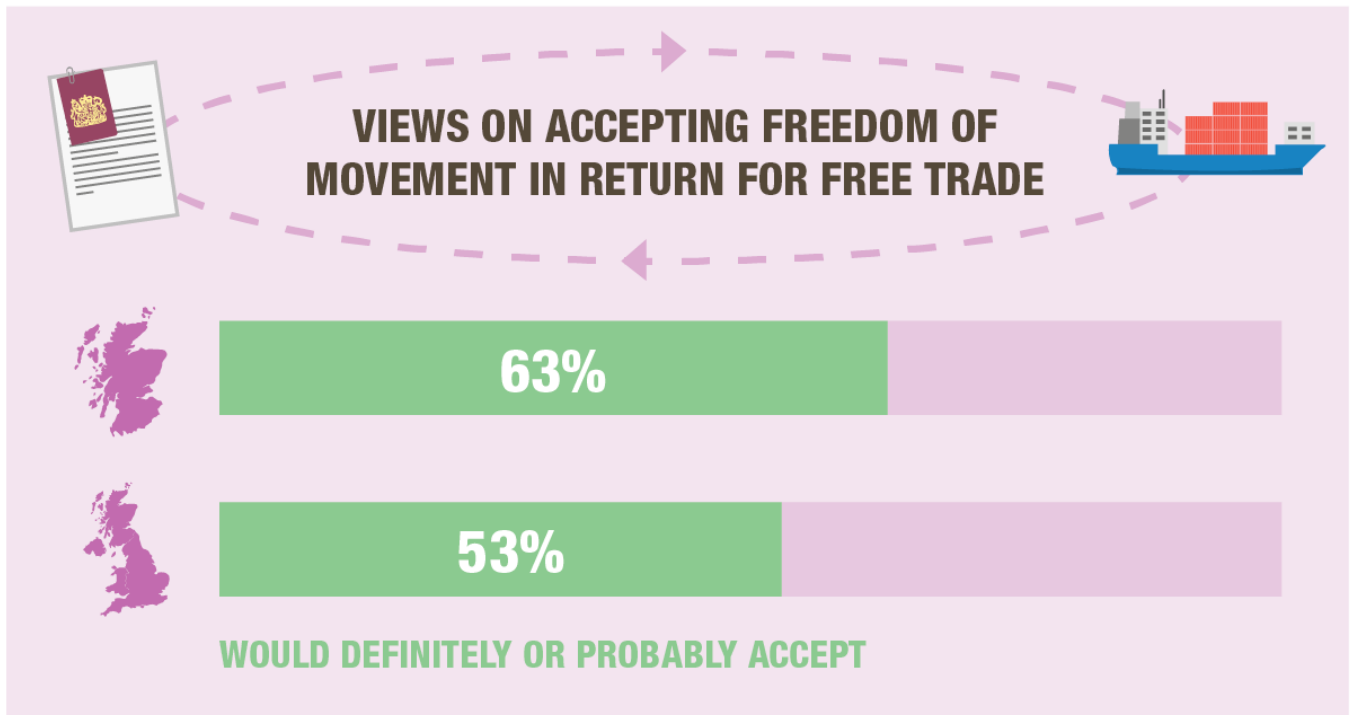


JUST 15 MONTHS TO GO: WHAT SCOTLAND IS MAKING OF BREXIT

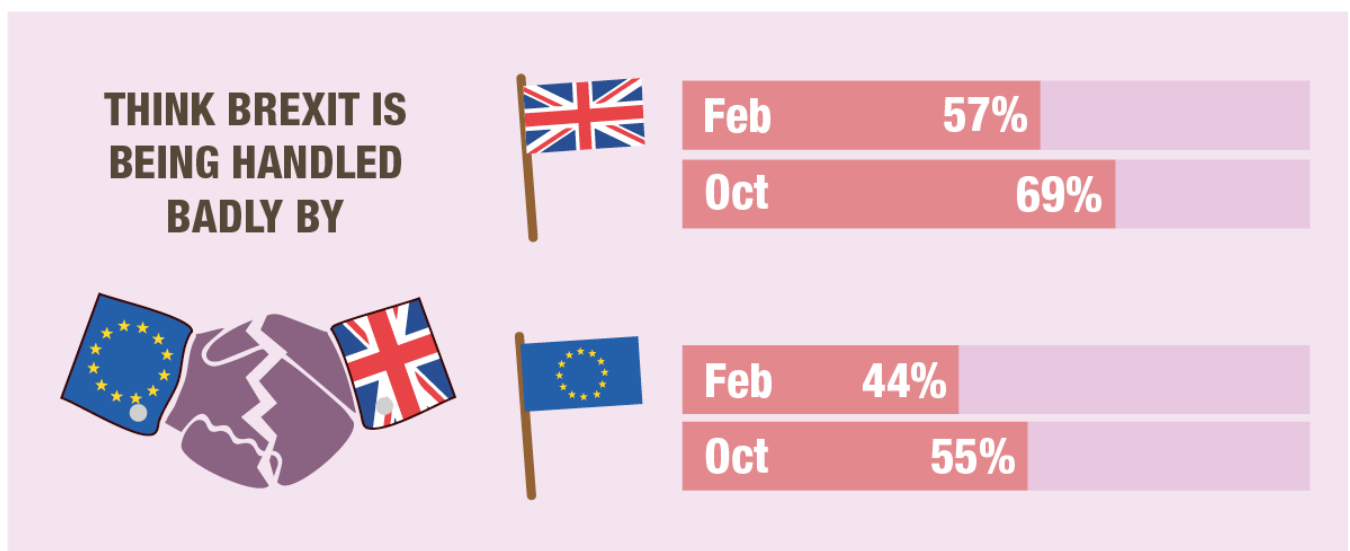
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Just 15 Months To Go: What Scotland Is Making of Brexit

