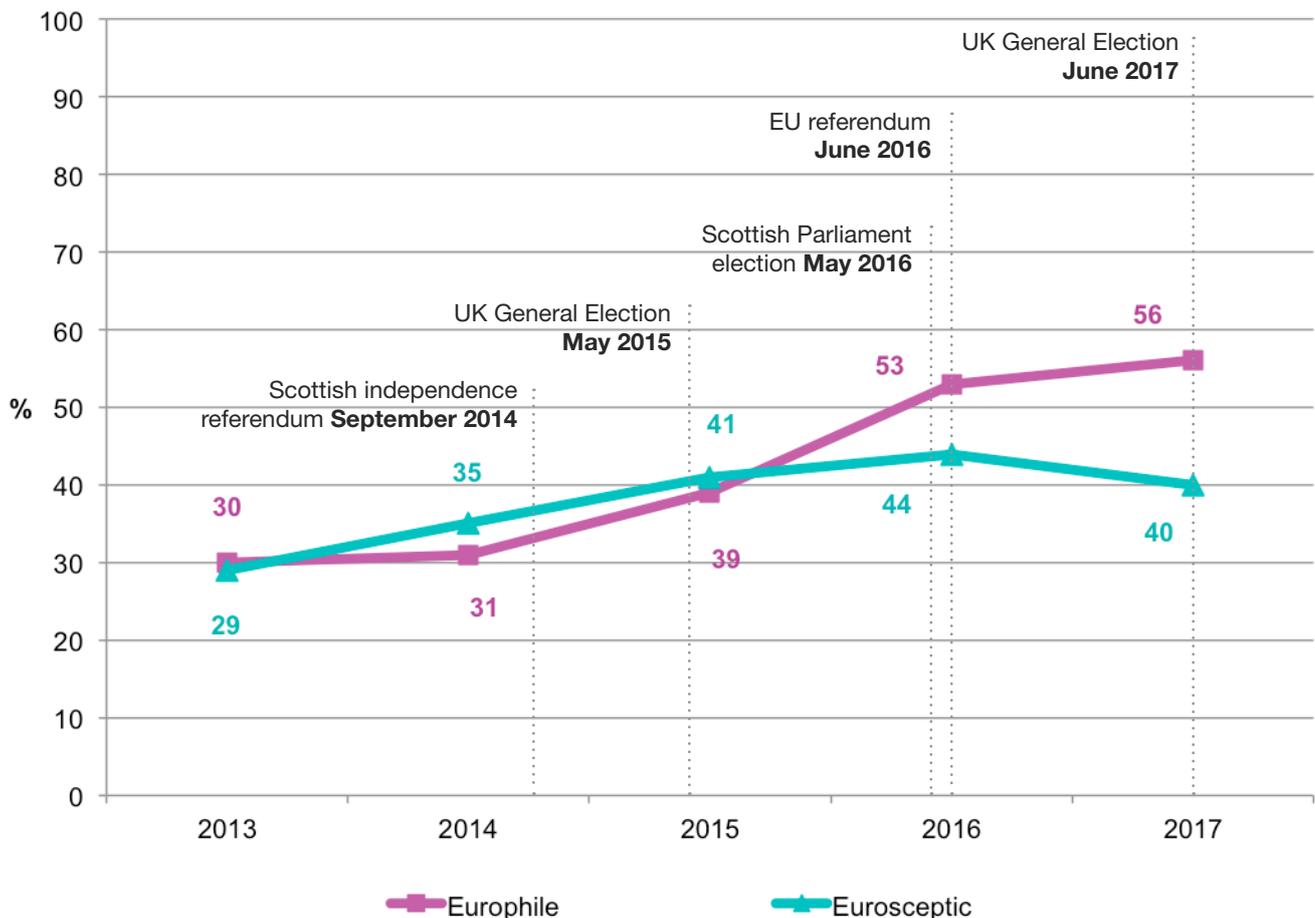


# Scotland

## How Brexit has created a new divide in the nationalist movement

Brexit has created a new line of division in the debate about Scotland’s constitutional status. Prior to the EU referendum in 2016, the level of support for independence was much the same among those who were sceptical about the EU as it was among those who wanted Britain to maintain its existing relationship. Now, however, Eurosceptics are less likely than Europhiles to support Scottish independence.

Support for Scottish independence, by attitude towards Britain’s membership of the EU, 2013-2017



## Overview

The overall level of support for Scottish independence has not changed in the wake of the EU referendum result. However, support for independence is now more strongly linked with a favourable attitude towards the EU, while the SNP lost ground in the 2017 election among those who are sceptical about Europe. Meanwhile, although those with a strong English identity were more likely to vote Leave, the EU referendum has not led to an increase in English nationalism that is hostile to Scottish devolution.

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## Attitudes to Brexit and independence become intertwined

Although the level of support in Scotland for independence has not increased in the wake of Brexit, support for the idea has become more closely linked to having a favourable view of the EU.

- 46% now say that the Scottish Parliament should make all decisions for Scotland, compared with 51% in 2015.
  - In 2015 the level of support for independence among 'Europhiles' (39%) was similar to that among 'Eurosceptics' (41%).
  - Now, however, support for independence is higher among 'Europhiles' (56%) than among 'Eurosceptics' (40%)
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## Brexit cost SNP support in 2017 election

Support for the SNP fell more heavily among those who are sceptical about the EU than it did among those who take a more favourable view of the EU.

- Support for the SNP fell substantially between 2015 and 2017 among 'Eurosceptics' (15 points), while remaining relatively steady among 'Europhiles' (2 points fall).
  - Conversely, the Conservatives registered a considerable increase in support among 'Eurosceptics' (14 points), while there was much less of a change among 'Europhiles' (4 point increase).
  - The impact of Brexit on how people voted helps explain why only 72% of those who support independence voted for the SNP in 2017, down from 84% in 2015.
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## No increase in hostility towards Scottish devolution in England

The tendency of those with a strong sense of English identity to vote Leave in the EU referendum does not signal a wider English nationalism that is unsympathetic to Scottish devolution.

- At 23%, the proportion of people in England who now say they are more English than they are British is no higher than the 26% who expressed that view four years ago.
  - 55% of people in England support Scottish devolution, unchanged from 20 years ago.
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## Introduction

Scotland voted very differently from the rest of Britain in the EU referendum in June 2016. While both England and Wales voted in favour of Leave by 53% to 47%, Scotland itself voted for Remain by 62% to 38%. As a result, the country appeared destined to leave the EU even though a majority of its voters had clearly indicated that they wanted to stay.

This outcome transpired just two years after another referendum had been held north of the border, this time on Scottish independence. In that ballot in September 2014, Scotland voted to remain part of the UK by 55% to 45%. But one of the central arguments during that referendum campaign concerned the implications of Scottish independence for the country's relationship with the EU. Opponents of independence argued that an independent Scotland would have to apply to join the EU, a process that might potentially be somewhat problematic, and that therefore the best way of ensuring Scotland's current status as part of the EU was to vote to remain part of the UK. Now that the UK itself was set on leaving the EU, that argument at least for voting against independence was seemingly at risk of looking a little threadbare.

