

Reading Level 3: Scottish Independence

3rd September 2014

Topics: politics, devolution, independence, Scotland

1 Having kept an eye on the Scottish independence debate, including skimming through the proposals of the
2 Scottish National party, here is my take on the issue as the referendum draws ever closer.

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4 Much of the criticism of the current union from Scottish voices is essentially party political. The policies of
5 Labour, let alone the Conservative Party, such as privatisation within the NHS, university tuition fees, social
6 security and so on are not liked by the more socialist SNP and, by extension, the majority of Scots. However,
7 just because Scotland was independent wouldn't necessarily mean that these policies would be stopped from
8 coming in. They could be implemented by an elected Scottish government of the future. Only by electing
9 appropriate parties to the Scottish government could a different policy path be chosen for Scotland – which in
10 fact is what happens now under devolution.

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12 Scotland already has significant freedom of action in exactly those policy areas and the Scottish Parliament has
13 taken good advantage of them, particularly under the SNP. Indeed, Salmond uses several examples of actions
14 which he is taking now to show what would be possible in the future. In my opinion he hasn't really explained
15 why independence would be different or better than the status quo regarding these policies, but raising the
16 age-old spectre of hated English policies being imposed may well be a referendum-winning tactic.

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18 To be fair, one exception to this could be taxation, which is likely to be the one new significant area of
19 difference. Nevertheless, even taxation policy is always subject to the whims of party politics and the taxation
20 differences in the White Paper on independence read more like a party manifesto. However, if the Scottish
21 want complete local control over their tax-and-spend powers to reflect their own priorities, then why not?

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23 The 'Better Together' campaign has been trying to draw attention to the bigger issues that actually affect
24 independence and sovereignty: macro-issues like the currency and economy, defence and expensive centres of
25 excellence. These are the real subjects for concern regarding independence, and should be the subject of the
26 debate. Curiously, in these areas Salmond appears to want to keep the status quo (ie. devolved status, not
27 independence). His preference is for a currency union with England & Wales, which would mean that London
28 (and the Bank of England) would retain control over interest rates and presumably taxation, and probably that
29 Scotland's budget would even have to be submitted for approval by London, just as happens within the Euro
30 single currency area. How would that be very different to the current situation?

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32 On defence, for example, the White Paper says that Scotland will, "continue to work in partnership with the
33 rest of the UK in defence alliances." Would Scotland ask for a continuation of the unified British army, just as it
34 wants to ask for a continuation of the currency union? And if so, would England would impose conditions from
35 a position of strength that result in a situation... just like it is today. I can see the same happening for other
36 macro-issues and don't see any indication of Scotland really wanting let alone achieving sovereignty over the
37 truly national issues. So would independence really be better than now? Or could it be worse? On the
38 assumption that England won't be too inclined to do any favours to a newly independent Scotland, and with
39 England holding all the cards that Scotland wants access to, the risk of Scotland ending up worse off is the real
40 threat posed by independence.



41 On a wider note, the referendum in Scotland may provide an indication of one style of future across Europe,
42 with regions of Spain, Germany and perhaps of France potentially following suit. In this future, smaller regions
43 would gain more control over local policy issues through nominal independence, while macro-issues that have
44 traditionally been considered symbols of true sovereignty would remain coordinated across wider regions in
45 order to take advantage of economies of scale. Although this duality may appear contradictory, it is actually
46 complimentary and perhaps more democratic and efficient. If Salmond gets everything he wants, what we
47 might be looking at really is a rebranding of increased devolution and a changing of the meaning of
48 'independence'. In the modern world, can any new small country really want to be truly independent, or even
49 be able to function totally independently?