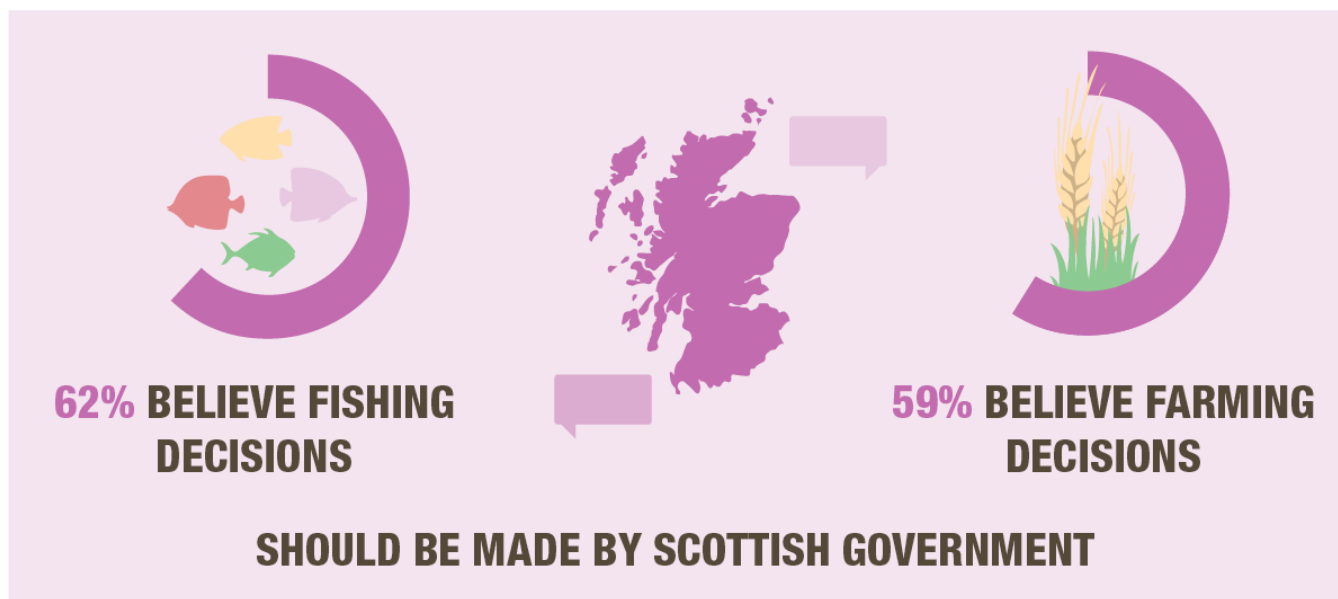
A majority of voters in Scotland would like the UK to maintain free trade with the EU but end freedom of movement. However, they are more likely than voters south of the border to prioritise free trade than immigration control.



People in Scotland have become more critical of the way that both the UK government and the EU are handling Brexit.



A majority of voters in Scotland think that all the decisions about fishing and farming in Scotland that are currently made by the EU should be made by the Scottish Government after Brexit.



But a majority of voters in Scotland think that, after Brexit, the rules on trade with the EU and on immigration should be the same in Scotland as in the rest of the EU.



INTRODUCTION

The debate about Brexit has a particular resonance north of the border. Unlike England and Wales, where a majority voted to leave the EU, Scotland voted - by 62% to 38% - in favour of remaining in the EU. Voters in Scotland might therefore be expected to have very different views from those elsewhere about what shape Brexit should take.