But perhaps even more importantly, the outcome of the EU referendum in Scotland could be regarded as the clearest possible illustration of the long-standing nationalist argument that, for as long as it remained part of the UK, Scotland was always at risk of seeing its 'democratic wishes' overturned by the votes of people in England. Moreover, the claim that the political preferences of England were different from those of Scotland seemed to be verified by a Leave vote that was a reflection of an apparently resurgent English nationalism (Henderson et al., 2017). If that conclusion was now also drawn by voters then perhaps the balance of opinion north of the border might now tilt in favour of Scottish independence.

That certainly seemed to be what Scotland's First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, anticipated would happen. Just a few weeks before the EU referendum, her party had been re-elected as the devolved Scottish Government on a pledge that it would not necessarily seek to hold a further referendum on independence unless there was a "material change of circumstance" – of which a UK-wide vote to Leave the EU that was not replicated in Scotland was cited as a possible example (Scottish National Party, 2016). Within hours of the announcement of the result of the EU referendum, Ms Sturgeon indicated that she felt that the circumstances had indeed changed and the possibility of holding a second independence referendum was now back "on the table" – though this was, perhaps, more a threat that another ballot might be called rather than a promise that it would be.

Indeed, in the months following the EU referendum the Scottish Government seemed intent on using the possibility of another independence ballot as a bargaining chip in the debate about what

One of the central arguments during the independence referendum campaign concerned the implications of independence for the country's relationship with the EU

shape Brexit should take. In December, it published a White Paper in which it laid out a vision of the “softest” of Brexits – Scotland, at least, should remain in the EU single market and the Customs Union even if the rest of the UK did not – and suggested that in the event of such an outcome another independence referendum might not be held after all (Scottish Government, 2016). But by March of the following year the First Minister had evidently come to the conclusion that the UK government had no intention of accommodating her stance on Brexit. As a result, Ms Sturgeon announced that she now wanted the UK Parliament to grant the Scottish Parliament the authority it needed to hold a second independence ballot, most likely in the autumn of 2018 or the spring of 2019 as the Brexit negotiations came to an end. Just a few days later, the Scottish Parliament itself voted in favour of a request for that authority.

However, things then began to go somewhat awry for the First Minister. In April 2017 the Prime Minister, Theresa May, announced that she intended to precipitate an early UK general election. That meant the SNP had to defend its remarkable success in the 2015 general election, when it won 50% of the vote in Scotland and 56 of the country’s 59 Westminster seats, three years earlier than it had anticipated. Meanwhile, in the Scottish Parliament election the previous year there had already been signs of a revival in the fortunes of the Scottish Conservative Party, while since then that party had made opposition to the SNP’s proposal for another independence referendum its central campaigning message. In the event the SNP’s share of the Scotland-wide vote fell to 37% and the party was reduced to 35 seats. That might still have been the party’s second-best result ever in a UK general election, but, nevertheless, it seemed like something of a rebuff. Shortly afterwards, Ms Sturgeon indicated that she was putting her plans for another independence referendum on hold, to be revisited in a year’s time when perhaps the political weather might, from her point of view at least, look a little less cloudy.

In this chapter, we look at the currents of public opinion that underlie these political developments. First, we assess what impact, if any, the EU referendum has had on public attitudes towards how Scotland should be governed. Is there any evidence that the referendum has changed the level of support for independence? Or, more subtly perhaps, has the referendum resulted in attitudes towards independence and membership of the European Union becoming intertwined, with support for one becoming more synonymous with backing for the other? Second, what role, if any, did debates about independence and about Brexit play in how people in Scotland voted in the general election? How might we account for the SNP’s reverse in that ballot? Third, what impact, if any, has the EU referendum and the further calls for a Scottish independence referendum that followed had on public opinion in England? Is there any reason to believe that the supposed awakening of English nationalism that was evident in the EU referendum is also reflected in increased hostility south of the border to the (enhanced) devolution settlement that Scotland now enjoys?

## Attitudes towards how Scotland should be governed

We begin by examining how attitudes towards the governance of Scotland have evolved since the referendums on independence and Britain's membership of the EU. Is there any evidence that Brexit has had a material impact on the balance of opinion on the subject?

Since the advent of devolution in 1999, the Scottish Social Attitudes survey (SSA) has asked its respondents a variety of questions about how Scotland should be governed, enabling us to track how public opinion towards Scotland's constitutional status has changed over the last two decades. The longest-running of these questions reads as follows:

*Which of these statements comes closest to your view?*

*Scotland should become independent, separate from the UK and the European Union*

*Scotland should become independent, separate from the UK but part of the European Union*

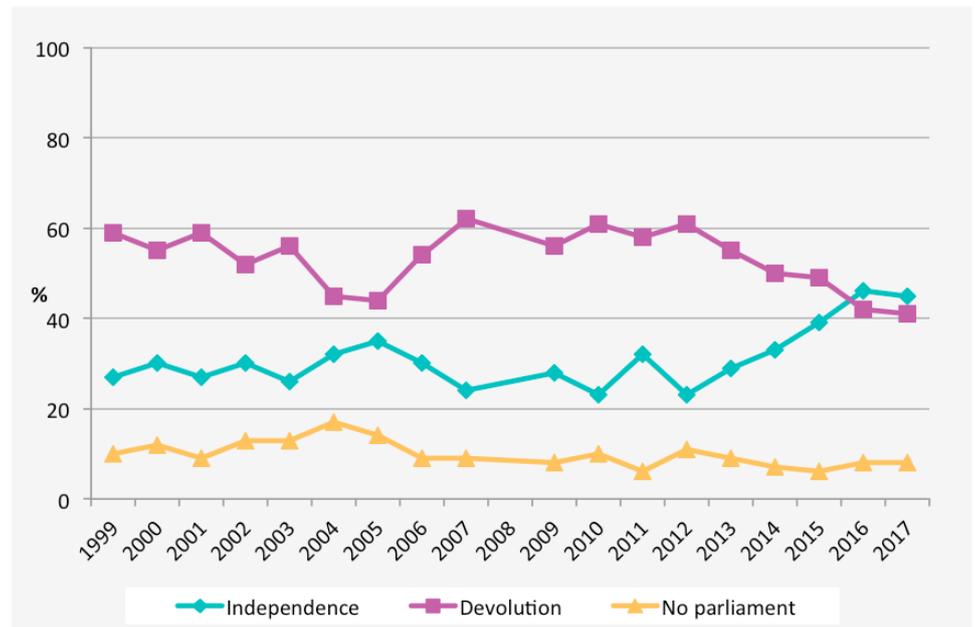
*Scotland should remain part of the UK, with its own elected parliament which has some taxation powers*

*Scotland should remain part of the UK, with its own elected parliament which has no taxation powers*

*Scotland should remain part of the UK without an elected parliament*

The question may now be regarded as a little dated. The distinction between having a devolved parliament with and without taxation powers refers to a debate that was originally settled when a majority of voters in Scotland not only voted in a referendum in 1997 in favour of creating the new institution, but also that it should have 'tax-varying powers' – powers that have subsequently been expanded considerably. Nevertheless, because the same question has been asked throughout the course of devolution it provides a unique indicator of how attitudes towards Scotland's constitutional status have evolved throughout the lifetime of the Scottish Parliament.

