

## Scottish Independence in the Age of Brexit

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## **Introduction**

In 2016, the United Kingdom held a referendum on whether or not they should leave the European Union. The majority voted to Leave, ushering in the age of “Brexit.” However, while the UK voted for an exit, Scottish voters had overwhelmingly voted to Remain. With 62 percent of Scottish voters voting to Remain, it has been predicted that Scotland will have an independence referendum similar to the one held in 2014, in hopes of breaking out of the UK and remaining in the EU. However, this does not appear to be happening soon. Despite Scotland’s history of desiring political independence from the UK, the chances of a future independence referendum in Scotland are low due to a variety of factors. First, the current political situation reveals a change in attitudes amongst the Scottish public and a lack of support for an independence referendum within the UK. Second, the current economic situation in Scotland is not strong enough for independence. Finally, while Scottish nationalism is strong, it does not equate to a strong independence movement, because it is difficult to agree upon a single view of the meaning of Scottish nationalism. Each of these factors make it unlikely a Scottish independence referendum will happen in the near future, even as the process for Brexit begins.

## **A Brief History of Scotland and England**

Currently, Scotland is a part of the United Kingdom. But Scotland has an identity that is often separate from that of the UK. From the legends of William Wallace to Robert the Bruce to the Jacobites, Scotland takes pride in the moments it has rebelled against England. The history between England and Scotland has contributed to strong nationalist feelings within Scotland today, and is part of the reason Scotland has attempted independence in the past. In order to

understand Scottish nationalism and independence, it is important to briefly touch upon the history of Scotland and the UK.

Scotland has gone through various periods in time where there was a struggle for power between the Scots and the English. One of the major historical events that has contributed to Scottish nationalism were the Wars of Independence. After the death of Scotland's King Alexander III and all possible heirs, Scotland faced a period of instability, which England took advantage of. John Balliol was eventually chosen to be king, but England's Edward I interfered in Scottish affairs, eventually leading to a rebellion by the Scots known as the First War of Scottish Independence. Lasting from 1296 to 1304, this war produced legends such as William Wallace, a leader of the rebellion, and Robert the Bruce, who became Scotland's next king. In 1320, during a brief period of peace, the Declaration of Arbroath was written, which declared Scotland's sovereignty from England. However, from 1332 to 1357, there was a Second War of Independence, due to unresolved conflict from the first war. Scotland kept its independence by the end of this war, but conflict and tension continued between the two countries for centuries.<sup>1</sup>

By 1603, Scotland and England forged a connection with the Union of the Crowns, when James IV of Scotland became James I of England after Elizabeth I died (as there were no other heirs). Despite Scotland and England sharing a monarch, the two countries were politically separate and sovereign, having separate parliaments.<sup>2</sup> But in 1707, Scotland and England officially united, creating the United Kingdom. Economically, the Union of 1707 benefitted Scotland, which was suffering from losing trade deals with France (due to sharing a monarch with England), crop failure, and a failed colony in Panama, known as the Darien scheme.<sup>3</sup> With

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Lynch, *Scotland: A New History* (London: Pimlico, 2000), 111, 114-6, 119, 126, 128.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 238-9.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Whatley, *Bought and Sold for English Gold?: Explaining the Union of 1707* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2001).

few other options, Scotland had to turn to England and its strong economy and empire to save its own economy. On April 28, 1707, the Scottish Parliament dissolved, and by May Scotland and England were officially united.<sup>4</sup> This was met with protest though, as Scots suddenly had less representation in Parliament and Scotland was no longer sovereign and independent.<sup>5</sup> Scots had not quickly forgotten about their former victories against England, and Scottish nationalism remained in the backs of people's minds.

Shortly after the Union, Westminster was quick to realize that governing Scotland and Britain simultaneously was no easy feat. This led to the creation of a Scottish Secretary of State, who handled issues specifically relating to Scotland. The Scottish Secretary of State was a Secretary who, in theory, handled both foreign and domestic affairs in the UK, but in practice handled issues specifically relating to Scotland. They were often Scots themselves. This position fluctuated between efficiency and non-efficiency, but the creation of such a position is telling; because a united parliament had a limited understanding of Scotland's needs, there was a need for Scottish affairs to be handled separately from British ones. This allowed Scotland to function in a semi-independent way, though Scotland was no longer independent itself.<sup>6</sup> Despite the new union, things between Scotland and England were not perfect; but it would not be until the next century that the Scottish independence movement would begin to gain political traction.

### **Scottish Political Nationalism Before Brexit and the Emergence of the SNP**

Because of the history between Scotland and England, a strong Scottish nationalist movement has grown over time. But in order for an independent Scotland to become a strong possibility, this nationalist movement needs to have political legitimacy. After World War II,

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<sup>4</sup> Lynch, 313.

<sup>5</sup> Whatley.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander Murdoch, *The People Above* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, Ltd., 1980), 4-5.

Scottish nationalism began to be politicized, slowly gaining more notice on the political stage. By the 1970s, Scottish nationalism and the Scottish National Party were in the political spotlight, and have been considered seriously in British politics since. However, the presence of Scottish nationalism in politics has not yet led to independence, and it is unclear whether it will anytime soon.

Prior to World War II, there were hints of Scottish nationalism in Scottish politics. As mentioned before, there was the 1320 Declaration of Arbroath, which was perhaps the first signs of Scottish independence becoming politically legitimate. After 1707, Scottish independence moved to the political back burner until the late 1800s. In 1853, the National Association for the Vindication of Scottish Rights was formed, and in 1886, the Scottish Home Rule Association formed. By 1885, Westminster realized that ruling Scotland in the same way as ruling England was not efficient, and the Scottish Office was created to handle purely Scottish affairs. The next stage of political nationalism appeared in 1920, when the Scottish National League was formed, which was the first sign of a political party dedicated to Scottish nationalist interests. Soon after in 1928 there was the National Party of Scotland, and 1934 saw the creation of the Scottish National Party with the combination of the Scottish Party and the National Party of Scotland.<sup>7</sup> Thus Scottish nationalism and independence began to make its mark on UK politics.

The Scottish National Party, or SNP, is currently the ruling party of the Scottish Parliament, with independence for Scotland being its number one goal. But the SNP has not always had such political power in Scotland, especially prior to there being a devolved Scottish Parliament. Though the SNP has not yet reached its goal of an independent Scotland, Scotland has gained more autonomy, partially due to the actions of the SNP in pushing for devolution of

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<sup>7</sup> Murray Stewart Leith and Daniel P. J. Soule, *Political Discourse and National Identity in Scotland*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 16-17.

the UK Parliament. The SNP had rocky beginnings, splitting in 1942, leading to the creation of the Scottish Convention. This cross-party organization created the National Covenant in 1949, a petition to Westminster calling for the creation of a separate Scottish Parliament. Though this Covenant was largely ignored by the UK government, it was a significant stepping stone in pushing Scottish nationalism into British politics, as it was one of the first times Scots organized for a clear political goal.<sup>8</sup>

During the 1950s and 1960s, Scottish nationalism began to gain further traction, and a clear link between political nationalism and the SNP began to appear. After World War II, Scotland's heavy industry decreased, negatively affecting Scotland's economy. After the 1960s, UK policies shifted towards centralization, but because these policies were enacted by the Scottish Office in Scotland, they were not as efficient.<sup>9</sup> Scotland had no autonomous institutions of their own, and policies created by a power that was so physically distant from Scotland made little sense within Scotland itself.<sup>10</sup> In addition, as the British Empire fell, so too did major industries in Scotland. Shipyards, coal mines, and steel mills were just some of the industries to suffer from a declining British Empire, and many of these industries were essential to the Scottish economy.<sup>11</sup> This caused Scotland's GDP to drop in comparison to the rest of the UK. Being centrally ruled by Westminster was no longer beneficial for Scotland, and it became apparent that Scotland would be better off apart from the Union. Rather than follow policies created by a far removed, centralized body, Scots began to desire a political body that would be solely dedicated to Scottish problems. Because of this, the ruling Conservative Party, known as the "Unionist Party" until 1965, experienced a decline in popularity in Scotland due to its

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>10</sup> Paolo Dardanelli, "Ideology and Rationality: The Europeanisation of the Scottish National Party," *Osterreichische Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft* 32, no. 3 (2003): 273.