At the same time, the arguments about Brexit have added a new dimension to the existing debate north of the border about how Scotland should be governed. Most obviously, the divergent outcome of the EU referendum raised the question of whether Scotland should now pursue independence in the hope that doing so would enable it to retain its membership of the EU. But even if the country were to accept that it was leaving the EU along with the rest of the UK, might it still have a different, closer relationship with the EU than the rest of the UK? And what should happen to those policy areas, such as fishing and farming, which are currently devolved but at present are largely determined by EU decisions made in Brussels?

We first addressed some of these questions in a report on attitudes in Scotland towards Brexit published last spring (Curtice, 2017a). We found that despite the very different outcome of the EU referendum in Scotland, attitudes in Scotland towards what Brexit should ideally mean were not very different from those elsewhere in Britain. In particular, nearly two in three voters in Scotland were in favour of requiring EU migrants to have to apply to come to the UK in the same way as non-EU migrants, and thus, by implication, backed an end to freedom of movement. Support for ending the ability of EU migrants to claim welfare benefits was also similar to elsewhere across Britain, as was the popularity of terminating some of the EU's labour market regulation, such as that on how many hours someone can be expected to work. Meanwhile, there appeared to be relatively little enthusiasm for the idea floated by the Scottish Government (Scottish Government, 2016) that Scotland might have a more liberal immigration policy and a closer trade arrangement with the EU than the rest of the UK.

A lot has happened since that research was conducted. In March the UK gave formal notice under Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty that it wishes to leave the EU, and in recent months the UK government has been engaged in phase one of the withdrawal negotiations with the EU. In so doing, it has shown no interest in pursuing the idea that Scotland might have a closer relationship with the EU than the rest of the UK. Also in March, the Scottish Parliament voted in favour of holding a second independence referendum when the terms of the Brexit deal became clear. But then the SNP lost ground in a snap UK general election held in June, following which the First Minister announced that the pursuit of a second independence referendum was to be put on hold until the autumn of 2018 (Sturgeon, 2017). After the election, which also saw the Conservatives unexpectedly lose their overall majority in the House of Commons, the UK government published the legislation required to integrate existing EU law into UK law, and in so doing proposed that those areas of policy which are devolved but are mostly determined by the EU (such as fishing and farming) should in the first instance be reserved to Westminster (Department for Exiting the European Union, 2017). Although most of the powers would eventually be transferred to Holyrood they would only be so after a 'common UK framework' had been developed, a stance to which both the Scottish and the Welsh governments objected (Scottish Government, 2017).

OUR NEW RESEARCH

It is thus timely to examine once more attitudes in Scotland towards both Brexit and the implications of Brexit for how the country is governed. Between 28 September and 29 October 2017 ScotCen interviewed a random sample of adults aged 18 and over living in Scotland about the subject. All of the respondents were people who had initially been interviewed as part of the 2015 or 2016 Scottish Social Attitudes survey, a high quality annual survey conducted face to face (Lubian et al., 2016), and who had agreed to participate in short follow-up interviews either over the internet or via the phone. All in all, 752 people completed our Brexit survey in October, representing 38% of those who were originally invited to participate. The data are weighted to reflect the known demographic characteristics of the adult population in Scotland and to correct for differential failure amongst the original set of Scottish Social Attitudes respondents to participate in the survey.

This approach mimics that used in our previous research, for which interviewing was conducted between 5 February and 2 March (Curtice, 2017a); it also replicates that used in a Britain-wide survey of attitudes towards Brexit that was also undertaken between 28 September and 29 October (Curtice, 2017b). Both of these exercises asked many of the same questions as our latest Scottish survey. Thus as well as looking at the picture now we can examine both how attitudes towards Brexit have evolved in Scotland in the wake of the political developments that unfolded in 2017, and also look once more at the extent to which attitudes north of the border are different from those in the rest of Britain.

Of course, we might still wonder how representative our sample is on the questions of Brexit and how Scotland should be governed. Here the position is relatively reassuring. So far as the EU referendum is concerned, after the data are weighted 65% of our sample said that they voted Remain, 35% for Leave, so the proportion of Remain voters in our sample is only a little above the 62% that transpired in the ballot boxes. Meanwhile, 49% indicated that they voted Yes in the independence referendum, while 51% backed No. So, we have a few too many Yes voters but not such that it should produce a serious distortion in the picture that we paint.

This paper falls into two main parts. First of all, we look at attitudes in Scotland not only towards what Brexit should mean, but also towards how the process is proceeding to date. We assess both how far attitudes have changed since the beginning of 2017 and whether they continue to be similar to, or have come to diverge from, those in the rest of the UK. Second, we look at attitudes towards the questions that Brexit has raised about how Scotland should be governed, including at how people might now vote in a second independence referendum.

