

# National identity and party affiliation are set to play a key role in the Scottish referendum, whose result is more uncertain than opinion polls suggest

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*'DevoMax' will not be an option on the ballot paper in the Scottish Independence Referendum next year even though it is more popular among the electorate than independence. **Arno van der Zwet** and **Craig McAngus** explore how Scottish attitudes to the two options vary according to national and party identity. They find that perceptions of national identity polarises assessments of Scotland's performance under independence more so than it does for DevoMax. Also, people's assessments of Scotland's future do not always match their actual constitutional preferences, suggesting that the referendum result is more uncertain than opinion polls may suggest.*



The referendum on Scottish independence to be held on the 18<sup>th</sup> September 2014 will contain a straight 'Yes or No' ballot. However, there exists a significant body of opinion in Scotland that actually prefers a constitutional position somewhere between the current devolved settlement and independence involving a further extension of the competences of the Scottish Parliament. DevoMax is one of the options that has consistently been part of the discourse surrounding constitutional change in Scotland. Although there is an element of uncertainty with regards to what DevoMax is, it commonly refers to devolving most policies and tax powers to Holyrood whilst the UK retains some macroeconomic policy, defence and foreign affairs. Around 50% of the electorate has consistently supported a position of extended devolution, making it a more popular option than independence.



But how does the Scottish public assess Scotland's performance under independence and DevoMax. Do they think that its future will be significantly better under one or the other? Furthermore, how do these assessments relate to two key variables that explain constitutional preferences, national and party identity? The findings of this research are based on data from Scottish Social Attitudes Survey from 2011 and 2012. The analysis focusses on a limited number of variables including economic performance, standard of living and voice in the world.

We find that assessments of DevoMax and independence are not, on the whole, that different. In relation to national identity, Scottish identifiers have a roughly equal assessment of what changes DevoMax and independence may bring. However, British identifiers are significantly more negative about independence than DevoMax. In the case of party affiliation, the assessments of independence and DevoMax are fairly similar. Furthermore, Labour supporters are more positive about the future performance of an independent Scotland than their actual constitutional preferences would suggest.

## Future performance assessments Independence and DevoMax

Assessments of both the economic and standard of living variable are more positive for DevoMax than for independence. Particularly, the economy the performance rating increases significantly (+8). For the voice in the world variable the assessment score is similar. Notably, a higher percentage of people opt for the 'same' category for DevoMax, suggesting that people are not convinced that DevoMax will make a huge difference to the current set up. It also suggests that positions in relation to independence are more polarised. Principle Component Analysis confirms that the variables presented in table 1 can be considered to form two latent variables which we have called performance assessment of independence and DevoMax. The scores on these latent variables range from 0-12.

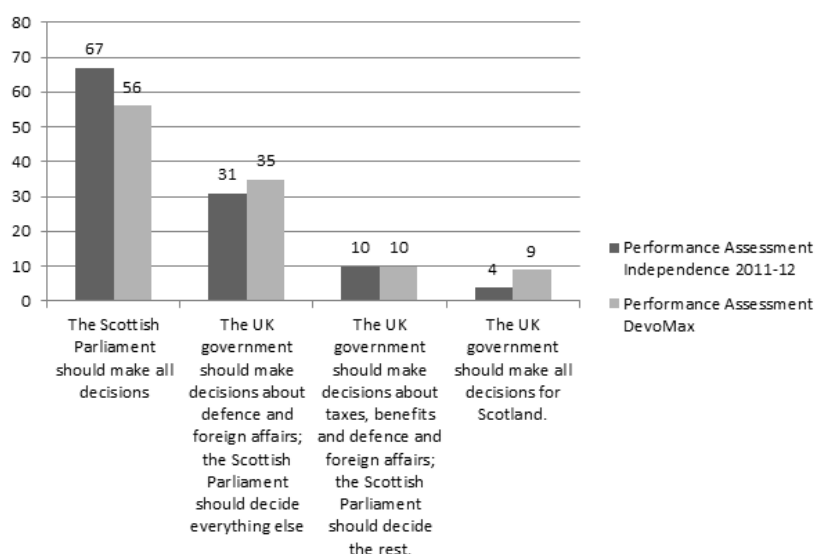
**Table 1: Performance assessment variables independence (2011 and 2012) DevoMax (2012)**

If Scotland were to become						
	Independent 2011 and 2012			DevoMax (2012)		
	Economy	Standard of living	Voice in the world	Economy	Standard of living	Voice in the world
Much better	9	8	17	5	3	8
Better	29	28	31	33	30	35
Same	28	38	30	36	49	42
Worse	21	20	12	19	14	10
Much worse	13	6	9	8	4	6
Worse – Better	+3	+10	+27	+11	+15	+27
N	2,120	2,158	2,257	1,131	1,150	1,195

Source: Scottish Social Attitudes Survey

Comparing the performance assessments of Scotland's future with actual constitutional preferences (see Figure 1), we find, unsurprisingly, that those who support independence are most likely to assess Scotland's performance under independence positively (67%). Just under a third of those that support DevoMax think that Scotland will perform better under independence. What is more surprising is the relatively low number of DevoMax supporters with a positive assessment of the future under such an arrangement. Only slightly more people that support DevoMax assess Scotland's performance positively under DevoMax (35%) when compared to independence (31%). It is, in fact, the independence supporters that are most positive about Scotland's performance under DevoMax despite it being lower than for independence (56%). In other words, independence supporters clearly see the DevoMax option as a next best option but for those that want DevoMax there does not appear to be much belief that it will change Scotland's future positively.

