

WHO WANTS CONTROL: CAN ATTITUDES TO SOVEREIGNTY EXPLAIN SCOTTISH PRO-EUROPEANISM?

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ABSTRACT

It is widely accepted in British political discourse that Scottish attitudes to the European Union (EU) are markedly more positive than those in the rest of the United Kingdom (UK). However, this truism has not been satisfactorily explained using a comparative framework. This paper attempts to uncover whether divergent attitudes to sovereignty in Scotland and the rest of the UK can explain Scotland's relative pro-Europeanism. This was explored using survey data. Two groups of respondents, from Scotland and the rest of the UK, answered a series of questions about EU membership, sovereignty and related political issues. These responses were then fed into a series of statistical models. The hypothesis anticipated that Scottish respondents would be less likely to view membership of the EU as a threat to the UK's national sovereignty than respondents from the rest of the UK, and consequently would have a more positive view of EU membership. These expectations were met. The first model found that sovereignty attitudes are significantly predictive of EU attitudes, and when sovereignty attitudes are controlled for, living in Scotland has no independent effect. The second model demonstrated that Scottish respondents had a view of sovereignty much more amenable to EU integration. However, the third model found that none of the explanations for this dissimilarity from existing literature are fully supported by these results. Therefore, further research which might help fill this gap in understanding is suggested.

INTRODUCTION

The question of why Scottish attitudes to the EU diverge from those in the rest of the UK is among the most pertinent in modern British politics. Although previously Scotland had been among the more Eurosceptic parts of the UK, since the late 1980s Scottish attitudes to EU membership have consistently been more positive in Scotland than elsewhere in the UK (Henderson et al. 2016, p.191). The dissimilarity of these attitudes has practical consequences for the future of the UK. The 2014 referendum on Scottish independence had resulted in a clear victory for the pro-union campaign (House of Commons Library 2014). As such, the prospect of Scottish independence in the near future was unlikely, not least because the Scottish government itself had framed the 2014 vote as a "once in a generation" event (Scottish Government 2013, p. viii). However, the question of Scotland's constitutional future was reignited by the result of the 2016 referendum on the UK's membership of the EU. In 2016, while 62% of Scottish voters supported the UK remaining in the EU, this was in significant contrast to the narrow UK-wide vote for Brexit (House of Commons Library 2016, p.5). Subsequently, the inconsistency between the pro-Brexit policy of the UK government and the Scottish electorate's expressed preference to remain has led the pro-independence Scottish National Party to lead a renewed push for independence in the immediate term (Dickie 2019, p. 5). Therefore, divergent Scottish attitudes to the EU are

among the most relevant phenomena for modern British political science to explore. Despite this salience, however, divergent Scottish EU attitudes currently lack an explanation backed by robust evidence — a gap this paper intends to fill.

Literature Review

While attitudes to sovereignty have been posited by political scientists like Dardanelli (2005) and Ichijo (2004) as an explanation, the theory lacks sufficient supporting evidence to be conclusive. In politics, sovereignty is a country's ability to make its own laws. However, sovereignty is complicated by EU membership, since the EU requires some pooling of authority at a pan-European level. In this context, 'sovereignty attitudes' refers to public perceptions of this pooling of sovereignty (Sørensen 2018).

Dardanelli (2005) and Ichijo (2009) both contend that there is a particular attitude to sovereignty in Scotland that differs from the prevailing view in the rest of the UK. Dardanelli argues that the divergence in EU attitudes seen since the 1980s reflected an ideological shift in Scotland around the same time. Scottish people's level of identification with Britain had been declining since the 1960s, due to changing religious, educational and employment patterns (Cameron 2010, p. 267). Subsequently, Dardanelli argues, by the 1980s Scots increasingly began to see the UK as an artificial political project in which national sovereignty was traded for material outcomes such as

economic development. This prior experience allegedly made the comparatively looser constraints of EU membership less threatening than they previously seemed (Dardanelli 2005, p. 148). The existence of a distinct ‘Scottish’ attitude to sovereignty was corroborated by Ichijo, who found that an attitude similar to the one described by Dardanelli was shared widely among Members of the Scottish Parliament (Ichijo 2009, pp.163-164).