WHAT SHOULD BREXIT MEAN?

So far as the kind of Brexit that people would like to see is concerned, in this wave of interviewing we focused on the two issues that are widely regarded as being at the heart of the debate about what Brexit should mean – free trade and immigration. Attitudes towards immigration played a central role in bringing about the narrow UK-wide majority in the referendum in favour of leaving the EU (Curtice, 2017c), and the UK government has indicated that it does not wish to maintain the freedom of movement rights currently enjoyed by EU citizens who wish to come to live and work in the UK (May, 2017). However, at the same time the UK is hoping to negotiate a wide-ranging free trade agreement with the EU, even though the EU regards freedom of movement and free trade as intimately bound up with each other (European Parliament, 2017).

These two issues were addressed in our survey by asking the following:

Following the decision to leave the European Union, the UK will have to negotiate a new agreement with the EU. The next few questions are about some things that could be included in that agreement.

First of all, requiring people from the EU who want to come to live here to apply to do so in the same way as people from outside the EU? Would you be in favour or against that being part of the agreement?

What about allowing companies based in the EU to sell goods and services freely in Britain in return for allowing British companies to sell goods and services freely in the EU. Would you be in favour or against that being part of the agreement?

Table 1 reveals that there continues to be overwhelming support for the principle of free trade, with around nine in ten backing the idea on both sides of the border. But at the same time there continues to be considerable support for the idea that potential migrants from the EU should have to apply to come to the UK in the same way as anyone from outside the EU. True, support appears to have fallen a little on both sides of the border, and support is a little lower in Scotland than elsewhere. But with around three in five in favour of controlling EU migration, public opinion continues to challenge the notion that free trade and freedom of movement should accompany each other.

Table 1 Attitudes Towards Free Trade and EU Migration, Scotland and Britain, February and October 2017

	Scotland		Great Britain	
	February	October	February	October
	%	%	%	%
EU migrants treated same as non-EU				
In favour	65	59	68	64
Neither	12	15	16	15
Against	22	25	15	20
Free Trade				
In favour	93	90	88	88
Neither	4	6	9	9
Against	3	3	3	3

That said, if in the negotiations the EU insists that the UK can only continue to enjoy free trade if it accepts freedom of movement, voters in Scotland are more willing than those in the rest of the UK to concede the continuation of freedom of movement. We asked:

It has been argued that when Britain leaves the EU, British firms will only be allowed to continue to sell goods and services freely to people in the EU if people from the EU are still free to come here to live and work. Do you think Britain should or should not allow people from the EU to come here freely to live and work in return for allowing British firms to sell goods and services freely in the EU?

Definitely should allow people from the EU to come here freely to live and work

Probably should allow people from the EU to come here freely to live and work

Probably should not allow people from the EU to come here freely to live and work

Definitely should not allow people from the EU to come here freely to live and work

As Table 2 shows, whereas across Britain as a whole only just over half would ‘definitely’ or ‘probably’ be willing to accept freedom of movement in return for free trade, in Scotland the figure is just over three-fifths. In neither case is there much evidence of opinion having changed during the course of 2017 (see also Curtice 2017b). So, although voters in Scotland apparently have much the same view as those elsewhere about what they would ideally like to see in the Brexit settlement, they are more likely than their counterparts elsewhere to regard free trade as a priority.

Table 2 Willingness to Allow Freedom of Movement in Return for Free Trade, Scotland and Britain, February and October 2017

	Scotland		Great Britain	
	February	October	February	October
	%	%	%	%
Definitely should	30	33	22	23
Probably should	31	30	32	31
<i>All ‘should’</i>	<i>61</i>	<i>63</i>	<i>54</i>	<i>53</i>
Probably should not	21	21	24	27
Definitely should not	16	15	20	20
<i>All ‘should not’</i>	<i>37</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>47</i>

EXPECTATIONS AND EVALUATIONS

But while many voters might ideally like to maintain free trade with the EU and introduce a measure of immigration control, do they necessarily anticipate that this is what will transpire now that negotiations between the UK and the EU have been taking place for some months? The answer appears to be, 'not necessarily'. As Table 3 shows only around a half of Scots think it likely that the eventual deal between the UK and the EU will make provision for free trade, though rather more - around three-fifths - think it likely that Brexit will result in EU migrants being treated in the same way as non-EU migrants. However, this still means that only one in three people in Scotland (32%) anticipate that Brexit will result in both, and to that extent voters are relatively pessimistic that Brexit will come to mean what a majority would seemingly like it to mean. In this they are largely at one with voters across Britain as a whole, only 29% of whom think it likely that both will happen.