<sup>11</sup> Leith, 22-3.

unionist policies. But because the Conservatives controlled Westminster and were favored in the rest of the UK, they continued to exercise control over all of Scotland.<sup>12</sup> Thus, began the quest for devolution.

Devolution is a form of decentralization, or transferring power from a high level of government to a lower level of government. In Scotland's case, devolution meant Scotland would have its own parliament, separate from the one in Westminster. By the 1970s, Scots viewed the UK's centralized policies in a negative light, and decentralization appeared like a positive change. For those who wanted independence – especially the SNP – devolution would have been the first step in attaining this goal. The SNP's political strategy was and has been defined by two things: autonomy and secession. Though the long-term goal was independence from the UK, the short-term goal was for Scotland to gain more political autonomy, which could first be achieved by Scotland regaining its own, separate parliament.<sup>13</sup> The road to devolution went hand-in-hand with the social, political, and cultural changes Scotland was experiencing during the 1960s and 1970s. During the 1960s, the Labour Party was favored in Scotland more than it was through the rest of the UK, because it was considered less unionist than the Conservative Party and represented those worse-off economically, which Scotland was compared to the rest of the UK.<sup>14</sup> However, Labour eventually lost favor in Scotland due to its pro-European (in a time where Scotland was Eurosceptic) and pro-nuclear armament policies – a turn of events that the SNP used to its advantage.<sup>15</sup> With both traditional UK political parties losing popularity in Scotland, the Scottish had to look for other parties that better represented their interests – and the SNP could provide.

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<sup>12</sup> Lynch, 444.

<sup>13</sup> Dardanelli, 272-3.

<sup>14</sup> Lynch, 444.

<sup>15</sup> Leith, 29-30.

In the late 1960s, the SNP experienced a boom in popularity. From 1967 to 1969, the SNP did extremely well in local elections, and in 1968 it was the largest political party in Scotland. This positive trend for the SNP began with an election for the Glasgow Pollok seat in 1967. There were three main candidates: Esmond Wright of the Conservatives, Dick Douglas of Labour, and George Leslie of the SNP. Though Wright won, Leslie polled at 28 percent and received significantly more votes than Douglas, revealing that when it came to progressive policies, the SNP was favored over Labour. Douglas himself even eventually switched to the SNP. The other 1967 local elections saw SNP members winning seats, gaining 27 burgh seats and 42 county ones. But the most notable SNP win was that of Winifred “Winnie” Ewing, who became a Member of the UK Parliament for the Hamilton constituency.<sup>16</sup> Her win pushed the SNP into the spotlight of mainstream UK politics, and proved that the SNP could achieve as much as their Labour and Conservative counterparts – if not more. And if the SNP could reach parliament, perhaps devolution – and even independence – could as well.<sup>17</sup>

The SNP wave of the late 60’s did not last long, however, and by 1969 Labour had recovered.<sup>18</sup> Those elected in the 1967 elections (with the exception of Ewing) had little political experience, and the sudden growth of the party made it difficult for the SNP to manage itself effectively. Despite this, both the Labour and Conservative parties felt threatened by the SNP’s sudden success, and devolution began to be seriously considered, mostly by the Conservatives.<sup>19</sup> In 1974, the SNP’s luck changed yet again as they gained eleven MPs.<sup>20</sup> The 1970s was a strong decade for the Scottish independence movement and the SNP, due to the discovery of oil in

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<sup>16</sup> Christopher T. Harvie, *Scotland and Nationalism: Scottish Society and Politics 1707 to the Present* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 177-8.

<sup>17</sup> Leith, 32.

<sup>18</sup> Harvie, 178.

<sup>19</sup> Lynch, 444-5.

<sup>20</sup> Leith, 32.

Scotland's North Sea. The SNP seized this opportunity to campaign with the slogan "It's Scotland's Oil," arguing that the revenue from this oil would only benefit Scotland if Scotland was independent.<sup>21</sup> After a long history of being economically in England's shadow, Scotland was ready to reap the rewards of its own oil. It is worth noting that, prior to the discovery of oil, poor economic conditions fueled Scottish nationalism, as UK policies were ineffective at improving economic conditions. Once there was a chance for Scotland to improve its economy without UK assistance, the SNP seized the opportunity. The SNP continued to call for independence and devolution, and in February of 1977, the Labour government introduced the Scotland and Wales Bill, which called for a devolution referendum. This bill was defeated, but reintroduced in November. However, this reintroduction included the addition of the Cunningham Amendment, which required 40 percent of the Scottish electorate support the referendum in order for it to pass. The referendum occurred in 1979, with 51.6 percent voting Yes to devolution – but because this was only 32.9 percent of the Scottish electorate, devolution remained a dream.<sup>22</sup>

The 1980s saw the SNP decline again, as the next general election resulted in only two MPs from the party. Despite this, the public still supported devolution. In 1980, the Campaign for a Scottish Assembly was set up,<sup>23</sup> and in 1988 it created the document "A Claim of Right for Scotland," a short statement that declared the Scottish people's desire for its own parliament:

We, gathered as the Scottish Constitutional Convention, do hereby acknowledge the sovereign right of the Scottish people to determine the form of Government best suited to their needs, and do hereby declare and pledge that in all our actions and deliberations their interests shall be paramount.

We further declare and pledge that our actions and deliberations shall be directed to the following ends:

To agree a scheme for an Assembly or Parliament for Scotland;

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<sup>21</sup> Harvie, 184-7.

<sup>22</sup> Leith, 32-3.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 33.

To mobilise Scottish opinion and ensure the approval of the Scottish people for that scheme; and  
To assert the right of the Scottish people to secure implementation of that scheme.<sup>24</sup>

In 1989, Westminster acted once again, and the Scottish Constitutional Convention was created. The only two parties that were strongly against this Convention were the Conservatives and, ironically, the SNP, because they viewed the Convention as dominated by Labour. Despite this, the Convention aided the fight for devolution, and in 1995 *Scotland's Parliament, Scotland's Right* was published, serving as the basis for the structure of the future Scottish Parliament.<sup>25</sup> By 1995, the SNP had once again committed itself to devolution, and with the majority of UK parties supporting devolution, a referendum was set up for 1997.