However, neither Dardanelli or Ichijo support their theory with an in-depth analysis of popular attitudes. Nor are either of their approaches fundamentally comparative: both examine values within Scotland, with only limited references to England, Wales or Northern Ireland. This is surprising, since comparative analysis of popular attitudes has previously yielded results in this area. For example, take Ray’s (1979) statistical analysis of Scottish and English popular attitudes to the European Economic Community (the forerunner to the EU) in 1979. Ray’s work is effective; his comparison of popular attitudes in Scotland and England allows him not only to draw conclusions based on differences in the overall character of the responses, but to identify ways in which common factors — such as partisanship — have different impacts in the two populations (Ray 1979, p. 219). However, his work is out of date, as it predates the shift in attitudes in the late 1980s. This presents an opportunity to conduct a comparative analysis of people’s attitudes to sovereignty and the EU in Scotland and the rest of the UK.

Hypothesis

Scottish respondents will be less likely to see EU membership as a threat to sovereignty than respondents from the rest of the UK, and therefore will have a more positive view of EU membership. This hypothesis entails a number of more specific expectations, detailed in Table 1, labelled **H1-4**.

METHODOLOGY

Regression Analysis

In order to test this hypothesis, I employed three multiple linear regression tests. Regression is a statistical tool which models the relationship between different variables. The simplest linear regression tests involve two variables; these are the predictor variable — the value whose impact you are attempting to measure — and the outcome variable — the value you want to predict. The regression formula plots a line of best fit which predicts the value of the outcome variable based on the value of the predictor variable.

Multiple linear regression allows you to analyse more complex relationships by adding additional predictor variables. In multiple linear regression, the line of best fit becomes a three-dimensional plane; however, the basic aim, of trying to create a model which minimises the difference between the predicted values and the actual values, remains the same.

A breakdown of the design and expectations for the three models is available in Table 1. My first model, Model 1, aimed to test whether sovereignty attitudes were a significant predictor of EU attitudes. It also aimed to test whether being Scottish had an effect on EU attitudes that was independent of sovereignty attitudes. Therefore, both sovereignty attitudes and Scotland/rest of UK served as predictor variables. Included as controls were a range of political values which had been previously found to be associated with EU attitudes (House of Commons Library 2016, p. 18) and sovereignty attitudes (Bean 2002, pp. 34-35).

Table 1: Description of Tests

Model	Predictor variables	Outcome variable	Purpose	Sample used	Expectation title	Expectation description
1	Sovereignty attitudes, Scotland/rest of UK	EU attitudes	To test whether sovereignty attitudes were a significant predictor of EU attitudes, independent of whether one lives in Scotland or the rest of the UK	Entire sample	H1	Sovereignty attitudes will be a significant predictor of EU attitudes.
					H2	Living in Scotland will have no independent effect on EU attitudes when sovereignty attitudes are controlled for.
2	Scotland/rest of UK	Sovereignty attitudes	To test whether being Scottish influenced sovereignty attitudes.	Entire sample	H3	Living in Scotland will be a significant predictor of sovereignty attitudes.
3	Several Scotland-specific variables (see Table 4c)	Sovereignty attitudes	To ascertain if a factor unique to Scotland could explain variation in sovereignty attitudes within Scotland.	Scottish subsample only	H4	Significant relationships will be found between the dependent variable, sovereignty attitudes, and the predictor values.

Model 2 aimed to test whether being Scottish influenced a person's sovereignty attitudes. Therefore, sovereignty attitudes were the dependent variable in this model, and residency of Scotland or the rest of the UK was the predictor variable. The same variables from Model 1, as well as EU attitudes, were used as controls.

Finally, Model 3 incorporated only Scottish respondents. The aim of this model was to try and explain any variation in Model 2 between Scotland and the rest of the UK. In order to do this, I tested whether factors unique to Scotland could explain variation in Sovereignty attitudes *within* Scotland. Therefore, Model 3 retained sovereignty attitudes as the dependent variable, and kept the control variables from Model 2 in place. However, several predictor variables, concerning devolution, independence and national identity, were added to the model which could not have been asked of respondents from the rest of the UK.

Measurement

In order to perform these tests, I first had to collect data that both: accurately measured my dependent and independent variables; and was compatible with regression modelling. In order to do this, I designed a survey with a range of questions covering Brexit, Scottish independence and other political issues. The survey was structured with closed questions, rather than an open-ended interview structure, so that I could collect uniform types of responses that could be used for regression analysis.