Table 3 Perceived Likelihood of Free Trade and EU Migration Control, Scotland and Britain, October 2017

		Likely	Neither likely nor unlikely	Unlikely
Free Trade				
Scotland	%	51	16	30
Great Britain	%	50	21	28
EU migrants treated same as non-EU				
Scotland	%	61	13	23
Great Britain	%	50	19	29

There is, though, little sign that voters' expectations of the consequences of Brexit have changed during 2017. Rather less than half of people in Scotland think that immigration will be lower as a result of leaving the EU, and in this respect the distribution of public opinion north of the border is much the same as across Britain as a whole. At the same time, nearly three in five reckon the economy will be worse off as a result of leaving the EU. In this respect voters in Scotland are somewhat more pessimistic than their counterparts elsewhere, though as voters across the rest of Britain have become rather more pessimistic about the economic consequences of Brexit, the gap has now narrowed somewhat.

Table 4 Expectations of the Consequences of Brexit, Scotland and Britain, February and October 2017

	Scotland		Great Britain	
	February	October	February	October
	%	%	%	%
Expect immigration to be:				
Higher	9	9	7	7
No difference	47	44	48	50
Lower	41	45	43	43
Expect economy will be:				
Better off	21	16	29	25
No difference	19	23	23	22
Worse off	58	58	46	52

This pessimism about the economic consequences of Brexit amongst people in Scotland is replicated when they are asked whether they think that the UK will get a good or a bad deal out of the negotiations. Well over half (55%) think that the UK will get a bad deal. But whereas in February the mood in Scotland was much more pessimistic than elsewhere in Britain, here too the gap has narrowed thanks to a sharp increase in pessimism in the rest of the UK. It now seems that on both sides of the border at least a half reckon the UK will get a bad deal while no more than a fifth anticipate that it will get a good one.

Table 5 Expectations of How Good a Deal the UK will Get, Scotland and Britain, February and October 2017

Expect UK to Get	Scotland		Great Britain	
	February	October	February	October
	%	%	%	%
Good Deal	22	18	33	19
Neither good nor bad	24	25	27	28
Bad Deal	50	55	37	52

Against this backdrop, it will doubtless come as no surprise to discover that many voters in Scotland do not think the UK government has been handling Brexit well. As many as 57% were of that opinion back at the beginning of 2017, and now over two-thirds (69%) espouse that view. However, Scotland is far from unique in having become markedly more critical of how the UK government has been handling the negotiations. Indeed, as many as three-fifths (61%) of voters across Britain as a whole also think that the UK government is handling the negotiations badly. So, here too, attitudes in Scotland are now quite similar to those in the rest of Britain, thanks to a change of mood south of the border.

Table 6 Evaluations of How Well the UK Government and the EU Have Handled the Brexit Negotiations, Scotland and Britain, February and October 2017

	Scotland		Great Britain	
	February	October	February	October
	%	%	%	%
UK Government				
Well	21	13	29	15
Neither	18	16	28	24
Badly	57	69	41	61
The EU				
Well	22	19	17	17
Neither	30	23	35	25
Badly	44	55	46	57

But voters are not just critical – and increasingly so – of how the UK government has been handling Brexit. They have also become more critical of the role played by the EU. On both sides of the border well over half of all voters now feel that the EU is handling the negotiations badly, and in both cases the increase in the proportion taking that view is of the order of ten points. Scotland may be keener on staying in the EU, but that does not mean that it necessarily endorses the stance being taken by the EU in the Brexit negotiations. Rather, as is the position across Britain as a whole, many voters are unhappy with the performance of those on both sides of the Brussels negotiating table. As many as 42% of people in Scotland say that both the UK government and the EU have been handling Brexit badly.

SUMMARY

One striking pattern stands out from our findings so far. Even though Scotland voted very differently in the EU referendum, attitudes towards Brexit are notable for their similarity to those in the rest of the UK rather than for their difference. Scotland now takes much the same view as the rest of Britain about how well the Brexit process is being handled and what the consequences of leaving the EU might be – not least because voters south of the border have come to share much of the pessimistic outlook that was already in evidence north of the border. At the same time, Scotland continues to share with the rest of the UK a preference that post-Brexit the UK should still be trading freely with the EU but that freedom of movement should have been ended. The one difference of note is that, faced with a choice between maintaining free trade and ending freedom of movement, Scotland remains rather more inclined to prioritise the former.