By this time, every major UK party supported devolution except for the Conservatives, and the referendum had a positive outcome. In 1998, the Scotland Act was passed, and by 1999 Scotland had its own Parliament.<sup>26</sup> This was a major win for Scottish political nationalism. Not only had Scottish nationalism proved capable of influencing mainstream British politics, but it had also secured a significant increase of autonomy for Scotland. Though still part of the UK, Scotland now had more control over Scottish affairs, and there was a clear distinction between Scotland and the UK. In addition, the SNP now had more room to pursue their political agenda. With a Scottish Parliament, it became easier for the SNP to gain votes and control of Scottish politics; since 1999, UK parties such as Labour have been less successful in Scottish elections than they have been in British elections, and the SNP has gained power in the Scottish Parliament since 2007.<sup>27</sup> The turn of the century saw a new era in Scottish political nationalism, and with devolution secured, the next step for the SNP was independence.

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<sup>24</sup> Campaign for a Scottish Assembly, "A Claim of Right of Scotland," 1988.

<sup>25</sup> Leith, 34.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 35-6.

### **The 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum**

The SNP's number one goal was – and still is – an independent Scotland. With a separate Scottish Parliament, the SNP now has the opportunity to push for this goal. The existence of a Scottish Parliament in Scotland makes it easier for the SNP to compete in elections, as opposed to competing for seats with the rest of the UK, and also allows the SNP to influence daily Scottish concerns. The Scottish Parliament also creates a strengthened sense of a Scottish national identity, uniting the Scottish people and giving them a sense of control over Scottish politics.<sup>28</sup> The SNP saw this as an opportunity to promote Scottish independence, and they hoped to reach this goal quickly. However, a referendum on Scottish independence did not occur until 2014, and even then, it failed to bring about an independent Scotland. In addition, the SNP itself failed to gain control of the Scottish Parliament until 2007 and did not gain a majority government until 2011. It became clear that, despite the creation of a Scottish Parliament and the influence of the SNP, Scottish independence was not a given. But why? To find the answer, one must first look more closely at the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum.

The SNP is the primary political party in Scotland that has promoted independence for Scotland, but its strategy for independence has changed over time. Today, in order for Scotland to become independent, the country must have a referendum, which must first be allowed by the UK government. Though Scotland now has a devolved parliament, some powers, such as the power to call a referendum, remain in the hands of the UK government. The SNP first mandated the need for a referendum before independence at its 1977 conference, though they acknowledged the need for a SNP majority in order for the referendum to happen. In the 1980s, the SNP proposed a two-stage process, where the first stage would be a Parliamentary majority

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 36.

allowing for a referendum while the second stage would be the referendum itself. But in 1997, the SNP's manifesto declared they would begin negotiations for independence with the UK government as soon as the SNP gained the majority of MPs in Scotland, without a referendum. The party was quick to realize though that this would cost them votes, as voters who were wary of independence would not vote for the SNP if it meant independence would happen automatically. After the Scottish Parliament was established in 1999, the SNP put an independence referendum in its manifesto on a list of ten priorities, promising that independence would not occur simply because of an SNP majority. The SNP hoped that promising a referendum would help the party gain votes from both proponents and opponents of independence.<sup>29</sup> It was clear to the SNP that support for an independent Scotland was not enough to win them seats in Parliament, and that perhaps not all of Scotland wanted independence – at least, not right away.

A lack of overwhelming support for Scottish independence throughout Scotland continued throughout the early 2000s. In 2007, opinion polls showed that when the choice is not black and white, voters were less likely to choose independence. In one such poll, voters were offered three choices: the status quo, more powers for the Scottish Parliament, and independence. With these options, support for independence was only at 23 percent.<sup>30</sup> This reveals that perhaps complete independence was not what the majority of Scots ever wanted – instead, further devolution or the status quo were more appealing. But even if the choice was black and white, independence still did not fare well; when the only choices were the status quo and independence, there was a 2:1 majority against independence. However, there was some hope for

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<sup>29</sup> James Mitchell, "The Referendum Campaign," in *The Scottish Independence Referendum: Constitutional and Political Implications*, ed. Aileen McHarg, Tom Mullen, Alan Page, and Neil Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 76-7.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

the SNP; 83 percent of SNP voters supported independence. But the SNP realized that in order to gain independence, they would have to win a majority government in the Scottish Parliament – and in order to win a majority government, they would have to appeal to voters throughout Scotland, even those who did not support independence. This was especially clear to the SNP in 2007, when they were the largest party in Scotland’s Parliament by only one seat.<sup>31</sup>

Just as the SNP recognized it needed a devolved Scottish Parliament to win independence, the party recognized it also needed control of that Parliament. To gain more support, the SNP began exploring different options besides independence that would appeal to voters. In 2007, the party published a white paper titled *Choosing Scotland’s Future: A National Conversation*, which outlined three different options: independence, the status quo, and further devolution.<sup>32</sup> The summary of the paper emphasized the importance of the Scottish people in determining Scotland’s future:

This paper is the first step in a wide-ranging national conversation about the future of Scotland. This conversation will allow the people of Scotland to consider all the options for the future of the country and make informed decisions. This paper invites the people of Scotland to sign up for the national conversation and to suggest how the conversation should be designed to ensure the greatest possible participation.<sup>33</sup>

Regardless of the SNP’s goals, it would be up to the Scottish people to make the final decision.

The SNP hoped that a “national conversation” would garner more support for the SNP, and in 2011 they won the majority government they had hoped for, and support for the SNP had doubled. But support for independence had not changed, remaining at the same level as in 2007.<sup>34</sup> Regardless, the SNP kept its promise of negotiating a referendum with the UK government after gaining a majority in the Scottish Parliament. With the Edinburgh Agreement

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>33</sup> Scottish Government, *Choosing Scotland’s Future: A National Conversation*, 2007.

<sup>34</sup> Mitchell, 79.

of October 2012, a date and the terms were set. Though the UK Parliament had to approve the referendum, the Scottish Parliament organized the rest of it.<sup>35</sup> And the SNP worked hard to promote independence as much as it could. In 2013, the Scottish Franchise Act was passed, which extended the vote to 16 and 17-year-olds. The SNP could have made this move in the hopes that younger voters would be more likely to vote Yes to independence – but the SNP had also wanted to extend the vote to younger people for a long time. Another aspect of the referendum that was in the SNP’s favor was time. Voters were given two years between the time the referendum was announced and when the referendum actually occurred, which gave them plenty of time to debate, discuss, and fully understand the issue at hand. The timing was also strategic; the referendum was set to happen shortly before a UK general election, and the SNP hoped the main UK parties would be too distracted to campaign against independence. To even further aid the SNP, the referendum lined up with patriotic events in Scotland, including the anniversary of the Battle of Bannockburn, the Commonwealth Games, and the Ryder Cup, all of which would raise nationalist pride. With nationalist fervor high, perhaps voters would feel motivated to vote for an independent Scotland.<sup>36</sup>

The SNP also began an information campaign similar to its “national conversation” paper, wanting to make sure voters had a clear understanding of the question and what independence for Scotland entailed. Through the Edinburgh Agreement, the Scottish government had the Electoral Commission send the question out to the public for review. The government also published a White Paper in 2013 outlining its plans for independence. Of course, the debate

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<sup>35</sup> Tom Mullen, “Introduction,” in *The Scottish Independence Referendum: Constitutional and Political Implications*, ed. Aileen McHarg, Tom Mullen, Alan Page, and Neil Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 6.