For my first independent variable — whether a respondent was from Scotland or the rest of the UK — respondents were asked simply which of the four parts of the United Kingdom — Scotland, England, Wales or Northern Ireland — they lived in. After collecting the data, I combined the English, Welsh and Northern Irish responses to create a single 'rest of UK' category. Admittedly, defining Scottishness — or, indeed, non-Scottish Britishness — in this way is contested; the politics of national identity is complex and multi-layered throughout the UK (Henderson et al. 2017, p. 632). As such, the sample could theoretically be divided in any number of ways. However, it is most effective to study a phenomenon in the form it appears. In this case, 'Scottish attitudes' manifest themselves at the level of residency, as seen in the EU referendum result. Therefore, for these purposes 'Scotland' and the 'rest of the UK' will be categorised by residency, meaning that any person resident in the UK was able to participate.

EU and sovereignty attitudes are both abstract values, so designing questions that accurately measured them was much more complicated. Both the questions measuring these concepts were constructed as 'Likert Scale' questions, asking respondents how much they agreed or disagreed with a given statement. Likert Scales are useful for social science, as you can create a clearly-defined scale of intensity of feeling. This allows you to perform statistical

analysis on political values. However, in addition to questions, I also needed respondents to fill out my survey.

PARTICIPANTS

I used social media to recruit participants for this survey. British residents (regardless of nationality or immigration status) were invited to participate in the survey in a post from my personal account on the social media platforms Facebook, Twitter and Reddit. These posts invited them to click an anonymous link to the survey. The purpose and subject matter of the survey was made clear in the post. For respondents recruited from Twitter and Facebook, the link was posted to my own page, meaning it was distributed to my pre-existing followers. On Reddit, the invitation was posted in communities dedicated to Scotland and British politics. In total, 350 people responded to the survey.

All data were collected after the 2019 general election, but before the UK left the EU on the 31st of January 2020. Admittedly, social media users are an imperfect sample of the UK population. Users of Facebook and Twitter are younger, better educated, more politically engaged, and they tend to lean politically 'left' compared to the population as a whole (Mellon and Prosser 2017, p. 2). While no academic research has been done studying the user base of Reddit, available surveys suggest that their demographics are similarly tilted (Sattlerberg 2019). Indeed, the sample I collected reflects these demographic trends. The majority (50.8%) of participants were young, falling between the ages of 18 and 34. An even larger majority were highly educated: 56.9% held a Bachelors' degree or equivalent.

The political attitudes of the sample also conformed to our expectations for social media users. Most were very politically engaged; 57% claimed they had paid a 'great deal' of attention to the Brexit debate. Naturally, this is a subjective self-evaluation that does not necessarily reflect exactly how much attention they have paid, but it is nevertheless clear that these participants themselves viewed themselves as highly engaged in the debate. Finally, most respondents positioned themselves on the left of the political spectrum. This was reflected in the votes that respondents recalled casting in the 2019 general election; a plurality of the respondents from the rest of the UK voted for the Labour Party, while a large majority of the Scottish sample (69.3%) voted for the Scottish National Party. Both of these results are inconsistent with the actual results of the 2019 election (House of Commons Library 2020), so we can safely assume that this sample is to the left of the population at large.

The unrepresentativeness of the sample, however, does not invalidate any relationships found in these data. Aside from these demographic trends, social media users are not fundamentally different from other UK residents (Mellon and Prosser 2017, p. 8). Therefore, since these variables are controlled in our models, there should not be an issue generalising its results to the UK population at large.

RESULTS

Model 1

In order to interpret the results of Model 1, as well as the following models, there are several numbers to keep in mind, visible on Tables 2a-2c. The first, the significance (p) value of the ANOVA (ANalysis Of VAriance) test – a standard procedure to determine significance between variables – tells us whether any relationships we find between our predictor and dependent variables can be confidently generalised to the population as a whole. In order for this to be the case, the p value must be less than 0.05, and since the p value displayed on Table 2b is 0.00, we can trust the results of this test.