**Figure 1: % of people with a positive performance assessment of independence (average 2011-2012) and**



## DevoMax (2012)

Source: Scottish Social Attitudes Survey

## Interaction with national identity and party affiliation

Analysing how people assess Scotland's future performance under DevoMax or independence in relation to national identity we note that the patterns are analogous (Table 2). As would be expected British identifiers are more likely to be negative whereas Scottish identifiers are more likely to be positive. Interestingly, Scottish identifiers only have a slightly more favourable assessment of Scotland's future under DevoMax when compared to independence (+2). British identifiers are considerably less negative in their assessment of DevoMax when compared to independence (+17). It therefore seems that it is mainly British identifiers that drive the differences between independence and DevoMax. It should be noted that British identifiers are not so much more positive about Scotland's future under DevoMax (+3) but rather more neutral (+13).

**Table2: Performance assessment and (forced) identity\***

Performance Assessment						
	Independence			DevoMax		
	Scottish	British	Total	Scottish	British	Total
Much better	9	2	7	4	1	4
Better	36	14	32	35	18	32
Same	35	31	34	47	44	46
Worse	17	38	21	11	30	15
Much worse	4	15	6	2	7	3
Worse-better	+24	-37	+12	+26	-18	+18
n	765	219	984	1480	366	1846

*Data source: Scottish Social Attitudes Study*

*\* Respondents were asked to choose their primary identity, only Scottish and British have been included in the analysis.*

Given the opinion polls over the last couple of years, coupled with the polarised nature of the inter-party debate, one would expect to find that those who affiliate themselves with a pro-UK party to be similarly negative about the performance of an independent Scotland. Table 6 below shows the mean performance assessments of party identifier groups:

**Table 2: Mean Perceptions of Independence and Devolution Max**

	Independence		DevoMax
	2011	2012	2012
No-Party	6.1 (2.3)	6.1 (2.3)	6.1 (2.1)
Conservative	3.2 (2.4)	3.8 (2.6)	5.1 (2.3)
Labour	5.7 (3.1)	5.9 (2.8)	6.4 (2.3)
Liberal Democrat	5.7 (2.8)	5.3 (2.5)	5.8 (2.3)
SNP	8.7 (2.3)	7.9 (2.1)	7.7 (1.9)
N	918	941	996

*Performance assessments measured on a 0-12 scale, with 6 being the neutral point. Figures in parentheses represent the standard deviation.*

As the table highlights, there is a noticeable difference in mean perceptions between affiliates of the main pro-UK parties. Furthermore, Labour identifiers have become more positive about independence on average between 2011 and 2012, taking up a position just below the neutral point. This is potentially significant to the outcome of the referendum as almost 38% of Scots identified themselves with the Labour party in 2012. Furthermore, those of no-party affiliation (17% of Scots) assess independence in fairly neutral terms and do not differentiate between independence and DevoMax.

National identity and party affiliation are set to play a key role in this referendum. When analysed as independent variables, using linear regression, to explain performance assessments of independence and DevoMax as dependent variables, the variance explained for independence assessments in 2012 is 26% compared to DevoMax in 2012 which is 15%. This shows that Scots draw upon their national identity and party affiliation to help them assess the issue of independence more than they do for different constitutional scenarios within the UK. This suggests that the term 'independence' is a value-laden one that encourages a greater degree of 'heuristic shortcutting' compared to the more 'neutral' concept of devolution. Indeed, only 14% of Labour affiliates were in favour of independence in 2012, but 26% believed that 'all decisions' should be made in Scotland.

## Conclusion

The research has two key messages. Firstly, people's assessments of Scotland's future as an independent country do not vastly differ from assessments of Scotland's future under a DevoMax arrangement. This particular applies to

Scottish identifiers but less so for British identifiers who are considerably less negative about DevoMax. In other words, perceptions of national identity polarises assessments of independence more so than it does for DevoMax. Secondly, people's assessments of Scotland's future do not always match their actual constitutional preferences. The findings regarding party affiliation suggest that the referendum result is more uncertain than opinion polls may suggest. Labour affiliates are an important component with regards to the referendum result, and there appears to be a noticeable discrepancy between the party's message and those who identify with it. Labour affiliates are not negative about the performance of an independent Scotland on the whole, but these assessments are not translating into actual constitutional preferences, perhaps partly because they see the term 'independence' as one that belongs to the SNP.

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*Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the British Politics and Policy blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please read our [comments policy](#) before posting.*

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