<sup>36</sup> Stephen Tierney, “The Scottish Independence Referendum: A Model of Good Practice in Direct Democracy?,” in *The Scottish Independence Referendum: Constitutional and Political Implications*, ed. Aileen McHarg, Tom Mullen, Alan Page, and Neil Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 61-2, 64.

was fair and balanced; the UK government also published their own papers criticizing Scotland's plans for independence. The Scottish people had access to information on the referendum from all angles – the government, different campaign groups, media, academia, and others in civil society were all able to campaign for their points of view. The Electoral Commission also sent an information booklet to the public, which included campaign statements from both sides of the debate. There was an issue with the booklet, though; normally, the Electoral Commission would explain issues in a neutral way. However, there was no way to present this issue neutrally, and as such, the booklet refrained from explaining what independence meant, resolving to present campaign statements instead.<sup>37</sup>

After years of preparation, September 18, 2014 came. Over three hundred years had passed, and Scotland was finally facing the possibility of independence from the UK. The referendum had an amazing turnout – 97 percent of Scotland's voting population registered to vote, and 84.7 percent did vote, which to date has been the highest figure for any UK election since universal suffrage. It was clear that the "Scottish question" was an important one, and that Scottish voters wanted to voice their opinions.<sup>38</sup> However, the vote did not turn out how the SNP wished. Scotland would not become independent, as 55.3 percent voted "No" while 44.7 percent voted "Yes." By region, almost every region voted "No," with the exception of Dundee, Glasgow, North Lanarkshire, and West Dunbartonshire.<sup>39</sup> This was the closest the SNP had come to reaching its goal – but, independence would remain only a dream.

There were a few possible reasons as to why the SNP's dream of independence failed to come to fruition. For starters, there was no clear understanding on what would have happened if Scotland voted "Yes." The conditions for independence had not been agreed upon by the time of

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 62-7.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>39</sup> "Scotland Votes No," *Scotland Decides*, BBC News, 2014.

the vote, and the Electoral Commission's information booklet failed to present a clear explanation of what independence meant. Though the booklet included a joint statement by the UK and Scottish governments explaining the process of negotiations in the event of a "Yes" vote, this perhaps was not enough to convince voters to vote "Yes."<sup>40</sup> In addition, voters simply had different views on what they wanted for Scotland's future. According to Scottish scholars Colin Kidd and Malcolm Petrie, voters could have been "happy enough to support the SNP, but reluctant to endorse its flagship policy; or were acting tactfully to secure further devolution; or had genuinely changed their minds about independence."<sup>41</sup> Just as in 2007, when weighing the options of independence, further devolution, or the status quo, some voters did not feel independence was the best option.

There are two main things that become clear when looking at the Scottish Independence Referendum; first, though things seemed to guarantee a "Yes" outcome for the referendum, the outcome was still "No." Timing, information, and a political majority benefitted the SNP and their cause, and by looking at those factors alone, one would have predicted Scottish independence winning. But although it seemed as though the cards were stacked on the side of the SNP, the final outcome rested in the hands of voters – who voted "No." Second, support for the SNP does not equal support for independence. When the referendum occurred, there were many districts in Scotland with SNP representatives that voted "No" to independence – even if they had SNP representatives in both the Scottish and UK Parliaments.<sup>42</sup> The SNP also had a majority government for the first time, but this majority still did not lead to independence. As

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<sup>40</sup> Tierney, 67.

<sup>41</sup> Colin Kidd and Malcolm Petrie, "The Independence Referendum in Historical and Political Context," in *The Scottish Independence Referendum: Constitutional and Political Implications*, ed. Aileen McHarg, Tom Mullen, Alan Page, and Neil Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 30.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

such, support for the SNP and support for the SNP's overall goal of independence do not necessarily go hand in hand.

### **The Brexit Vote and its Aftermath**

The story of Scottish independence became more complicated in 2016, as did the UK's relationship with the rest of Europe, as a result of the UK European Union membership referendum, or EU referendum. In an extremely close outcome, 51.9 percent of the voters voted to Leave the EU, sealing both the UK's and Scotland's fate. However, the majority of Scotland did not want to Leave the EU; only 38 percent of Scotland voted Leave, while 62 percent had voted Remain.<sup>43</sup> Because of this, many have begun to wonder whether another Scottish independence referendum is on the horizon. But why did the Brexit vote occur, and why was this the outcome? With such a close result in the overall UK, the concept of Brexit was controversial, and in order to understand how Scottish independence fits into the picture, the UK's relationship as a whole with the EU must be examined.

The European Union, or EU, connects twenty-eight European countries economically and politically. Conceptualized after World War II as a means of preventing future war between the European countries, the EU began as the Council of Europe, then the European Coal and Steel Company, and eventually evolved into the EU. Though it is not an international government, the EU functions similarly to a government; through a series of treaties and policies, the EU outlines rules and regulations that member states must follow, and member states in turn receive economic benefits similar to those that federal states would receive as part of a federation. The EU is made up of various bodies, including the European Council, the European Commission, the Council of Ministers, the European Parliament, and the European Court of Justice, allowing

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<sup>43</sup> *EU Referendum Results, 2016*. BBC News.

it to function in a manner that is similar to a government.<sup>44</sup> However, it is not possible for the EU to ever truly be a government, as each member state has its own sovereign government that functions separately from the EU and other EU members.

The main benefit to being a member of the EU is having access to its common market, or the European Economic Community (EEC). This common market is an economic market that allows for the free movement of people, money, goods, and services. In terms of goods and services, as a member of the EU, a country would not have to worry about trade with other EU member states, as there would be no tariffs or restrictions. In terms of people, EU citizens have the freedom to work and live where they please, being able to move freely between any EU country without being subject to standard immigration policies. In terms of money, the EU has a common currency – the euro – which makes travel and trade easier, provides monetary stability, and allows for greater price transparency. The bulk of these policies are a result of the 1985 Schengen Agreement, the 1987 Single European Act, and the 1992 Maastricht Treaty. These removed customs and border checks within the Schengen zone, an area of the EU where people with an EU passport can move between countries with relative ease. They also removed fiscal barriers (forms of taxation such as excise duties and value added tax) and technical barriers (different health, safety, and consumer protection and environmental regulations).<sup>45</sup>

The EU has its benefits, but it also has its flaws. Out of all the member states, the UK has always been quickest to point out the disadvantages of being a member of the EU, and has always been hesitant to truly integrate itself into the EU. The first and perhaps biggest of these issues is that it is unclear what the EU actually is. Though it is definitely not a government, it is unclear whether the EU is an intergovernmental organization (IGO), a supranational

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<sup>44</sup> John McCormick, *Understanding the European Union: A Concise Introduction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 49, 53, 78, 80, 84, 88, 92.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-5, 59-61, 63-4, 149-52, 167.

organization, or something in between. At first glance, it would seem like the EU is an IGO, as it is an organization made up of multiple countries and their governments. However, the EU has a governmental structure of its own, with its own parliament and its own president, which stands apart from any country's parliament and leaders. In this way, the EU is a supranational organization, an organization that has a level of authority and cooperation that is autonomous, above the state, and powers that are independent of states.<sup>46</sup>

This supranationalism is intimidating and threatening to some, especially the UK, because it calls into question the sovereignty of the member states. The overall goal of the EU is to unify the members states and create a sense of a unified Europe. The downside to this is that the more integrated Europe becomes, the less sovereignty each individual state has. Throughout the world, it is a common belief that one of the most important things a country can have is sovereignty, the ability to rule and govern itself. But despite this fear, there are other downsides to the EU that point to states not losing their sovereignty; for one, different countries have different foreign policies, and the EU often struggles to come up with a unified foreign policy when different states each want different things. In addition, there is a limited understanding of what the EU does and what it is. Voter turnout for EU Parliamentary elections are often very low for a variety of reasons; first, polls reveal that the average European does not know what the EU specifically does or what it has accomplished. This is due to poor media representation of the EU and a lack of clarity when it comes to EU policies and treaties. Second, there is a feeling of democratic deficit amongst many EU citizens, who feel their opinions are not consulted in EU policy decisions.<sup>47</sup> This results in a feeling of separation between the EU and those who are directly affected by EU policies and can create a negative image of the EU in the eyes of many.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 15, 98-9, 101, 104-7.