However, for the specific relationships we are interested in to be considered significant, the p value of each relationship must

also be less than 0.05. This is displayed in Table 2c. As we can see, the sig value of the sovereignty attitudes predictor is less than 0.05, meaning that sovereignty attitudes have a significant impact on EU attitudes. The extent of the significance is measured in the B value, also visible on the coefficient Table. The further the B value is from 0.00 (in either direction), the greater the relationship is between our predictor and outcome variables. The B value for the predictor measuring sovereignty attitudes is -0.224. This indicates that a sense that the EU infringes on sovereignty makes a person significantly more negative towards EU membership. Therefore, **H1** is satisfied.

In contrast, the Scotland/rest of UK predictor has a p value of 0.619. Therefore, there is no significant effect of being Scottish on EU attitudes when sovereignty attitudes are controlled for. This means that **H2** is also met.

Table 2a: Model 1 Summary

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. error of the estimate
1	0.845 ^a	0.715	0.703	0.503

a. Predictors: (Constant), Sovereignty attitudes, Age, Education level, Attention paid to EU debate, Scotland or rest of UK, UK state institutions approval, Left-right self-placement, Globalist identification, Territorial integrity importance, EU social policies approval, Immigration attitude, Perceived impact of Brexit on the economy

Table 2b: Model 1 ANOVA - Outcome Variable: EU attitudes

Model		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	P
1	Regression	187.133	12	15.594	61.607	0.000 ^a
	Residual	74.672	295	0.253		
	Total	261.805	307			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Sovereignty attitudes, Age, Education level, Attention paid to EU debate, Scotland or rest of UK, UK state institutions approval, Left-right self-placement, Globalist identification, Territorial integrity importance, EU social policies approval, Immigration attitude, Perceived impact of Brexit on the economy

Table 2c: Model 1 Coefficient Table - Outcome Variable: EU attitudes

Model		Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients	t	P
		B	Std. error	β		
1	(Constant)	2.600	0.428		6.077	0.000
	Scotland or rest of UK	0.036	0.073	0.018	0.498	0.619
	Territorial integrity importance	-0.062	0.027	-0.102	-2.293	0.023
	EU social policies approval	0.228	0.049	0.228	4.614	0.000
	Immigration attitude	-0.071	0.038	-0.094	-1.884	0.061
	Globalist identity	0.043	0.028	0.060	1.553	0.122
	UK state institutions approval	0.008	0.037	0.008	0.220	0.826
	Perceived impact of Brexit on the economy	0.206	0.047	0.223	4.350	0.000
	Education	-0.019	0.012	-0.048	-1.493	0.137
	Age	-0.035	0.038	-0.030	-0.925	0.356
	Attention paid to EU debate	0.044	0.040	0.038	1.117	0.265
	Left-right self-placement	-0.018	0.019	-0.038	-0.960	0.338
	Sovereignty attitudes	-0.224	0.039	-0.317	-5.722	0.000

Model 2

Model 2 meets the test set in **H3**. As in Model 1, the p value of the ANOVA test is 0.00; therefore, the results which follow can be trusted. Table 3c demonstrates that being Scottish had a significant impact on sovereignty attitudes. Scottish respondents are markedly less likely to view EU membership as a threat to sovereignty. Moreover, the p value for this relationship is 0.033, a value which, while higher than the ideal

0.00, nevertheless indicates a significant result. As a result, H3 is accepted. Cumulatively, the results of Models 1 and 2 indicate that Scottish respondents are in fact less likely to believe that EU membership has a negative impact on the UK's sovereignty than respondents from the rest of the United Kingdom, and consequently that they have a more positive view of EU membership. However, in order to interpret these results most effectively, it is worthwhile to test one final model, to examine how widely these values are shared within Scotland.

Table 3a: Model 2 Summary

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. error of the estimate
2	0.828 ^a	0.686	0.675	0.747

a. Predictors: (Constant), Left-right self-placement, Education, Age, Attention paid to Brexit debate, Scotland or rest of UK, UK state institutions approval, Globalist identity, Perceived impact of Brexit on the economy, Territorial integrity importance, Immigration attitudes, EU social policies approval

Table 3b: Model 2 ANOVA - Variable: Sovereignty attitudes

Model		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	P
2	Regression	362.977	11	32.998	59.045	0.000 ^a
	Residual	165.981	297	0.559		
	Total	528.958	308			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Left-right self-placement, Education, Age, Attention paid to Brexit debate, Scotland or rest of UK, UK state institutions approval, Globalist identity, Perceived impact of Brexit on the economy, Territorial integrity importance, Immigration attitudes, EU social policies approval

