level in this annual survey since 2010, and since then has consistently been lower than any time since the survey began in 1989.
Previously at least a quarter supported the proposition and occasionally as many as a third did so.

It is relatively rare for polls or surveys to ask people in England whether they want England to become independent or not. But when the proposition is put it appears to find little support. The 2013 British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey, for example, found that just 16% thought it would be better for England if it were to become independent while 78% thought it would be better if it remained part of the United Kingdom.

There is rather greater evidence on attitudes towards what might be considered a proxy for this issue, which is how people in England think that Scotland should be governed. BSA has asked voters in England how they think should Scotland should be governed on a regular basis since the advent of devolution. Support for independence has ranged between 19% and 29% during that period and stood at 24% on the last occasion the question was asked in 2013. Meanwhile, the proportion of people south of the border who back Scottish independence appears to have fallen during the referendum campaign. In a poll conducted by YouGov shortly before referendum polling day, just 17% of people in England and Wales said that Scotland should become independent, down from 24% in January 2014, 36% in January 2012, and 41% in May 2011. Similarly, the Future of England survey found that the proportion who back Scottish independence fell from 30% in November 2012 to 19% in April 2014.

4. What level of support is there for the current devolution settlement and how does it vary between the four nations of the UK?

There is course no such thing as a single ‘constitutional settlement’, but rather separately crafted settlements for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and more piecemeal moves towards a degree of devolution in England. At the same time, the current arrangements in Scotland and Wales are in a degree of flux, and thus the relevance of attitudes towards the ‘current’ devolution settlement might be considered problematic.

There is no doubt that the principle of devolution is popular in each of the three territories that now enjoy legislative devolution. According to the longest running time series on the subject (provided by SSA), support for devolution in Scotland (either with or without tax-varying powers) has been at or above 50% on 13 out of the 15 occasions between 1999 and 2014 on which people in Scotland have been invited to choose between devolution, independence and no parliament at all. In the last ten years support for the last of these options has typically been less than 10%, while further evidence from the same survey indicates that nearly everyone whose first preference is independence choose devolution as their second preference.

However, this does not mean that the current devolution settlement or even the version envisaged by the Smith Commission necessarily matches the current or likely new dividing line between ‘devolved’ and ‘reserved’ responsibilities. The instinctive reaction at least of most people in Scotland appears to be that more or less all of the country’s domestic affairs should be determined by the Scottish Parliament, leaving the UK government to deal with just defence and foreign affairs. For example, SSA has persistently found that just under 60% think that the Scottish Parliament should make the key decision for Scotland about taxation while just over 60% say the same
about welfare benefits. (In contrast, less than two-fifths say the same about defence and foreign affairs.) Meanwhile, such polling evidence as there is on the proposals of the Smith Commission suggest that the public are inclined to think they do not go far enough. For example, a YouGov poll in December last year reported that no less than 51% said that they did not go far enough, while just 14% reckoned they went too far.

In Wales, the ICM poll to which reference is also made at 3, found that just 13% now think that the National Assembly should be abolished. This result is typical of recent polls on the subject. Meanwhile no less than 77% said they preferred devolution to either independence or no assembly, with just over half of this group (40%) saying that they believe that the Assembly should have more powers. However, the extent to which people in Wales back more powers appears to be somewhat less straightforward than in Scotland. Research undertaken for the Silk Commission by Beaufort Research in May/June 2013 found clear majorities in favour of making the Assembly responsible for renewable energy, policing and wind farms, but that a majority were opposed to devolution of criminal justice as well as defence and foreign affairs. Meanwhile, opinion on welfare benefits was almost evenly divided. However, more recently polls by YouGov on how people would vote in a referendum on giving the National Assembly tax powers have found that a plurality are against; in the most recent poll in September 34% said they would vote in favour, 41% against.

NILT has found that on the seven occasions on which the question has been asked since 2007, between 50% and 58% have said they preferred devolution to either direct rule or unification, with the most recent reading standing at 50%. As we might anticipate the option is rather more popular amongst Protestants (63% in 2014) than Catholics (44%).