For our immediate purposes here, those respondents who select either of the first two options can be classed as supporters of independence, while those who choose either the third or fourth option can be categorised as supporters of some form of devolution. Those who opt for the last answer can be regarded as opposed to either independence or devolution. Using that simplification, Figure 1 summarises the pattern of responses to this question in each year since it was first asked:

**Figure 1 Attitudes in Scotland towards how Scotland should be governed, 1999-2017<sup>1</sup>**

Source: Scottish Social Attitudes

The data on which Figure 1 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

**There is evidence that the independence referendum in 2014 resulted in a marked increase in support for independence that has outlasted the ballot itself**

As discussed elsewhere (Curtice, 2014), there was little sign of any long-term increase in support for independence prior to the independence referendum in September 2014. Between 1999 and 2013 support for independence on our measure simply fluctuated between a low of 23% and a high of 35%, with the lowest reading having been replicated as recently as 2012. Even our 2014 survey – conducted during the spring and summer before the independence referendum – still only put support at 33%. But since then support for independence has consistently been higher. In 2015 it increased to 39%, while in our 2016 survey, interviewing for which took place shortly after the EU referendum, it increased yet further to 46%. Now, at 45% it remains at more or less that level.

Our latest reading therefore supports the previous evidence from our 2015 and 2016 surveys that the independence referendum in 2014 resulted in a marked increase in support for independence that has outlasted the ballot itself (Curtice, 2017a). That said, we might still be left wondering if the EU referendum has also played a part in bringing about this rise? After all, some of the increase in support for independence in Figure 1 was first registered after the EU ballot in 2016 rather than immediately after the independence referendum itself.

However, other measures of attitudes towards how Scotland should be governed suggest that the EU referendum has not had a material impact on the balance of opinion towards how Scotland should

<sup>1</sup> Note that between 1999 and 2015, the SSA survey interviewed adults aged 18 plus. In 2016 and 2017, following a reduction in the age at which people can vote in ballots organised by the Scottish Parliament, the survey also interviewed those aged 16 and 17. Their inclusion has little material impact on the figures reported here.

be governed. The first such measure is a question that focuses on what people believe the appropriate division of powers between the Scottish Parliament and the UK government should be:

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

*The Scottish Parliament should make all the decisions for Scotland*

*The UK government should make decisions about defence and foreign affairs; the Scottish Parliament should decide everything else*

*The UK government should make decisions about taxes, benefits and defence and foreign affairs; the Scottish Parliament should decide the rest*

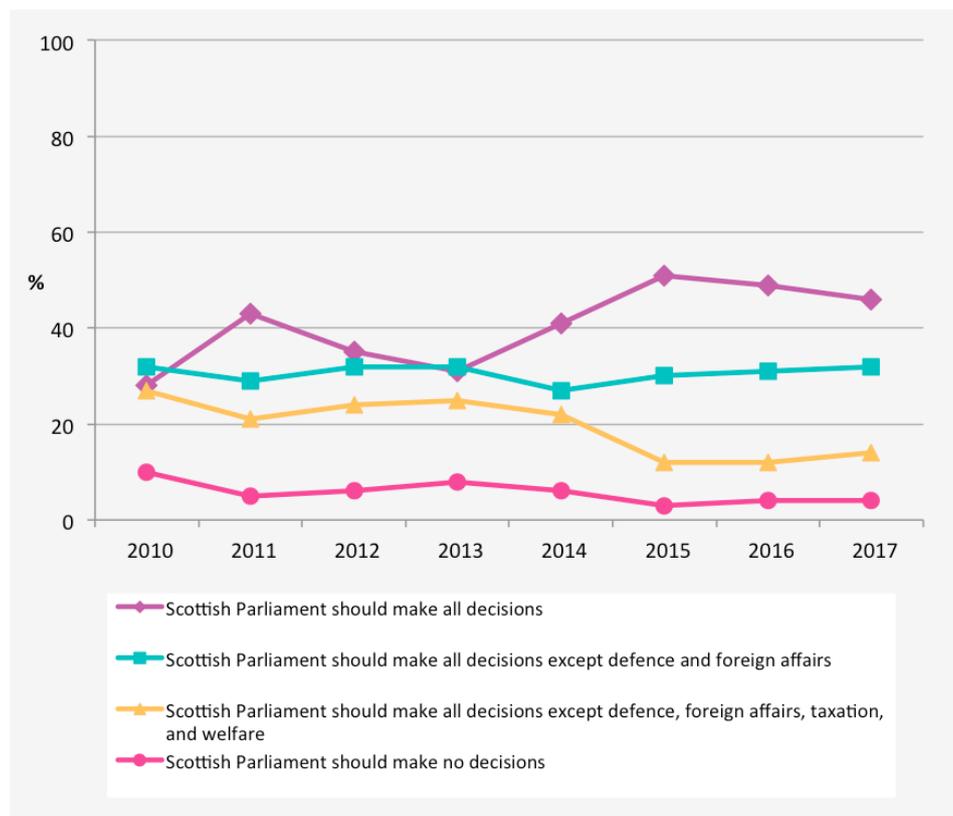
*The UK government should make all decisions for Scotland*

The first option is intended to describe ‘independence’, while the second is intended to refer to what has come to be known as ‘devo max’, that is, that the Scottish Parliament should be responsible for more or less all of Scotland’s domestic affairs, leaving just defence and foreign affairs in Westminster’s hands. The third option is designed to encapsulate the original devolution settlement prior to the expansion of the Scottish Parliament’s powers in legislation passed in 2012 and (especially) 2016, while the fourth option suggests there should not be a devolution settlement of any kind.

As Figure 2 shows, for the most part the level of support for ‘independence’ as ascertained by this question showed little sign of increasing until shortly before the independence referendum was held. At 31% the level in 2013 was little different from the 28% figure recorded in 2010. However, by the time that the referendum was over the proportion had increased (in our 2015 survey) to 51%, while since then it has shown signs of easing a little. There appears to be no sign, on this measure at least, that support for independence has increased in the wake of the EU referendum.

**There appears to be no sign, on this measure at least, that support for independence has increased in the wake of the EU referendum**

**Figure 2 Attitudes in Scotland towards the distribution of responsibilities between the Scottish Parliament and the UK government, 2010-2017**



Source: *Scottish Social Attitudes*

The data on which Figure 2 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

Much the same conclusion can be reached if we look at how people say they would vote if another independence referendum were to be held now. Leaving aside those who felt unable to say how they would vote, in 2016 45% said that they would vote Yes to independence, 55% No – the same result as in the September 2014 referendum. In our most recent survey the proportion saying Yes was, at 48%, a little higher (with No at 52%), but this slight departure from the result of the first independence referendum could clearly be a consequence of no more than the random sampling variation to which all surveys are subject.<sup>2</sup>

The relatively favourable light in which the prospect of independence is now regarded is underlined by the evidence in Table 1, in which we show the results that we obtained in our 2017 survey when, for the first time since the independence referendum, we repeated a number of questions about what people think would happen “if

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, our 2015 survey also obtained a reported referendum vote of Yes 48%, No 52%. The fact that support for independence as registered by our long-standing question in Figure 1 more closely matches that of our other two measures in 2016 and 2017 than it did in 2015 reflects a greater consistency of response to our various measures in our more recent surveys. In 2017 only around one in ten of those who said that they would vote Yes in another independence referendum failed to choose one of the two independence options in Figure 1, whereas in 2015 around one in four of those who said that they voted Yes in the previous year’s referendum did not do so. This adds further weight to our argument that the increase in support for independence in Figure 1 between 2015 and 2016 should not be regarded as attributable to the impact of the EU referendum.