These broad issues with the EU have contributed to more specific concerns within the UK. Because of the issues regarding sovereignty, the UK has never been fully invested in the EU since its founding. Even before the creation of the EU, after World War II, Winston Churchill proposed the idea of a Council of Europe, but stated that the council should not include Britain because Britain was “with Europe but not of it. We are interested and associated, but not absorbed.”<sup>48</sup> The UK did not want to be fully “absorbed” by any larger European body out of fear that its individual sovereignty would disappear. Throughout the evolution of the EU, the UK remained on the outskirts; when the European Coal and Steel Company was formed, the UK did not join due to having just nationalized its coal and steel industries. When the European Economic Community was established in 1958, the UK refrained from joining until 1973.<sup>49</sup> Today, even though the UK is a member of the EU, it is not part of the Schengen Agreement, instead being part of a special Common Travel Area that allows for easier but not completely unregulated travel for EU citizens.<sup>50</sup> Britain has also opted out of the Social Charter (the economic and social counterpart to the European Convention on Human Rights)<sup>51</sup> and the EU asylum and immigration law from the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty.<sup>52</sup> An issue related to sovereignty is trade; though trade within the EU is arguably the largest benefit, being an EU member also prevents the UK from making trade deals with other countries outside the EU. Many who support leaving the EU argue that leaving can lead to positive trade deals elsewhere.<sup>53</sup> The UK has always been hesitant and wary of full EU integration, and as such, the occurrence of an EU membership referendum should come as no surprise.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 53, 57.

<sup>50</sup> David Torrance, *EU Referendum 2016: A Guide for Voters* (Edinburgh: Luath Press Limited, 2016), chapter 8.

<sup>51</sup> McCormick, 186-7.

<sup>52</sup> Torrance, chapter 8.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., chapter 7.

Along with issues of sovereignty, there are other concerns the UK has regarding the EU, such as migration. Because the UK is not part of the Schengen zone or the EU asylum and immigration law, the UK has better control over migration from EU states than other EU states do. However, the UK does take part in some aspects of the Schengen Agreement, and around three million EU citizens currently live in the UK. There is a belief amongst some in the UK that EU citizens come to the UK to take advantage of welfare, as treatment through the UK's National Health Service is free to Europeans with a health insurance card, and child benefits are paid to EEC members whose children stay in their home countries. Of a similar concern, some fear EU citizens in the UK also take advantage of employment and education benefits, as EU members have equal access to education across the different countries and are guaranteed certain employment benefits under the Maastricht Treaty. However, research has shown that, because of taxes, EU migrants tend to put more into the UK than they take out.<sup>54</sup> Regardless, migration remains an issue. Immigration-wise, the UK also fears terrorism. Due to the Syrian refugee crisis, it has become difficult for EU countries to control the number of refugees crossing their borders. Many politicians within these countries have blamed the crisis for recent sexual assaults and terrorist attacks, such as the 2015 terrorist attack in Paris. Though this issue applies to countries in the Schengen Agreement, UK citizens have expressed concern that attacks could spread – in a January 2016 poll, 34 percent of British voters said they would vote to leave the EU because of the Paris attacks. Those who support Leaving the EU believe it will help the UK have better control over its borders.<sup>55</sup>

These many concerns regarding membership in the EU had always been present within the UK government. Within the Conservative party alone, there were divisions between those

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., chapter 8.

<sup>55</sup> David Charter, *Europe In or Out: Everything You Need to Know* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2016), 34-8.

who were Eurosceptic and those who were not. In 2015, Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron decided to declare an EU membership referendum in order to quiet the divisions within his own party, believing that a Remain majority would put the EU issue on the backburner and allow for him to concentrate on domestic issues.<sup>56</sup> The referendum was set for June 23, 2016, with two voting options: to Remain in the EU or to Leave the EU. Those supporting Remain argued that the UK would be “stronger, better off and safer in Europe” than on its own, and that there were many benefits of being in the EU, including a stronger economy, stronger leadership on the world stage, and stronger global security. The Leave campaign, on the other hand, argued that there needed to be an end to the “supremacy of EU law,” and that the UK would be stronger outside of the EU. One of the largest arguments the Leave campaign made was that the money spent on EU membership (£350 million per week, according to Vote Leave’s website) could be used towards other UK issues and projects, such as healthcare or scientific research. In response to concerns regarding international trade, the Leave campaign argued that the UK could regain seats on other international institutions such as the World Trade Organization and could work out other international trade deals.<sup>57</sup> When it came to actual voters and what issues were important to them, the most important issue for Remain voters was the economy, while the most important issues for Leave voters were sovereignty and immigration.<sup>58</sup>

Soon, June 23, 2016 arrived. With a voter turnout of 72.2 percent, Leave won by a slim majority – 51.9 percent.<sup>59</sup> Cameron’s gamble that there would be a Remain majority failed, and he resigned, leading Home Secretary Theresa May to become Prime Minister in his place. And

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<sup>56</sup> Oliver Wright, Charlie Cooper, “Brexit: What is it and why are we having an EU referendum?” *The Independent*, June 23, 2016.

<sup>57</sup> Torrance, chapters 6, 7.

<sup>58</sup> Chris Prosser, Jon Mellon, and Jane Green, “What mattered most to you when deciding how to vote in the EU referendum?”, *British Election Study*, 2016.

<sup>59</sup> *EU Referendum Results*, 2016.

the UK now found itself in a predicament, needing to negotiate an agreement with the EU on leaving. According to the EU's 2009 Lisbon Treaty, a leaving state must negotiate a withdrawal agreement with the EU, which has not happened before in EU history. The negotiating process would be extremely difficult for the UK; for starters, in negotiations, the UK has a weak position, as the EU will most likely act without UK input. In addition, the UK still has to follow EU law during the negotiating period but is not allowed to take part in EU decision-making. The negotiations are also highly unpredictable; emotions run high on both the sides of the UK and the EU, and because such negotiations have never happened voluntarily before, there is much uncertainty on what the outcome will be. Possible outcomes include the UK maintaining a trade deal with the EU, remaining part of the European Economic Area, re-joining the European Free Trade Association, joining the EU's customs union, or joining the World Trade Organization. Each option has its pros and cons, but any trade deal with the EU would most likely require the UK to continue contributing to the EU budget or follow certain EU rules, and any trade deal outside the EU would result in higher tariffs and costs.<sup>60</sup>

The official exit of the UK from the EU is set to happen on March 29, 2019.<sup>61</sup> But as predicted, the negotiations have been difficult. Since the referendum, they have been almost at a stalemate, with Prime Minister Theresa May struggling with EU leaders to reach a deal everyone can agree on. The situation within the Conservative Party has also been difficult, as the party remains split over Brexit. In the EU's eyes, because May cannot unite the Conservatives regarding Brexit, she is unfit to lead Brexit negotiations, weakening her power within Brexit talks. This led May to call for a snap election to occur in June 2017 in order to increase the

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<sup>60</sup> Torrance, chapter 17.