REMAIN AND LEAVE VOTERS

Just how is it possible that attitudes towards Brexit in Scotland are much the same as those in the rest of the UK even though the country voted very differently in the referendum? After all, we would anticipate that Remain voters, more numerous in Scotland, are more sceptical about Brexit than those who voted Leave. But perhaps Remain voters in Scotland are not as sceptical as their counterparts south of the border. Or maybe, now that the UK has voted to leave the EU, the attitudes of Remain and Leave voters towards the shape Brexit should take and how well or badly the negotiations are being handled are not so different after all?

In order to address this question, the top half of Table 7 compares the expectations of Remain and Leave voters, both in Scotland and across Britain as a whole, as to how good a deal the UK will obtain. First of all, we find that the expectations of Remain voters in Scotland are in fact similar to those of Remain voters in the rest of Britain. Indeed, the same can be said of Leave voters on the two sides of the border. But what we should also note is that although some differences exist between Remain and Leave voters, these differences are not that large. Indeed, during the course of the 2017 it was amongst Leave voters above all that greater pessimism set in. For example, in Scotland there was a 14-point drop amongst Leave voters between February and October in the proportion expecting the UK to secure a good deal, while the equivalent drop amongst Leave voters across Britain as a whole was no less than 23 points. In contrast, the fall amongst Remain voters was just two points in Scotland and six across Britain as a whole. This narrowing of the difference of outlook between Remain and Leave voters served to reduce the difference between Scotland and the rest of Britain.

Table 7 Expectations of How Good A Deal the UK will Secure and Evaluations of How Well the EU Has Handled Brexit by EU Referendum Vote, Scotland and Britain, October 2017

	Scotland		Great Britain	
	Remain	Leave	Remain	Leave
	%	%	%	%
Expect UK to Get:				
Good Deal	12	26	11	28
Neither good nor bad	19	30	20	33
Bad Deal	67	41	68	38
EU Has Handled Brexit:				
Well	22	10	22	10
Neither	27	19	26	20
Badly	49	69	50	71

A similar pattern is found in the bottom half of Table 7, which undertakes the same analysis of evaluations of how well the EU has handled the Brexit negotiations. As we might anticipate, Remain supporters are somewhat less critical of the EU's performance than Leave voters, and in this Scotland is no different from Britain as a whole. But even Remain voters are far from uncritical – and so the greater prevalence of Remain voters in Scotland is insufficient to generate much of a difference in outlook between Scotland and Britain as a whole.

Table 8 Willingness to Allow Freedom of Movement in Return for Free Trade by EU Referendum Vote, Scotland and Britain, October 2017

	Scotland		Great Britain	
	Remain	Leave	Remain	Leave
	%	%	%	%
Definitely should	45	12	39	7
Probably should	33	28	37	25
<i>All 'should'</i>	78	39	76	32
Probably should not	12	33	17	34
Definitely should not	7	28	6	34
<i>All 'should not'</i>	20	60	23	67

So why then is it the case that attitudes in Scotland are rather different from those in Britain as a whole when it comes to willingness to accept freedom of movement in order to secure free trade? Table 8, which shows separately the attitudes of Remain and Leave voters towards this issue, both in Scotland and across Britain as a whole, addresses this question. Here, the differences between the two sets of voters are substantial. In Scotland and across Britain as a whole, at least three-quarters of Remain voters would 'definitely' or 'probably' accept freedom of movement in order to secure free trade, while at least three-fifths of Leave voters would not. Given the greater prevalence of Remain voters in Scotland, a difference of that size does begin to generate a difference of outlook between Scotland and the rest of Britain as a whole. But at the same time Leave voters in Scotland (39%) are somewhat more likely than those in Britain (32%) to be willing to accept freedom of movement. Indeed, much the same point as applies to those who did not vote in the referendum – 60% of non-voters in Scotland were 'definitely' or 'probably' willing to accept freedom of movement in return for free trade compared with 48% in Britain. So, an additional reason why attitudes towards this subject are rather different in Scotland is because both Leave voters and those who did not participate in the referendum (but not Remain voters) are less keen than their counterparts south of the border on the 'hard' Brexit that is implied by prioritising control of immigration over free trade.

FISHING AND FARMING

But even if attitudes towards Brexit in Scotland are for the most part relatively similar to those in the rest of the UK, they are hardly uncritical of the process to date. They still leave open the possibility that voters in Scotland might want to have a closer relationship with the EU than the UK government envisages for the rest of the UK, including perhaps wanting to pursue independence in order to maintain Scotland's EU membership. Meanwhile, as we noted earlier, the process of leaving the EU requires decisions to be made about who in future should have responsibility for those policy areas such as fishing and farming which are devolved. It is to the implications of Brexit for these debates about how Scotland should be governed to which we now turn.