**Our data suggest that, during the two years leading up to the referendum, on balance voters were inclined to become more pessimistic about the consequences of Scottish independence**

Scotland were to become an independent country, separate from the rest of the United Kingdom but part of the European Union” (full question wording for these questions is available in the appendix to this chapter). As the table makes clear, our data suggest that, during the two years leading up to the referendum, on balance voters were inclined to become more pessimistic about the consequences of such a scenario. For example, in 2012 as many people thought that the economy would be better as a result of independence as thought it would be worse, whereas two years later, in the weeks leading up to the referendum, as many as 43% thought that Scotland’s economy would become worse while only 26% reckoned it would be better. Now, however, rather more people think that Scotland’s economy would be better as a result of independence (41%) than believe it would be worse (35%). Similar improvements have also occurred in people’s perceptions of the consequences of independence for how much pride people would have in their country and (especially) for the strength of Scotland’s voice in the world.

**Table 1 Attitudes towards the consequences of Scottish Independence, Scotland, 2012-2017**

Perceived consequence of independence	2012	2013	2014	2017
<b>Scotland’s Economy</b>	%	%	%	%
Better	34	30	26	41
No difference	23	26	15	13
Worse	34	34	43	35
<b>Pride in country</b>	%	%	%	%
More	55	51	49	58
No difference	39	41	39	34
Less	3	4	6	3
<b>Scotland’s voice in the world</b>	%	%	%	%
Stronger	42	38	33	49
No difference	32	32	23	22
Weaker	22	25	37	25
<b>Gap between rich and poor</b>	%	%	%	%
Bigger	19	16	29	29
No difference	47	49	37	40
Smaller	25	25	18	22
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1180</i>	<i>1348</i>	<i>1433</i>	<i>1234</i>

Source: Scottish Social Attitudes

Because we did not ask these questions in 2015 and 2016, we cannot be sure whether or not people’s perceptions have been

**Our evidence suggests that the outcome of the EU referendum has not resulted in a significant increase in support for independence**

affected by the outcome of the EU referendum, separately from the legacy of the independence referendum. Indeed, it will be noted that these questions refer explicitly to an independent Scotland that was part of the EU, and perhaps the implied contrast with what is now set to be membership of a UK that is outside rather than inside the EU influenced some respondents' answers in our most recent survey, encouraging them to view independence within the EU more favourably than if Brexit were not due to take place. But either way, we certainly have here further evidence that the climate of opinion is now more favourable to the idea of leaving the UK as compared with the position before the independence referendum.

For the most part, then, our evidence suggests that the outcome of the EU referendum has not resulted in a significant increase in support for independence. That said, there is little evidence that it has resulted in a diminution either. Rather, the marked increase in support for independence that appears to have arisen during the later stages of the independence referendum campaign has proven to be much more than a short-term phenomenon and, despite the fall in SNP support in the 2017 general election, has withstood the fallout from the Brexit vote. The increase also seems to be founded on a more optimistic view of the likely consequences of independence than was in evidence during the independence referendum campaign itself. That alone is enough to ensure that the debate about Scotland's constitutional future is far from settled, even if it has not as yet been sparked into new life by the prospect of Brexit.

## The intertwining of the independence and European debates

On balance, therefore, it seems that the UK-wide vote to leave the EU has not had a significant impact on the level of support for independence. To that extent, the First Minister's apparent expectation that the Brexit referendum result would increase the level of support for Scotland leaving the UK has not been fulfilled. However, even if the EU referendum has not significantly changed the aggregate level of support for independence, perhaps it has ensured that attitudes towards the two issues are intertwined more closely than before. Perhaps some people who voted No to independence now feel minded to vote Yes, because of their opposition to Brexit. At the same time, perhaps some who voted Yes to independence but are opposed to membership of the EU have switched in the opposite direction. Such a development would result in a greater tendency for supporters of independence to hold favourable attitudes towards the EU and vice-versa.

First of all, however, we should investigate that pattern of attitudes in Scotland towards the European Union a little more closely. To what extent was the 62% vote in favour of Remain registered at the EU referendum a reliable indication that people in Scotland largely take

a favourable view of the EU? To assess how far this is the case, we examine answers to a question that endeavours to secure a more nuanced picture of public opinion than simply whether people are in favour or against Britain's membership of the EU. It reads:

*Leaving aside the result of the referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union, what do you think Britain's policy should be...*

*...should it leave the European Union,  
to stay in the EU and try to reduce the EU's powers,  
to leave things as they are,  
to stay in the EU and try to increase the EU's powers,  
or, to work for the formation of a single European  
government?*

This question has appeared periodically on SSA since 1999. The one change that we have had to make since the EU referendum is to introduce it by saying, "Leaving aside the result of the referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union, what do you think Britain's policy should be...". The possible answer options, however, have not been changed. Table 2 shows the proportion choosing each option in each year and also the combined tally of those who give either of the first two responses, answers that (to some extent at least) are indicative of a 'Eurosceptic' outlook (Curtice and Evans, 2015). In contrast, those selecting any of the remaining response options might be considered to be 'Europhile', as they wish to maintain or enhance the current relationship between Britain and the EU.

**Table 2 Attitudes in Scotland towards Britain's membership of the EU, 1999-2017**

	1999	2000	2003	2004	2005
<b>Britain should ...</b>	%	%	%	%	%
... leave the EU	10	11	11	13	14
... stay in the EU but reduce its powers	36	37	29	31	36
<b>Total Eurosceptic</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>51</b>
... stay in the EU and keep powers as they are	21	21	24	27	21
... stay in the EU and increase powers	14	13	19	12	13
... work for formation of a single European government	9	9	8	7	5
<b>Total Europhile</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>38</b>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1482	1663	1508	1637	1549

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>Britain should ...</b>	%	%	%	%	%
... leave the EU	19	17	17	25	19
... stay in the EU but reduce its powers	40	40	41	42	39
<b>Total Eurosceptic</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>58</b>
... stay in the EU and keep powers as they are	25	24	21	21	30
... stay in the EU and increase powers	8	7	9	5	5
... work for formation of a single European government	3	4	3	3	3
<b>Total Europhile</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>37</b>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1497	1501	1288	1237	1234

Source: Scottish Social Attitudes

As we might anticipate, relatively few people in Scotland say in response to this question that they think that Britain should leave the EU, though in the immediate wake of the referendum the proportion choosing that option did reach as high as one in four. But that does not mean that people in Scotland necessarily want the EU to be a relatively powerful institution. The modal response to our question has consistently been that Britain should remain a member but should try to reduce the EU's powers. Moreover, this has been a somewhat more popular response in recent years than it was during some of the early years of devolution. As a result, a majority of people in Scotland can nowadays be classified as 'Eurosceptic', that is, they would either like Britain to leave the EU or they would like the EU's powers reduced. Indeed, as many as two-thirds (66%) fell into that camp in the immediate wake of the referendum, and, at 58%, the figure remains relatively high in our most recent survey.

**Relatively few people in Scotland say that they think that Britain should leave the EU**

Scotland is therefore not as enamoured of the existing EU as we might have anticipated from the result of the EU referendum north of the border – or indeed from the fact that, according to a separate question on our survey, nearly three in four (74%) think that an independent Scotland either ‘definitely’ or ‘probably’ should be a member of the EU. Furthermore, half of those who said they voted Remain in the EU referendum can be classified as Eurosceptics by this definition (because although they back staying in the EU they think it should have fewer powers). Against this backdrop, it is perhaps not so surprising that the UK-wide outcome of the EU referendum apparently did not persuade many people to change their minds about independence. The commitment of many Remain voters to the EU was too weak for the issue to be a deal breaker for them on the question of Scotland’s constitutional status (Montagu, 2018).