<sup>61</sup> J. P., "Why the Brexit negotiations are about to get harder," *The Economist*, December 13, 2017.

number of pro-Brexit Conservative MPs.<sup>62</sup> However, just like the Brexit vote, this election turned out to be a gamble that did not work as predicted. Instead of gaining pro-Brexit MPs, the Conservatives lost thirteen seats, also losing their majority. Labour, meanwhile, gained thirty-two seats, revealing a shift in voters' political attitudes and overall dissatisfaction with the Conservative Party. To form a new government, the Conservatives made a deal with the Democratic Unionist Party, or DUP.<sup>63</sup> This loss was a massive blow to May and her party, especially in regards to Brexit negotiations.

The snap election has made the Brexit situation even murkier than before. The Conservative Party is still split on Brexit, and it will be difficult to get past the debate stage of any future trade deal with the EU.<sup>64</sup> Adding to that difficulty, the snap election has weakened May's political power domestically, which in turn will affect Brexit negotiations. May not only needs to convince her fellow Conservatives to back her ideas involving Brexit, but now she also needs to win the favor of the DUP. She also has to handle domestic pressure, as the election reveals her party has lost some support from UK citizens. And Brexit talks with the EU will not get any easier either. As of December 13, 2017, May has created a potential deal that is significantly softer than past ones; the current deal states that the European Court of Justice will control EU citizens' rights for eight years following Brexit, Britain will pay £35 to £39 billion (\$47 to \$52 billion) as an exit bill, and trade across the Irish border will continue to follow the rules of the single market. Past attempts at deals have included harsher control over laws, money, and borders, and leaving the single market. But this new deal is only phase one of negotiations,

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<sup>62</sup> Zack Beauchamp, "Why Britain's prime minister just called a new election – and how it could backfire," *Vox*, April 18, 2017.

<sup>63</sup> "UK election 2017: full results," *The Guardian*, June 9, 2017.

<sup>64</sup> J. P., "Why the Brexit negotiations are about to get harder."

and it has taken since March 2017 to reach this point.<sup>65</sup> Because of the political atmosphere within the UK and disagreements with negotiations between the UK and EU, the path to Brexit will continue to be a long and difficult road. To further complicate matters, Scotland voted to Remain in the EU, raising the question of whether a future independence referendum is in the cards.

### **Scottish Independence After Brexit?**

While the majority of UK voters voted one way, the Scottish majority voted the opposite. Broken down by region, 53.4 percent of England voted to Leave the EU while 46.6 percent voted to Remain; but in Scotland, only 38.0 percent voted to Leave while 62.0 percent voted to Remain. The turnout in Scotland was lower than in England (67.2 percent versus 73.0 percent, respectively), but the implications of the overall result are still clear.<sup>66</sup> These results have led many to believe that a future Scottish independence referendum is in the future – in fact, the SNP continues to campaign for one. But the 2017 snap election, Scotland’s current political and economic situation, and differing opinions on Scottish nationalism suggest that perhaps a future Scottish independence referendum will not be happening anytime soon.

The result of the EU Referendum in Scotland is an interesting one, considering Scotland was not always pro-European. In the 1970s, Scotland and the SNP were Eurosceptic, because EU integration symbolized the opposite of the SNP’s goal of decentralization. In an age when the SNP was pushing for more regional-based politics, the UK was discussing joining the EU, which had a more centralized structure. The SNP was also angered by the fact that Scotland was not represented in negotiations regarding EU entry, as it showed that Scotland was viewed merely as

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> *EU Referendum Results, 2016.*

a region as opposed to a sovereign nation. The SNP was also wary of EU policies regarding agriculture and fishing, fearing that Scotland's economy would be damaged by policies regulating these industries. However, from the late 1980s to late 1990s, the SNP changed its view on the EU. Rather than suffer because of the EU, Scotland had benefitted from the single market. SNP leaders also saw the EU as a way to promote independence; if Scotland were independent, they would have more influence on the world stage through EU membership and would also be able to negotiate EU policies that would benefit Scotland without the UK's input. An independent Scotland would thus have more influence in the EU than it currently had in UK affairs. Independence while also remaining an EU member might also provide stability. An independent Scotland would not be economically isolated and would continue free trade with the UK through the single market. Soon, in the SNP's eyes, EU membership was a blessing, not a curse.<sup>67</sup>

In the 1990s, the SNP began campaigning "Independence in Europe." The 1994 SNP Manifesto stated that "Scotland needs to change...central to that change is the need for a powerful, direct voice in Europe. An independent Scotland sitting at the top table beside the other nations of Europe will totally change our situation."<sup>68</sup> This argument did not lead to independence in 2014, however. For some, EU membership outside of the UK was not a strong enough argument for independence, partly because many believed that the UK would never leave the EU.<sup>69</sup> On the other hand, it was not guaranteed that Scotland would be able to keep its seat in

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<sup>67</sup> Dardanelli, 275-7.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 277.

<sup>69</sup> Steven Erlanger, "After Brexit, Scotland Lays a Path to Another Independence Vote," *The New York Times*, April 1, 2017.

the EU if it left the UK – thus the least risky option for EU supporters was to vote “No” in the 2014 independence referendum.<sup>70</sup>

The result of the EU Referendum, however, left some Scots with a feeling of betrayal. Those who assumed the UK would never leave the EU were bound to regret their decision to vote “No” in 2014 – or so the SNP predicted. The SNP had always planned to promote independence in the event of Brexit; their 2016 manifesto stated that the Scottish Parliament would hold another referendum “if there is a significant and material change in the circumstances that prevailed in 2014, such as Scotland being taken out the EU against our will.”<sup>71</sup> As in the 90’s, the SNP saw EU membership as a campaigning point for independence, and began to use the Brexit outcome to their advantage. Scotland’s First Minister and SNP party leader Nicola Sturgeon has especially been promoting independence since Brexit. Sturgeon has argued that the UK has no right to force Scotland to leave the EU if it does not wish to, stating that it is “democratically unacceptable.”<sup>72</sup> In a speech in March 2017, Sturgeon continued to mention that Brexit was not Scotland’s choice, declaring her dedication to setting up a second independence referendum:

Right now, Scotland stands at a hugely important crossroads. We didn’t choose to be in this position...if Scotland can be ignored on an issue as important as our membership of the EU and the single market, then it is clear that our voice and our interests can be ignored at any time and on any issue...I can confirm today that next week I will seek the authority of the Scottish Parliament to agree with the UK government the details of a section 30 order - the procedure that will enable the Scottish Parliament to legislate for an independence referendum.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Dardanelli, 278.