First, we consider the question of who after Brexit should make decisions about fishing and farming in Scotland. We addressed the issue by posing the following question:

At present, most of the government decisions about farming in Scotland are made by the European Union. After Britain has left the European Union, these decisions will have to be made by either the UK government or the Scottish government instead.

Who do you think should make decisions about farming in Scotland after Britain has left the EU?

All decisions should be made by the Scottish Government

Some decisions should be made by the Scottish Government, some by the UK government

All decisions should be made by the UK government.

This was followed by an identically worded question about fishing.

As Table 9 shows, in both cases around three in five people in Scotland think that all such decisions should be made by the Scottish Government, and thus largely support the stance taken by the Scottish Government. Only around three in ten think that decision-making should be shared by the two governments, as implied by the UK government's view that there should be a UK-wide common framework for decisions about fishing and farming. This appears to be an issue on which the Scottish Government has rather more public support than the UK government.

Table 9 Attitudes towards who should make decisions about fishing and farming after Brexit

	Farming	Fishing
	%	%
All decisions made by Scottish Government	59	62
Some made by UK government, some by Scottish Government	32	27
All decisions made by UK government	8	9

As we might anticipate, though, people's attitudes towards this subject to some degree reflect their views about the merits or otherwise of Scottish independence. As Table 10 shows, those who voted Yes in the independence referendum are twice as likely as those who voted No to think that all decisions about fishing and farming should be made by the Scottish Government. But that said, those who want Scotland to remain in the UK are quite divided in their views. Indeed, even amongst those who voted Conservative around a quarter (23% in the case of farming, 28% fishing) think that all decisions should be made by the Scottish Government, while over a half (58% in both cases) of Labour voters take that view.

Table 10 Attitudes towards who should make decisions about fishing and farming after Brexit by Independence Referendum Vote

	Farming		Fishing	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
	%	%	%	%
All decisions made by Scottish Government	81	41	84	42
Some made by UK government, some by Scottish Government	16	45	13	40
All decisions made by UK government	2	14	3	16

A CLOSER RELATIONSHIP?

But while there appears to be widespread support for the idea that, following Brexit, the Scottish Government should be making the decisions for those policy areas that are already devolved, albeit within a EU-wide framework, there still appears to be relatively little enthusiasm for the idea floated by the Scottish Government that Scotland might remain a member of the EU single market (including its freedom of movement provisions), even if the rest of the UK is not (Scottish Government, 2016). We asked:

Which of the following statements comes closer to your view about immigration after Britain has left the EU?

The rules on immigration from the EU should be the same in Scotland as they are in England and Wales

The rules on immigration from the EU should make it easier for someone from the EU to come to live in Scotland than in England and Wales

The rules on immigration from the EU should make it harder for someone from the EU to come to live in Scotland than in England and Wales

and

Which of the following statements comes closer to your view about the rules on trade after Britain has left the EU?

The rules on trade with the EU should be the same in Scotland as they are in England and Wales

The rules on trade with the EU should make it easier for a EU company to do business in Scotland than in England and Wales

The rules on trade with the EU should make it harder for a EU company to do business in Scotland than in England and Wales

Just over three in five (63%) say that the rules on immigration from the EU should be the same in Scotland as in the rest of the UK, while two in three (67%) think the rules on trade should be the same. Only around one in four (24%) believe that it should be easier for EU migrants to come to Scotland and no more than three in ten (30%) reckon that it should be easier for EU companies to do business in Scotland than elsewhere in the UK. None of these figures have changed materially during the course of 2017, suggesting that the Scottish Government has made relatively little headway in persuading people in Scotland that, following Brexit, the country should have a closer relationship with the EU than the rest of the UK.

Table 11 Attitudes towards Scotland having different rules on immigration and trade, February and October 2017

	February	October
	%	%
Immigration		
Rules should be the same	62	63
Should be easier for EU migrants to come to Scotland	25	24
Should be harder for EU migrants to come to Scotland	12	12
Trade		
Rules should be the same	62	67
Should be easier for EU companies to trade in Scotland	34	30
Should be harder for EU companies to trade in Scotland	2	2

Again, as Table 12 illustrates, this is a subject on which people's views in part reflect how they voted in the independence referendum. Those who voted Yes are more willing to contemplate the prospect that Scotland might have different rules than the rest of the UK on immigration and trade with the EU. But even so, slightly over half of those who voted Yes say that the rules should be the same, an increase on the two in five or so that expressed that view in February (Curtice, 2017a). Meanwhile, those who voted Leave are, unsurprisingly, also less keen on the idea that Scotland might have a closer relationship with the EU than the rest of the UK, a pattern that is in evidence even when we have taken into account how people voted in the independence referendum. Even so, well over half of those who voted Remain reckon that Scotland should have the same relationship with the EU on immigration and trade as the rest of the UK. In short, even those to whom the idea of a closer relationship with the EU might be expected to have the greatest appeal do not evince a great deal of enthusiasm for the idea.