The most widely available indicator of attitudes in England towards devolution in the rest of the UK is in respect of Scotland. It suggests the principle of Scottish devolution appears to be widely accepted south of the border. In 2013 BSA found that just 21% did not think that Scotland should not have a parliament at all, while 55% said that there should be a devolved parliament (while as reported earlier 24% backed independence). However the proportion opposed to Scotland having any kind of parliament has consistently been somewhat higher since 2007 than it was in the early years of devolution (when the figure never exceeded 19%). Meanwhile, the 2013 BSA found that 45% of people in England supported the devolution of key decisions on taxation and welfare to the Scottish Parliament, while just 27% were opposed.

This, of course, does not necessarily mean that people in England are supportive of the current financial arrangements whereby Scotland enjoys a higher level of public spending per head than England. Certainly, according to the most recent BSA reading (2013) just 5% think that Scotland secures less than its fair share while 36% believes it obtains more than its fair share. The latter figure has tended to be somewhat higher since 2007 than previously, when it never exceeded 24%.

On attitudes in England towards devolution for England see 7.

5. To what extent can constitutional change (such as devolution to or within England, or a new ‘charter of the union’) be expected to affect public opinion about the Union and the governance of the UK?
There is evidently no guaranteed link between constitutional reform and the level of support for staying in the UK. In Northern Ireland the full restoration of devolution in 2007 has been accompanied by a reduction in support for reunification, though that may have also been occasioned by the financial and fiscal difficulties facing the Republic of Ireland following the banking crisis. England appears to be keener on the Union, convinced perhaps by some of the arguments made in favour of the unionist case in the Scottish referendum. Support for independence in Wales continues to be remarkably low. But at the same time, the advent of devolution in Scotland has apparently done nothing to strengthen support for the Union there, but rather appears to have helped to instigate a series of developments that have undermined it. Much evidently depends on the skill of politicians!

6. To what extent is there still a British or UK politics, rather than different politics in each of the nations of Great Britain?

Electoral behaviour in Scotland has long been divergent from that in England and Wales, not least in respect of the relative weakness of Conservative support north of the border. But that tendency became even sharper in 2015. Whereas both Conservative and Labour gained ground across England and Wales as a whole, both saw their support fall back in Scotland – the Conservatives to a new all-time low, and Labour to its lowest share since 1918. Half of the vote in Scotland went to a party that does not contest elections elsewhere in the UK. Neither UKIP nor the Greens advanced as strongly as they did elsewhere. Only the sharp fall in Liberal Democrat support in England and Wales was echoed north of the border. These patterns suggest that Scottish voters are now attuned to different messages and considerations than are their counterparts in England and Wales, and this significantly undermines the notion that there is a common pattern of electoral politics – and thus a ‘British politics’ - across Great Britain.

7. What appetite is there for legislative or administrative devolution to England or its regions?

Support for legislative or administrative devolution in England appears to be weaker than elsewhere in the UK, and is certainly more fractured. BSA has regularly asked people in England to choose between an English Parliament, regional (administrative) assemblies and maintenance of the status quo whereby laws are made by the UK Parliament. The latter has always proven the most popular option on the 15 occasions that the question has been asked since 1999, backed by between 53% and 65%. The proportion preferring an English parliament has ranged between 19% and 31%, while those preferring a regional assembly has varied between 13% and 28%. Regional assemblies were the more popular of the two options until the defeat in the referendum of the proposal for a regional assembly in the North East in 2004. Since then an English parliament has been the more popular option.

However, answers to questions on this issue appear to be quite sensitive to the way in which the question is asked. Questions that simply ask people whether they are for or against a possible form of devolution as opposed to choose between devolution and the status quo often secure majorities in favour. For example, a YouGov poll in May 2015 found that 47% of people in England & Wales supported the creation of ‘a new English Parliament, while just 21% were opposed – though we should note that as many as 32% said Don’t Know. A Survation poll conducted immediately after the
Scottish independence referendum reported that as many as 60% supported having a ‘separate English Parliament to decide matters like health and education that only affect England’, while just 11% were opposed. Meanwhile a poll conducted by Opinion in August 2015 found that just 22% wanted ‘things to continue as they are now’ while 28% wanted ‘power devolved to a new English Parliament’, 15% ‘power devolved to new elected regional assemblies’ and 12% ‘power devolved to city-regions’. These options are, of course, not necessarily mutually exclusive.

The sensitivity of the pattern of responses on this subject to question wording and format may be thought to raise questions about the strength of support for devolution in England as well as underline its potentially fragmented character.

See also Dr. Eichhorn’s evidence.