<sup>71</sup> *The SNP Party Manifesto 2016*, 23.

<sup>72</sup> Lyndsie Bourgon, “Brexit Has Brought the Idea of Scottish Independence Back From the Dead,” *The Atlantic*, April 20, 2017.

<sup>73</sup> Nicola Sturgeon, “Speech on Scotland’s Referendum” (speech, Edinburgh, Scotland, March 13, 2017), SNP.org.

And as Sturgeon promised, the SNP began demanding a second referendum. On March 28, 2017, the Scottish Parliament approved a plan to request a second referendum by a vote of 69 to 59.<sup>74</sup> However, this post-Brexit independence campaigning backfired on the SNP.

Despite the logic behind the SNP's argument, Scottish citizens don't appear to be in any rush to have another independence referendum. The 2017 snap election revealed that the SNP's goal of independence is perhaps harming the party more than helping it. Rather than gain or maintain seats, the SNP lost 19 seats.<sup>75</sup> This result was a harsh and unexpected blow to the SNP. In a political forecast by UK newspaper *The Times*, for example, it was predicted that the SNP would have between 46 and 51 seats after the election, but in reality, the SNP left the election with only 35 seats.<sup>76</sup> The seats that the SNP lost went to the Conservatives, still known for being a unionist party. The SNP soon realized that independence was not the public's priority, and they had to change their strategy. Sturgeon admitted that the SNP pushing for independence "undoubtedly" caused the SNP to lose seats, and she was "expected to shelve her plans for a second independence referendum."<sup>77</sup> And so far it seems as though she has; in Sturgeon's Statement on the Programme for Government in September 2017, independence was barely mentioned, as Sturgeon chose to focus on more domestic issues such as education.<sup>78</sup> So will Brexit lead to Scottish independence, as many have speculated? For now, it seems as though Scottish independence will remain on the backburner.

### **Why Scottish Independence is Not in the Near Future**

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<sup>74</sup> Stephen Castle, "Scotland Votes to Demand a Post-'Brexit' Independence Referendum," *The New York Times*, March 28, 2017.

<sup>75</sup> "UK election 2017: full results."

<sup>76</sup> "The Political Map of Britain." *The Times*, June 8, 2017.

<sup>77</sup> Hamish Macdonnell, "Wounded Sturgeon to reflect on referendum," *The Times: Scotland*, June 10, 2017.

<sup>78</sup> "Nicola Sturgeon's speech proves the SNP has finally taken on the role of the establishment in Scotland." *The Independent*, September 5, 2017.

It does not appear as though Scottish independence will come in the near future – but why? Regardless of whether or not there is a referendum, Scottish independence will not occur for a multitude of reasons, the first being that another referendum may not occur. For starters, May needs to approve the referendum, which she has so far refused to do.<sup>79</sup> Because she is preoccupied with her election losses, Brexit negotiations, and other pressing issues, it is unlikely that she will turn her attention to approving a Scottish independence referendum. In addition, it is unlikely that Scots will want a referendum. Not only did the result of the snap election reveal that the SNP's campaign for independence was tiring, but voters in Scotland have also experienced election fatigue. Scotland has seen many elections in the past few years: the 2014 independence referendum, 2015 UK Parliament elections, 2016 Scottish Parliament elections, the 2016 EU Referendum, and the 2017 snap election. By the time of the EU referendum, voters were already feeling the fatigue – the First Ministers of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland objected to the June 2016 date because it was so soon after their assembly and parliament elections in May.<sup>80</sup> After the referendum and the snap election, tired voters are unlikely to want to vote again, lowering the chances of another independence referendum soon.

In the event May did approve a referendum and one was set, there is a slim chance that the majority of voters would vote for independence. One of the reasons for this is because there is no clear, unified idea of what Scottish nationalism is. Scottish national identity is a driving force behind the wish for independence, but this identity means different things to different people. There is no clear definition of Scottish ethnic identity, creating a question of what “Scottishness” is and what makes a person Scottish. Some believe that Scottishness can be marked by birth, ancestry and residence; in order to be Scottish, one must have either been born

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<sup>79</sup> Castle.

<sup>80</sup> Torrance, chapter 1.

in Scotland, have ancestors from Scotland, or live in Scotland. Here there has been a difference in opinion between the masses and the political elite of Scotland; while the masses believe birth and ancestry are extremely important, the elite believe that living in Scotland and feeling Scottish is enough to make one Scottish. Scottish identity could also relate to politics and current events, and fluctuations in Scottish identity have correlated to the political situations of the times. For example, 1979 saw the lowest recorded level of Scottish identity, perhaps because of the failed devolution referendum of that year. In the 1990s, the level of Scottish identity rose, perhaps because devolution succeeded.<sup>81</sup>

The nature of Scottish nationalism has also changed over time. Some, such as University of Edinburgh professor Alasdair Raffe, have stated that Scottish nationalism is less secessionist than it used to be. The SNP promotes an independent Scotland in the EU, which would mean remaining in one union while leaving another. In 2007, the SNP also proposed that an independent Scotland would continue to be associated with certain UK institutions, such as the National Health Service.<sup>82</sup> Because Scottish nationalism and ideas involving independence are constantly changing, it would be difficult to vote for independence without a clear understanding of what an independent Scotland and nationality would mean.

Scottish identity also includes the question of British identity – is it possible to be both Scottish and British? For the political elite, who have to navigate both the Scottish government and the UK government, it is not only possible to be both, but necessary. For others, though, the idea of being British is appalling, due to the history between Scotland and the UK and a dislike of Scotland's "subservience" to the UK.<sup>83</sup> But being able to say "I am not British" or "I am

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<sup>81</sup> Leith, 79, 84.

<sup>82</sup> Alasdair Raffe, "1707, 2007, And the Unionist Turn in Scottish History," *The Historical Journal* 53, no. 4 (2010): 1082.

<sup>83</sup> Leith, 123, 131.

Scottish” is easier than explaining why these identities exist. When writing *Political Discourse and National Identity in Scotland*, authors Murray Stewart Leith and Daniel P. J. Soule

interviewed members of the Scottish political elite. One interviewee stated:

I am fiercely Scottish in those aspects of my life that I allow myself to be...I feel a sense of identity...but if you ask me to what...I am affected by the symbols of national identity but I am not sure I can identify it for you. I feel pride in Scottish institutions, I feel pride in Scottish traditions...I find it very difficult to define myself, and perhaps it is easier to define oneself by what one isn't and I am not English.<sup>84</sup>

Scots feel a strong sense of nationalism, but they cannot quite place what Scottish nationalism truly is. Because Scottish nationalism has numerous connotations, it is nearly impossible to build an independent Scotland on nationalistic principles alone. Just as Scots each have their own ideas of “Scottishness,” they also have different ideas about independence. Though Scottish nationalism is strong, it does not necessarily equal a strong independence movement or a cohesive idea on what nationalism and independence means.