Nevertheless, it appears that the EU referendum has left its mark on the pattern of support for independence. Table 3 shows people’s attitudes towards how Scotland should be governed as measured by their responses to our long-running question on independence (introduced at Figure 1), broken down by whether the respondent is a ‘Eurosceptic’ or a ‘Europhile’ (as defined at Table 2). Up to and including 2015, the level of support for independence (and, indeed, devolution) was more or less the same among Europhiles as it was among Eurosceptics. Perhaps, despite the prominence that the issue of EU membership was given in the independence referendum campaign, it had little influence on how people voted in that ballot. However, since the EU referendum, both our 2016 and our 2017 surveys show that Europhiles are now more likely than their Eurosceptic counterparts to support independence. It seems that the two issues have, indeed, become more closely intertwined in voters’ minds.

**Since the EU referendum, both our 2016 and our 2017 surveys show that Europhiles are now more likely than their Eurosceptic counterparts to support independence**

**Table 3 Attitudes in Scotland towards how Scotland should be governed, by attitude towards Britain's membership of the EU, 2013-2017**

Constitutional Preference	Attitudes towards the EU	
	Eurosceptic	Europhile
<b>2013</b>	%	%
Independence	29	30
Devolution	57	55
No Parliament	10	8
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	913	484
<b>2014</b>	%	%
Independence	35	31
Devolution	53	49
No Parliament	7	9
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	893	476
<b>2015</b>	%	%
Independence	41	39
Devolution	50	51
No Parliament	7	5
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	787	394
<b>2016</b>	%	%
Independence	44	53
Devolution	45	37
No Parliament	8	7
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	836	337
<b>2017</b>	%	%
Independence	40	56
Devolution	48	33
No Parliament	9	7
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	763	407

Source: Scottish Social Attitudes

This development is confirmed if we take the link between attitudes towards the EU and how people said they voted in the 2014 independence referendum (as measured by our 2015 survey), and compare it with the link between attitudes towards the EU and how respondents say they would vote in an independence referendum that was held now (using our 2017 survey). Support for independence in the 2014 referendum was, if anything, higher among those who were Eurosceptics than it was among Europhiles - while 49% of Eurosceptics voted Yes in the independence referendum, only 44%

of Europhiles did so (although this difference was not found to be statistically significant). But now, in our 2017 survey, the pattern is very different – only 40% of Eurosceptics say they would vote Yes compared with 60% of Europhiles.

**40% of Eurosceptics say they would vote Yes compared with 60% of Europhiles**

A further, more direct indication of the more Europhile nature of support for independence is obtained if we return to our long-running question about how Scotland should be governed, but now examine the division that we ignored earlier between those who think that Scotland should be independent outside the EU and those who think it should be independent inside the EU. While in 2013 those who backed an independent Scotland inside the EU (18%) were rather more numerous than those who wanted an independent Scotland outside the EU (11%), the latter group still constituted a significant part of the nationalist movement, much as they had done ever since the first SSA survey in 1999. But by 2016, those who backed independence outside the EU still only represented 11% of all voters in Scotland, whereas those who supported independence in the EU now constituted 35%. At 10% and 35% respectively, the most recent figures for 2017 are much the same. In short, where once those whose first preference was independence outside the EU comprised at least one in three of all those who wished for Scotland to leave the UK, now they represent less than one in four.

Meanwhile, as we might by now anticipate, in some respects at least Eurosceptics and Europhiles now also have rather different views about what would happen if Scotland were to become independent. As Table 4 shows, in 2014 the two groups largely had similar views about what the consequences of independence would be. For example, while 28% of Europhiles thought that Scotland's economy would be better as a result of independence, so also did 25% of Eurosceptics. But while both groups now take a more optimistic view of the economic consequences of independence, at 48% the level of optimism is clearly higher among Europhiles than among Eurosceptics (37%). Similar gaps between the two groups have also opened up in respect of the implications of independence for Scotland's voice in the world and for the gap between rich and poor. Europhiles are now noticeably less likely to regard independence as a risky project than their Eurosceptic counterparts.

**Table 4 Attitudes in Scotland towards the perceived consequences of independence, by attitude towards the EU, 2014 and 2017**

Perceived consequence of independence	2014		2017	
	Attitudes towards the EU		Attitudes towards the EU	
	Eurosceptic	Europhile	Eurosceptic	Europhile
<b>Scotland's Economy</b>	%	%	%	%
Better	25	28	37	48
No difference	13	17	13	13
Worse	48	41	40	29
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>850</i>	<i>450</i>	<i>737</i>	<i>388</i>
<b>Pride in country</b>	%	%	%	%
More	48	49	56	61
No difference	39	40	36	32
Less	6	6	4	3
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>853</i>	<i>450</i>	<i>737</i>	<i>388</i>
<b>Scotland's voice in the world</b>	%	%	%	%
Stronger	33	34	46	56
No difference	23	23	23	20
Weaker	39	38	30	18
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>852</i>	<i>452</i>	<i>737</i>	<i>388</i>
<b>Gap between rich and poor</b>	%	%	%	%
Bigger	32	27	32	24
No difference	37	37	41	37
Smaller	17	21	19	30
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>851</i>	<i>450</i>	<i>737</i>	<i>389</i>

Source: Scottish Social Attitudes

**Up until the EU referendum attitudes in Scotland towards Britain's membership of the EU were not related to people's views on Scotland staying in the UK or becoming an independent country**

We have seen that up until the EU referendum – though not thereafter – attitudes in Scotland towards Britain's membership of the EU were not related to people's views on the relative merits of Scotland staying in the UK or becoming an independent country. Those with a favourable view of the EU were no more likely to support Scottish independence than those with a more sceptical outlook – and vice-versa. Indeed, this was still the position on EU referendum day itself. According to the 2016 SSA survey, for example, while 67% of EU referendum participants who were in favour of independence indicated that they had voted Remain, so also did 63% of those who voted No. However, since then support for independence has come to be aligned to some extent with a more Europhile outlook – and vice-versa. It looks as though the prospect of the UK leaving the EU has made the idea of an independent Scotland that, according

**Brexit has, it seems, created a new line of division in the debate about Scotland's constitutional status**

to the SNP at least, would be part of the EU look a somewhat more attractive prospect to those with a 'Europhile' outlook, while making a UK that is outside the EU look more acceptable to Eurosceptics. Brexit has, it seems, created a new line of division in the debate about Scotland's constitutional status.

## Brexit and the 2017 general election in Scotland

We have seen that, how people voted in the EU referendum cut across the existing patterns of support for both independence and unionism. Both groups found themselves split roughly two to one in favour of remaining in the EU. Yet those two groups had voted very differently in the 2015 election. No less than 84% of those who supported independence voted for the SNP, whereas only around one in four unionists (27%) did so. Never before had the two groups voted so differently in a UK general election, suggesting that the constitutional question had now come to dominate electoral politics in Scotland (Curtice, 2017b).