Table 12. Attitudes towards Scotland having different rules on immigration and trade by EU referendum vote and Independence Vote

	EU Referendum Vote		Independence Referendum Vote	
	Remain	Leave	Yes	No
	%	%	%	%
Immigration				
Rules should be the same	59	68	54	75
Should be easier for EU migrants to come to Scotland	34	11	36	14
Should be harder for EU migrants to come to Scotland	6	21	9	9
Trade				
Rules should be the same	60	77	53	82
Should be easier for EU companies to trade in Scotland	37	20	45	17
Should be harder for EU companies to trade in Scotland	1	3	2	1

THE INDEPENDENCE DEBATE

But, of course, the most important question that, according to Nicola Sturgeon, was put back 'on the table' as a consequence of the referendum result was whether Scotland should revisit the question of independence. The First Minister, at least, seemed to anticipate that the divergence in the outcome of the referendum north and south of the border would serve to increase support for independence thanks to some former No voters being upset at the prospect of Scotland being required to leave the EU against the expressed wish of the majority of its voters.

Table 13 Hypothetical and Reported Independence Referendum Vote, February and October 2017

	February		October	
	All	Excluding 'Not Sure' / 'Did Not Vote'	All	Excluding 'Don't Knows' / 'Did Not Vote'
	%	%	%	%
Hypothetical Referendum Vote				
Yes	43	47	40	44
No	48	53	51	56
Not Sure	9		9	
Reported 2014 Vote				
Yes		48		49
No		52		51

However, after an apparent swing in favour of independence in the immediate wake of the EU referendum result, there has been little consistent evidence in the opinion polls of a swing either for or against independence. Our surveys certainly fail to detect any evidence of increased support for independence. In Table 13 we report both how people say they would vote in a referendum now and how they actually voted in the independence referendum. In our survey at the beginning of 2017 there was little evidence of much movement in the net balance of opinion – the 48% who said that they voted Yes in 2014 was more or less matched by the 47% who said they would do so in a second contest (after leaving aside those who said they were not sure how they would vote). Now in our most recent survey it appears that, if anything, there has been a swing against independence; 49% said that they voted Yes in 2014, while only 44% indicated that they would do so now.

One of the central influences on how people voted in the Scottish independence referendum was whether they thought independence would be economically beneficial or not (Curtice, 2015). As Table 14 shows, despite the concerns that many voters have about the economic consequences of Brexit, it is still the case that more people think the economy would be made worse as a result of independence than believe it would get better. That perhaps helps explain why a majority for independence has not emerged in the wake of Brexit. However, the most recent apparent fall in support for independence has not been accompanied by an increase in the proportion who think that Scotland's economy would get worse as a result of leaving the UK. Rather, the opposite appears to have happened. It would seem therefore that other considerations beyond those addressed by our survey must have occasioned the apparent fall in support for independence since our previous survey.

Table 14 Perceptions of the Economic Consequences of Independence, February and October 2017

	February	October
As a result of independence Scotland's economy would be:	%	%
Better	32	35
Same	16	19
Worse	49	44

CONCLUSION

The divergence between the outcome of the EU referendum in Scotland and that across the UK as a whole appeared to add a new dimension to the debate about Scotland's constitutional future. Yet, in practice, it has not created a major rift in public opinion on the two sides of the border. Just as across Britain as a whole, a majority of voters in Scotland would ideally like Brexit to result in greater control of EU migration as well as the maintenance of free trade. Meanwhile, contrary to the presumption of the Scottish Government, most voters in Scotland are not keen to see Scotland remain in the single market, and thus continue freedom of movement, should the rest of the UK leave it. Only if the UK is faced with a choice between ending freedom of movement and maintaining free trade will voters in Scotland be inclined to give a somewhat different answer from their counterparts south of the border.

Not that this means that the public in Scotland are happy with the way Brexit is proceeding. They are critical of the way the issue is being handled by both the UK government and the European Union, are concerned about the economic consequences of Brexit, and are far from convinced that the UK will get a good deal, let alone one that matches their own preferences. Meanwhile, the UK government appears to have scored something of an own goal in insisting that in the first instance at least the powers currently exercised by the EU in respect of policy areas that otherwise are devolved should return to Westminster. However, this critical mood is not unique to Scotland, but rather is increasingly shared with the rest of Britain. Of course, that might eventually mean that at some point Scotland looks to independence as a way out of Brexit, an option that is not available to voters in England. But as yet at least there is little sign of this happening.

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