Along with the complicated picture of Scottish nationalism, there is also a question of whether or not an independent Scotland would be able to remain in the EU, and if this is still valuable after Brexit. If Scotland did remain in the EU, Scotland’s economy could suffer; 63 percent of Scotland’s trade is with Britain, while only 16 percent is with the rest of the EU.<sup>85</sup> With the UK leaving the EU, Scotland would lose its free trade with the UK, harming its economy rather than aiding it. But there is a question about whether Scotland even could remain. There is no clear procedure within EU law regarding when a region of an EU member secedes, and with Brexit, there is no clear procedure on what happens when a region of an ex-EU state wishes to remain. The question of EU membership and whether or not Scotland could remain posed an issue in the 2014 referendum; though Sturgeon believed that Scotland would be

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

guaranteed membership, the European Commission President José Manuel Barroso believed that Scotland would have to reapply for membership.<sup>86</sup> The risk of losing EU membership was too high in 2014 for voters to vote for independence. Now losing EU membership with the UK is a given, but it is not guaranteed that an independent Scotland would be allowed to remain in the EU after the UK leaves. If May did not approve a referendum until after March 2019, Scotland would leave the EU with the rest of the UK and would most likely have to reapply for EU membership if it later became independent. Though talk of Scottish independence has reemerged due to Scotland wanting to remain in the EU, it is unlikely that an independent Scotland could avoid a period of time being outside the EU.

Adding to the unpredictability of Brexit, independence in and of itself is risky. Scotland's economy would be the largest obstacle in an independent Scotland, as Scotland's economic situation is much different than it was during the last independence referendum. When the SNP aimed for independence in 2014, it was counting on the oil in the North Sea. However, since 2014, profits from Scotland's oil have decreased. In the 2011-2012 fiscal year, Scotland's oil revenues were £9.6 billion, but in 2015-2016 it had decreased significantly to £60 million. To add to this, Scotland's budget deficit is twice of Britain's, and Scotland's rate of growth is a third of Britain's. In the event of independence, it would be economically difficult for Scotland to support itself, making independence unappealing. Brexit further complicates this. Brexit negotiations have so far been unpredictable, and the state of the UK's economy after Brexit is uncertain. With the future of the UK as a whole being unknown, Scottish voters are unwilling to take the risk of voting for independence. One such prospective voter was Ian Ramage, a citizen of Edinburgh, who stated "Right now there's too much uncertainty, not just about Scotland but

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<sup>86</sup> Flamini, Roland. "Scotland's Independence Bid: History, Prospects, Challenges." *World Affairs* 176, no. 1 (2013): 60.

about Brexit.”<sup>87</sup> This uncertainty could prevent voters from voting for independence. Because of Scotland’s economy, the unpredictable nature of Brexit, different views on Scottish nationalism, and a rise in conservatism amongst Scottish voters, it appears as though a referendum on Scottish independence and an outcome of a “Yes” vote is not in the near future.

Of course, there is a chance that the UK and Scotland could see a shift in perspective in the coming years. By the next general election, events, opinions, and the government could change. The snap election offers a glimpse of May’s declining popularity, and it is entirely possible that Labour could win a majority in the next general election – they already gained a significant number of seats this past June. And a Labour government could be more likely to approve a Scottish independence referendum. Jeremy Corbyn, the head of the Labour Party, stated in a March 2017 interview that Scotland should be allowed to have a referendum if they wished, saying, “I don’t think it’s the job of Westminster or the Labour Party to prevent people holding referenda.” But this does not mean that Labour supports Scottish independence. A few days later, Corbyn clarified his statement: “But just to be absolutely clear, I do not think there should be another referendum. I think that independence would be economically catastrophic for many people in Scotland.”<sup>88</sup> Regardless of Labour’s position on independence, though, it is possible that an independence referendum could be granted to Scotland if Labour were to control Parliament. But even in the event of a referendum occurring because of Labour, would Scots vote for independence? Only if their ideas on independence changed. Things can change quickly in a few years; Brexit negotiations will have finished, the economy could improve (or worsen), and ideas on Scottish nationalism itself could evolve. But these scenarios can only be imagined

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<sup>87</sup> Erlanger.

<sup>88</sup> Joe Watts, “Jeremy Corbyn comes out against second Scottish referendum after saying he would be 'absolutely fine' with one,” *The Independent*, March 13, 2017.

at the moment, and it is impossible to tell if the tide will change enough to lead to Scottish independence. As the situation is now, Scottish independence is not in the immediate future.

### **Conclusion**

As Brexit talks continue and the future of the UK remains unknown, so too does the future of Scotland and Scottish independence. Whether or not Scotland will ever become independent is hard to tell, but for now it does not appear as though Scotland will become independent soon. Scottish nationalism, in terms of both politics and identity, does not necessarily equal a strong independence movement. Independence needs political backing to come to fruition, and for decades, Scotland's quest for independence has been in the hands of the SNP. But support for the SNP has waxed and waned over time. Though the SNP has had support since 2007 and 2011, the 2017 snap election saw a decline in support for the SNP, which does not bode well for independence. The snap election dealt a harsh blow to the SNP, which now realizes that independence is not the number one priority for voters. However, independence in Scotland does not ride solely on the power of the SNP; the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum failed despite the SNP having control of a majority government in the Scottish Parliament. There are other factors in the independence equation.

The road to independence in general is long and risky, and is not a risk some voters are willing to face. The current state of Scotland's economy cannot handle independence easily, and the uncertain nature of both Brexit and independence cast a shadow over independence dreams. The 2017 snap election saw Scottish voters turn away from nationalism and towards conservatism, perhaps because of the uncertainty surrounding Brexit. While the future of the UK in Europe is unknown, it is safer to avoid independence than pursue it. Scottish independence

also faces challenges from Scottish nationalism and identity. Though Scottish nationalism drives the desire for independence, and though nationalistic pride has been a constant in a time of so much change, the existence of nationalism does not guarantee independence. There are many different attitudes and views surrounding what it means to be Scottish and what it means to be independent, and without finding a clear uniting factor in these beliefs, independence cannot become a reality.

There is another lesson to be learned from the current state of the UK and Scotland after the Brexit outcome – in politics, things are not always what they seem, and expected outcomes are not guaranteed. There has been a pattern with each of these recent referenda and elections, where an outcome that is assumed does not come to fruition. The first was the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum. Because the SNP held a majority government, and because they experienced success in the creation of a Scottish Parliament in the late 1990s, it seemed as though the logical next step for Scotland was independence. However, the majority of Scots voted to remain part of the UK. This carries implications for the fate of Scottish independence after Brexit. Just as the creation of a Scottish Parliament and the existence of an SNP-led Parliament did not guarantee independence, neither does Brexit. The second referendum to follow this pattern was the 2016 EU Referendum. David Cameron was only one of many who believed that the UK would vote to Remain in the EU, but instead Brexit was the outcome. Similarly, in the 2017 snap election, Theresa May assumed the Conservatives would gain more MPs who supported Brexit. Much to her surprise, the Conservatives actually lost their majority in Parliament. Both the EU Referendum and the snap election were political gambles that Cameron and May lost. A future Scottish independence referendum could also be a gamble, and judging by the current circumstances, one that would also fail.

Will independence come soon to Scotland? Most likely not. Though a majority of Scots voted to Remain in the EU, other factors make it unlikely that an independence referendum will occur in the near future. But this is not to say that Scotland will never become independent. If the SNP works on its policies, if Scotland works on its economy, and if Scottish nationalists work on finding a unifying factor within Scottish nationalism, Scottish independence can be possible. Even in the age of Brexit, this can be a goal that Scotland can continue to strive towards.

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