This suggests that if voters north of the border responded to the Prime Minister's decision in April 2017 to precipitate an early general election by reflecting their views about Brexit in how they voted, one consequence would be to reduce the prominence of the constitutional question in how people voted in 2017. For example, given that the SNP was expressing continued opposition to Brexit and was arguing for Scotland to continue to have a close relationship with the EU, some previous opponents of independence who voted Remain might have been persuaded to vote for the SNP, whereas some supporters of independence who backed Leave might have defected from the SNP because of their stance on Brexit. Such a pattern would see the SNP gain ground among No voters while losing it among their Yes counterparts – and would suggest that it might be wrong to interpret the decline in SNP support in the 2017 election as simply a rejection of the party's stance on independence.

But did the way in which people in Scotland voted in the 2017 election in any way reflect their stance on Brexit rather than the constitutional question? Table 5 shows how those who we defined earlier as 'Europhiles' and 'Eurosceptics' voted in the 2015 and 2017 UK general elections. Two points stand out. First, in 2015, before it was clear that a EU referendum was going to be held, the level of support for the SNP was almost exactly the same in both groups, with around a half of both sets of voters backing the party. But whereas in 2017 support for the SNP remained at roughly this level among Europhiles, it dropped to little more than a third among Eurosceptics. The SNP does indeed appear to have found it more difficult in the 2017 election to retain the support of those who were less strongly committed to Britain's membership of the EU.

**Support for the SNP remained at roughly this level among Europhiles, it dropped to little more than a third among Eurosceptics**

Second, the increase in Conservative support registered between the two elections was more marked among Eurosceptics than Europhiles. As a result, the party attracted the support of more than one in four Eurosceptics, but only around one in ten Europhiles. In this respect at least, the pattern of voting in the election north of the border had clear echoes of the pattern in evidence in the rest of Britain whereby the Conservative Party gained ground among Eurosceptics but lost support among Europhiles (see the Voting chapter by Curtice and Simpson in the forthcoming British Social Attitudes 35<sup>th</sup> report). On the other hand, what we do not see north of the border is any clear evidence of the Labour Party advancing more strongly in one group rather than another. Instead, the party's support seems to have edged up a little among both groups, albeit with the result that the level of support for the party remained a little higher among those we have classified as Europhiles.

**Table 5 General election vote, by attitude towards the EU, 2015 and 2017**

	Attitude towards EU					
	Eurosceptic			Europhile		
	2015	2017	Change 2015-2017	2015	2017	Change 2015-2017
<b>General election vote</b>	%	%		%	%	
Conservative	14	28	+14	7	12	+4
Labour	22	26	+4	30	34	+4
Liberal Democrat	7	8	+1	9	4	-5
SNP	51	36	-15	49	47	-2
Other	6	1	-4	4	3	-1
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	628	585		280	287	

Source: *Scottish Social Attitudes*

Figures showing change between 2015 and 2017 in this table are calculated from the exact data, rather than the rounded figures that appear in the table. As a result they will sometimes vary from the difference between the rounded figures by +/-1%.

But what implications, if any, did this pattern have for the relationship between attitudes towards how Scotland should be governed and how people voted in the general election? What impact did the decline in SNP support among Eurosceptics have on the party's ability to secure the support of those who back independence? In Table 6 we classify people as either supporters of independence or of the Union using our long-standing question on how Scotland should be governed and show how the two groups divided their support between the parties in the 2015 and 2017 elections. This shows that the SNP were markedly less successful than they had been two years earlier in securing the backing of those who said they currently supported independence. Fewer than three-quarters (72%) of those

who currently support independence voted for the party in 2017, well down on the 84% who did so in 2015. Not since the 2010 UK general election, when only 55% of those who favoured independence voted for the SNP, had the level of support for the SNP among those who backed the party's stance on the constitutional question been so low in an election to either the Westminster or the Scottish Parliament (Curtice, 2017b).

**Table 6 General election vote, by attitude towards how Scotland should be governed, 2015 and 2017**

	Attitude towards how Scotland should be governed					
	Independence			Stay in the UK		
	2015	2017	Change 2015-2017	2015	2017	Change 2015-2017
<b>General election vote</b>	%	%		%	%	
Conservative	1	4	+3	19	37	+18
Labour	7	19	+12	38	36	-1
Liberal Democrat	1	2	+2	13	10	-3
SNP	84	72	-12	27	15	-12
Other	7	2	-5	3	2	-1
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>374</i>	<i>355</i>		<i>556</i>	<i>513</i>	

Source: Scottish Social Attitudes

Figures showing change between 2015 and 2017 in this table are calculated from the exact data, rather than the rounded figures that appear in the table. As a result they will sometimes vary from the difference between the rounded figures by +/-1%.

However, the party's losses were not confined to those who supported independence. Support for the SNP also fell away among those who would prefer Scotland to remain in the UK. In fact, it fell by just as much among this group as it did among those who supported independence, even though many fewer unionists had voted SNP four years previously – indeed, the level of support among this group was also lower than at any election since 2010. It would seem that support for the SNP fell irrespective of voters' stance on the constitutional question. But then given that No supporters had been just as likely as backers of Yes to vote Leave, perhaps the explanation is simply that the SNP's No voters who supported Leave also defected in greater numbers from the party than did those who voted Remain?

Indeed, the SNP did lose ground especially heavily among Eurosceptic backers of the Union; its support fell by as much as 15 percentage points among this group. But that said, it also fell by 9 points among Europhile unionist voters. Meanwhile, we have so far ignored the implications for our analysis here of the fact that the relationship between attitudes to the constitutional question and

**Evidently the pattern of the SNP's losses in the 2017 election cannot simply be accounted for by its stance on Brexit**

people's attitudes towards the European Union changed after the EU referendum. As we showed above, by 2017 those who supported independence were significantly more likely to be Europhiles, in contrast to the position in 2015. That makes it rather surprising that the SNP should have lost as much ground among supporters of independence as it did among those who would prefer to stay part of the UK. Indeed, further analysis reveals that support for the SNP among those who both support independence and can be classified as Europhiles was as much as 13 points lower in 2017 than it had been two years previously. Evidently the pattern of the SNP's losses in the 2017 election cannot simply be accounted for by its stance on Brexit.

Before we pursue how we might account for those losses, we should note two other features of Table 6. First, as we might anticipate given the robust stance that the party took in opposing the possibility of any second referendum on independence, the increase in support for the Conservatives between 2015 and 2017 occurred primarily among those who would prefer Scotland to remain part of the UK. The party's share of the vote increased by 18 points among unionists, but by just 3 points among supporters of independence. Indeed, although the party's core constituency proved to be those who both supported the Union and were Eurosceptic – no less than 42% of this group support the party, up 19 points on the equivalent figure in 2015 – it also registered substantial support (26%, up 14 points) among those who supported the Union but could be classified as 'Europhile'. It would seem that people's willingness to support the Conservatives north of the border was shaped by their attitudes towards the constitutional question as well as Brexit.

The second pattern of note in Table 6 is, however, one that we might not have anticipated. Even though Labour also supports Scotland's continued membership of the Union, the party's support rose markedly between 2015 and 2017 among supporters of independence, while the party did not make any advance at all among those who would prefer Scotland to remain part of the UK. Here, perhaps, is a vital clue as to why the SNP lost ground among supporters of independence even though that group had become more Europhile in outlook.