8. Will a parliamentary mechanism, such as ‘English votes for English laws’, address public dissatisfaction over the democratic representation of England within the Union?

There is no doubt that the principle of ‘English votes for English laws’ is popular in England. When BSA has asked people on a regular basis whether they support or oppose the idea, the proportion backing the idea has never been less than 64% and has been as high as 74%. There is, though, no consistent trend over time towards higher levels of support, although the proportion who say that they ‘strongly agree’ as opposed to just ‘agree’ has never been less than 30% since 2007, whereas between 1999 and 2002 it was never higher than 25%. It should also be noted that the question was never asked before 1999, and thus we cannot be sure that support for the idea postdates the advent of devolution in the rest of the UK.

The recent change to the standing orders of the House of Commons does, of course, represent something considerably less than only allowing English MPs to vote on English laws.

‘English votes for English laws’ is an idea for which there is also considerable sympathy north of the border. SSA has regularly found that around a half agree with the idea, while only between a fifth and a quarter are actually opposed. Polls conducted since the referendum have again suggested that just over half still back the idea. What, however, we do not know, because no Scottish poll has addressed the issue since, is whether attitudes have changed in the wake of the SNP’s electoral landslide in May. That development has certainly changed the implications of Evel – what originally appeared an embarrassment for Labour is now, perhaps, at risk of being portrayed as an attempt to silence ‘Scotland’s party’, viz. the SNP.

9. What non-legislative or non-constitutional initiatives to strengthen the image of the Union might be supported by the public in the UK as a whole, and in each of its four nations?

This question is too wide-ranging to respond with written evidence.

10. Which powers do people consider should be exercised by devolved legislatures and which should be reserved to the UK level? How does this vary between the nations?

This has been addressed at 4 above.
11. Is support for greater devolution or decentralisation matched by support for variation in service delivery and potentially in tax and welfare policies?

Despite the apparent high level of support for the devolution of both taxation and welfare, people in Scotland do not at the moment at least seem to embrace the prospect that there might be highly visible differences in rates of taxation and welfare on the two sides of the border, while many do not appear to accept the funding implications of more devolution.

SSA has asked on three occasions between 2009 and 2013 whether public services such as health and education should be paid for ‘out of a sum of money decided by the UK Government and funded out of taxes collected across the UK’, or whether instead they should be funded ‘out of taxes decided and collected by the Scottish Government in Scotland’. On each occasion only around a half agreed that they should be funded out of Scottish taxes, while support for UK-wide funding rose from 40% in 2009 to 46% in 2013,

It appears there is a particular reluctance to see responsibility for funding applied to the funding of welfare benefits. In 2013 SSA found that only 34% believed that pensions in Scotland should be funded solely out of Scottish revenues, a proportion that fell twelve months later to just 22%. Equally, in 2013 just 36% reckoned the benefit paid to people in Scotland who are unemployed should be funded solely out of Scottish taxes, while just 26% did so a year later.

On rates of taxation, SSA asked on three occasions between 2011 and 2013 whether the basic rate of income tax in Scotland should ‘always be the same in Scotland as it is in England’, or ‘whether it is OK for it to be different in Scotland (either higher or lower) than it is in England’. Every time rather more people (between 50% and 52%) said that the rate of tax should always be the same than said it was OK for it to be different (between 41% and 48%).

Reluctance to embrace differences in welfare payments appears to be even greater. Between 2011 and 2013 only between 37% and 41% thought it was OK for the old age pension to be different on the two sides of the border, while between 56% and 63% said that it should always be the same.

However, although these figures indicate that support for policy variation is lower the level of support for more devolution, those in favour of a stronger Scottish Parliament are more willing to embrace variation than those who do not want a stronger parliament.

As we might anticipate, the level of support in England for Scotland having different rates of taxation and levels of welfare benefits are even lower than they are in Scotland. According to the 2013 BSA, 58% of people in England think that the basic rate of income tax in Scotland should always be the same as in England, while no less than 65% say the same about the old age pension. Equally, England is more inclined to believe that the revenues from taxation in Scotland should be pooled with those from the rest of the UK – and that welfare benefits in Scotland should be paid from those pooled revenues too.

We may need to remember, however, that the questions reported here asked people to consider the principle of difference, but that in practice their reaction to differences in
taxation and welfare on the two sides of the border may well depend on whether or not they approve of the substantive decisions in question.

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