At this point it is useful to bear in mind two features of those who support independence. First, they are more numerous among those on the left of the political spectrum. Secondly, they are more common among the young. The first of these patterns becomes apparent when we use the items that form our socialist-laissez-faire scale, details of which are given in the appendix to this chapter, to divide voters in Scotland into three groups, the one third most socialist – or left-wing – the one third most laissez-faire – or right-wing – and the remaining one third in the centre. In our latest survey, no less than 58% of those on the left support independence as measured by our long-standing question, compared with 41% of those in the centre and just 38% of those on the right. Meanwhile, 56% of 18-34 year

olds back independence, compared with 48% of 35-54 year olds and just 33% of those aged 55 and over.

Despite the relatively high level of support for independence among younger and more left-wing voters, Labour advanced particularly strongly in both groups. Support for the party increased between 2015 and 2017 by as much as 13 points among those on the left compared with 6 points among those in the centre, while the party's support actually dropped by 3 points among those on the right. Meanwhile, an 18-point increase in Labour support was registered among 18-34 year olds, while those aged 35 or more barely moved towards the party at all. Conversely, SNP support fell most heavily (by 18 points) among young voters, with the result that, if anything, they were less likely to vote for the party (42%) than those aged 35-54 (46%) (though the difference between these groups was not found to be statistically significant).

It appears then that, despite their increasingly more Europhile outlook and their continued support for independence, some of the SNP's younger and more left-wing supporters switched to Labour in 2017. The defection of younger voters to Labour in particular complements what was a strong Labour advance among younger voters across Britain as a whole. The apparent enthusiasm among younger people for the relatively radical message put forward by the Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn, perhaps served to displace these voters' former enthusiasm for the equally radical independence message of the SNP, and thereby served to undermine the SNP's hold on a constituency that the party had hitherto seemed to make its own. Certainly, it seems that the scale of the SNP's loss of support among supporters of independence cannot simply be blamed on voters responding to their views about Brexit. Rather, the outcome of the 2017 election in Scotland reflected the interplay of voters' attitudes towards the constitutional question and Labour's more left-wing appeal as well as the new intertwining between attitudes towards independence and Britain's future relationship with the EU. What it was not, was simply a reflection of voters' judgement on the merits or otherwise of independence.

## An English backlash?

One of the most notable features of how people in England voted in the EU referendum is that those who describe themselves as wholly or primarily English were much more likely to vote to Leave the EU than those who regard themselves as wholly or primarily British (Curtice, 2017c; Henderson et al., 2017). Indeed, as we noted earlier, their behaviour could be regarded as one of the vital ingredients that brought about the overall vote to Leave. It has been suggested that the pattern is indicative of a wider, longer-term change in the prevalence and role of national identity in England whereby people have both become more likely to regard themselves as English rather than British and more likely to reflect their sense of identity in their

**Some of the SNP's younger and more left-wing supporters switched to Labour in 2017**

views about how the UK should be governed (Jeffrey et al., 2016). One implication of this argument is that voters in England might have become less supportive of the relative autonomy that Scotland enjoys in its domestic affairs as a result of the devolution settlement, and that this may be particularly true of those with a strong sense of English identity. In other words, the EU referendum may have helped stir up an ‘English backlash’ against Scotland’s constitutional status.

Is there, however, any evidence that English identity has become more prevalent? One very useful way of ascertaining national identity in a country where most people acknowledge one or the other of two identities – and maybe both – is to ask what has come to be known as the Moreno question (Moreno, 2006). Respondents are invited to say which of five possible combinations of the two identities best describes themselves. Thus, in England we ask:

*Which, if any, of the following best describes how you see yourself?*

*English not British*

*More English than British*

*Equally English and British*

*More British than English*

*British not English*

Table 7 shows the pattern of responses to this question in England over the last 20 years. As we have noted before (Curtice et al., 2013), there was an increase in the proportion of people who felt a strong sense of English identity at the time that devolution was first introduced in Scotland and Wales. In 1997, just 7% said that they were English and not British, whereas two years later 17% did so. But there is no evidence of any continuing trend thereafter, or of any particular increase in English identity in the wake of the 2016 Brexit referendum. Indeed, at 23%, the proportion who say they are either ‘English, not British’ or ‘More English than British’ is lower now than it has been at any time since before the introduction of devolution in the late 1990s. Indeed, for the first time, it is no larger than the proportion who say they are either ‘British, not English’ or ‘More British than English’. In short, there is little sign of any continuous or recent trend towards a more widespread sense of English identity.

**There is little sign of any continuous or recent trend towards a more widespread sense of English identity**

**Table 7** Moreno national identity in England, 1997-2017

	1997	1999	2000	2001	2003	2007	2008
<b>National identity</b>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
English, not British	7	17	18	17	17	19	16
More English than British	17	14	14	13	19	14	14
Equally English and British	45	37	34	42	31	31	41
More British than English	14	11	14	9	13	14	9
British, not English	9	4	12	11	10	12	9
<i>Unweighted base</i>	3150	2718	1928	2761	1917	859	982

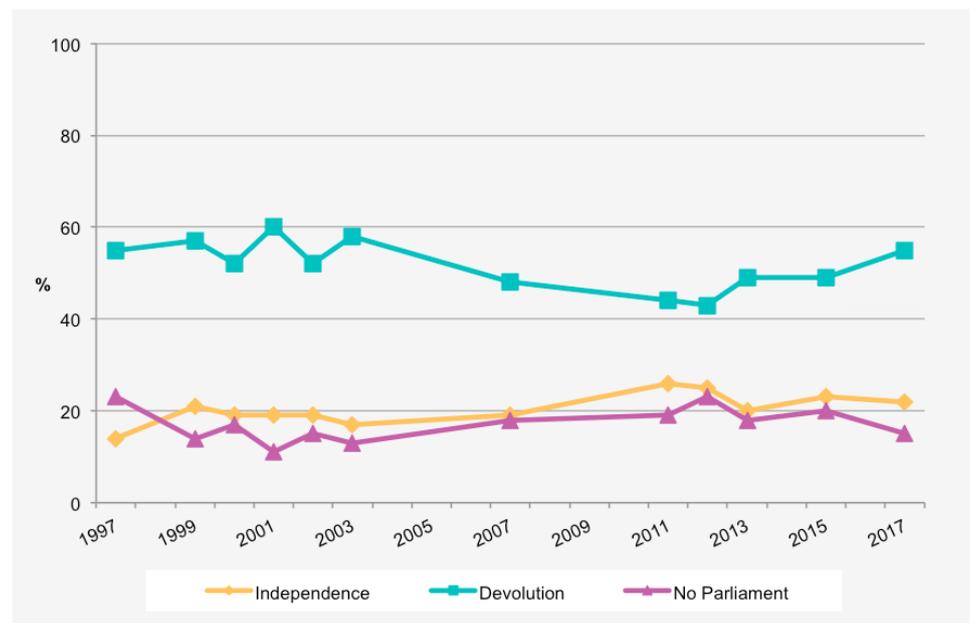
  

	2009	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>National identity</b>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
English, not British	17	17	14	16	17	14	13
More English than British	16	12	12	12	10	11	10
Equally English and British	33	44	42	41	42	42	41
More British than English	10	8	8	8	8	8	10
British, not English	13	10	13	12	13	13	13
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1940	2729	2799	2383	3778	2525	3478

Source: British Social Attitudes, respondents in England only  
 In 2012 and 2014 the question was not asked of those living in England who were born in Scotland or Wales

Equally, there is little sign that the Brexit vote signals the onset of an English nationalism that is also reflected in the attitudes of people in England towards how Scotland should be governed. In Figure 3 we show how people in England have responded when they have been presented with our long-standing question on how Scotland should be governed. This shows that the willingness of people in England to back devolution for Scotland was seemingly beginning to wane in 2011 and 2012 – that is, shortly after the SNP won an overall majority in the 2011 Scottish Parliament election and instigated the independence referendum. Support for the idea that Scotland should have its own parliament within the framework of the UK fell from 60% in 2001 and 58% in 2003 to just 43% in 2012, while, conversely, support for independence increased from 17% in 2003 to 26% in 2011. However, these trends have since largely been reversed. At 55%, the level of support in England for Scottish devolution is now as high as it was 20 years ago. Meanwhile, the proportion backing Scottish independence is still no more than 22%. In short, it remains the case that a large majority (85%) of people in England would like Scotland to remain part of the UK, and, moreover, that many are also willing to accept that Scotland should enjoy a degree of self-government.

**85% of people in England would like Scotland to remain part of the UK**

**Figure 3 Attitudes in England towards how Scotland should be governed, 1997-2017**

Source: 1997: *British Election Study*, respondents in England only; 1999-2017: *British Social Attitudes*, respondents living in England only

The data on which Figure 3 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

True, this outlook is somewhat less popular among those who say they are “English, not British”. Only 40% of this group say that they support Scottish devolution, while as many as 30% feel that Scotland should leave the UK and become an independent country. But this is a difference of degree, not a major division on the scale that was evident in how people voted in the EU referendum. Support for Scottish independence is only 11 points higher among those who say they are “English, not British” than it is among those who either say they are equally English and British or that they are wholly or primarily British. Moreover, the level of support for independence among those who say they are “English, not British” is no different now from what it was in 2015, before the Brexit referendum campaign, while the proportion backing devolution has only slipped back a statistically insignificant 3 points. The link in England between national identity and attitudes towards how Scotland should be governed is both relatively weak and no stronger now than it was before the EU referendum.

Thus, whatever role national identity may have played in shaping how people in England voted in the EU referendum, it would appear to be a mistake to assume that the sharp differences between those who regard themselves as English and those who call themselves British in their levels of support for Remain and Leave are indicative of a wider resurgence in English nationalism. There is little sign that English identity has become more prevalent in the wake of the Brexit referendum or that those who feel predominantly English have become particularly more antagonistic towards Scotland’s current status within the UK. To that extent at least it seems that Brexit has

**The link in England between national identity and attitudes towards how Scotland should be governed is both relatively weak and no stronger now than it was before the EU referendum**

done little to undermine the level of tolerance in England for the current constitutional settlement north of the border.

## Conclusions

The outcome of the EU referendum has had an impact on attitudes towards Scottish independence – but not in the way that Scotland's First Minister and many others anticipated. It has not resulted in a marked increase in Scotland in support for independence, not least because despite the heavy support for Remain in the EU referendum, the commitment of many Remain voters to the EU is relatively weak. Further, it has not stirred up an English nationalism that has become more antipathetic to Scotland's position in the Union. Equally, however, it has not resulted in a diminution of support in Scotland for an idea which, despite the outcome of the 2017 election in Scotland, remains markedly more popular than it had been before the independence referendum in 2014.

What the aftermath of the EU referendum has done is to bring about the emergence of a degree of alignment in Scotland between attitudes towards independence and those towards the European Union, whereas no such alignment existed before. As a result, the nationalist movement in Scotland is now more of a pro-European movement at grassroots level than was previously the case. It is a change that has proven disruptive for the SNP. In the 2017 election it helped cost the party the support of some of those who voted Yes in 2014 and SNP in 2015 but who were sceptical about the EU and may well have voted Leave in 2016, and whose enthusiasm for independence may consequently have dimmed. At the same time, the party's difficulties in that election were compounded by the ability of a somewhat revived Scottish Labour Party to win the support of some of those who still support independence. The coalition that resulted in a 45% vote for independence in 2014 has been unsettled – but if it were put back together again, perhaps when the future of Brexit is clearer, it could yet still raise questions about the future integrity of the UK.

**The EU referendum has brought about a degree of alignment in Scotland between attitudes towards independence and those towards the European Union**

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## Appendix

The data on which Figure 1 is based are shown below.

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
<b>How Scotland should be governed</b>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Independence	27	30	27	30	26	32	35	30	24
Devolution	59	55	59	52	56	45	44	54	62
No Parliament	10	12	9	13	13	17	14	9	9
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1482	1663	1605	1665	1508	1637	1549	1594	1508
	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
<b>How Scotland should be governed</b>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Independence	28	23	32	23	29	33	39	46	45
Devolution	56	61	58	61	55	50	49	42	41
No Parliament	8	10	6	11	9	7	6	8	8
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1482	1495	1197	1229	1497	1501	1288	1237	1234

Source: Scottish Social Attitudes

The data on which Figure 2 is based are shown below.

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>Scottish Parliament should make...</b>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
... all decisions	28	43	35	31	41	51	49	46
... all except defence and foreign affairs	32	29	32	32	27	30	31	32
... all except defence, foreign affairs, taxation, and welfare	27	21	24	25	22	12	12	14
... no decisions	10	5	6	8	6	3	4	4
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	1495	1197	1229	1497	1501	1288	1237	1234

Source: Scottish Social Attitudes

The full question wording for the data presented in Table 2 is as follows:

*Thinking now about what might happen if Scotland were to become an independent country, separate from the rest of the United Kingdom but part of the European Union.*

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

*(A lot better, A little better, No difference, A little worse, A lot worse)*

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

*(A lot better, A little better, No difference, A little worse, A lot worse)*

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

*(A lot better, A little better, No difference, A little worse, A lot worse)*

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

*(A lot better, A little better, No difference, A little worse, A lot worse)*

The data on which Figure 3 is based are shown below.

	1997	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
<b>How Scotland should be governed</b>	%	%	%	%	%	%
Independence	14	21	19	19	19	17
Devolution	55	57	52	60	52	58
No Parliament	23	14	17	11	15	13
<i>Unweighted base</i>	2536	902	1928	2761	1924	1917

	2007	2011	2012	2013	2015	2017
<b>How Scotland should be governed</b>	%	%	%	%	%	%
Independence	19	26	25	20	23	22
Devolution	48	44	43	49	49	55
No Parliament	18	19	23	18	20	15
<i>Unweighted base</i>	859	967	939	925?	1865	891

Source: 1997: British Election Study, respondents in England only; 1999-2017: British Social Attitudes, respondents living in England only

## Libertarian–authoritarian scale

Since 1986, the BSA surveys have included an attitude scale which aims to measure where respondents stand on a certain underlying value dimension – libertarian–authoritarian.

This scale consists of a number of statements to which the respondent is invited to “agree strongly”, “agree”, “neither agree nor disagree”, “disagree” or “disagree strongly”.

The items are:

*Young people today don’t have enough respect for traditional British values. [TradVals]*

*People who break the law should be given stiffer sentences. [StifSent]*

*For some crimes, the death penalty is the most appropriate sentence. [DeathApp]*

*Schools should teach children to obey authority. [Obey]*

*The law should always be obeyed, even if a particular law is wrong. [WrongLaw]*

*Censorship of films and magazines is necessary to uphold moral standards. [Censor]*