Table 3c: Model 2 Coefficient Table - Outcome Variable: Sovereignty attitudes

Model		Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients	t	P
		B	Std. Error	β		
2	(Constant)	4.142	0.588		7.040	0.000
	Scotland or rest of UK	-0.228	0.107	-0.081	-2.139	0.033
	Territorial integrity importance	0.125	0.040	0.145	3.154	0.002
	EU social policies approval	-0.266	0.072	-0.187	-3.705	0.000
	Immigration attitude	0.224	0.054	0.208	4.145	0.000
	Globalist identity	-0.110	0.041	-0.107	-2.681	0.008
	UK state institutions approval	0.022	0.054	0.016	0.405	0.686
	Perceived impact of Brexit on the economy	-0.432	0.066	-0.330	-6.591	0.000
	Education	-0.008	0.019	-0.015	-0.454	0.650
	Age	0.073	0.056	0.044	1.300	0.195
	Attention paid to EU debate	0.058	0.059	0.035	0.981	0.327
	Left-right self-placement	0.011	0.028	0.016	0.393	0.694

Model 3

The results of Model 3 also hew to our expectations. As Table 4c demonstrates, all of the variables measuring perceptions of EU outputs such as social policies, economic benefits and immigration, were significantly predictive of sovereignty attitudes — as they had been in the UK-wide sample in Model 2. In all three relationships, a more positive assessment of these outputs led to a more flexible view of sovereignty.

The questions which were only asked of Scottish respondents were less successful as predictors of sovereignty attitudes. Neither national identity nor support for independence were significant predictors of sovereignty attitudes. The exception to this, perhaps unsurprisingly, was the question measuring whether respondents felt that EU membership infringed on the role of the Scottish Parliament. Therefore, several of the predictor variables were significantly predictive of sovereignty attitudes in Scotland, meaning that **H4** is accepted.

Table 4a: Model 3 Summary

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. error of the estimate
3	0.779 ^a	0.608	0.575	0.606

a. Predictors: (Constant), UK state institutions approval, Age, Education Globalist identity, Left-right self-placement, Attention paid to EU debate, Popular sovereignty, Independence referendum voting intention, EU social policies approval, popular sovereignty, Perceived impact of Brexit on the economy, Impact of EU on Scottish Parliament, national identity, Territorial integrity importance

Table 4b: Model 3 ANOVA - Outcome Variable: Sovereignty attitudes

Model		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	P
3	Regression	95.750	14	6.839	18.582	0.000 ^a
	Residual	61.835	168	0.368		
	Total	157.585	182			

a. Predictors: UK state institutions approval, Age, Education Globalist identity, Left-right self-placement, Attention paid to EU debate, Popular sovereignty, Independence referendum voting intention, EU social policies approval, popular sovereignty, Perceived impact of Brexit on the economy, Impact of EU on Scottish Parliament, Moreno national identity, Territorial integrity importance

Table 4c: Model 3 Coefficient Table - Outcome Variable: Sovereignty attitudes

Model	Coefficients	Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients	t	P
		B	Std. Error	β		
3	(Constant)	3.620	0.685		5.284	0.000
	British/Scottish national identity	-0.079	0.058	-0.093	-1.350	0.179
	Age	0.067	0.064	0.054	1.036	0.302
	Education	-0.003	0.022	-0.006	-0.124	0.901
	Left-right self-placement	0.027	0.026	0.057	1.051	0.295
	Perceived impact of Brexit on the economy	-0.314	0.074	-0.289	-4.222	0.000
	Immigration attitude	0.136	0.060	0.140	2.265	0.025
	Globalist identity	-0.089	0.044	-0.114	-1.994	0.048
	Attention paid to Brexit debate	0.104	0.062	0.093	1.684	0.094
	Support for Scottish independence	-0.055	0.070	-0.046	-0.788	0.432
	EU social policies approval	-0.215	0.095	-0.143	-2.255	0.025
	EU impact on Scottish Parliament sovereignty	0.280	0.061	0.306	4.613	0.000
	Territorial integrity importance	0.033	0.057	0.046	0.574	0.567
	Belief in popular sovereignty	-0.014	0.080	-0.010	-0.173	0.863
	UK institutions approval (Scotland)	-0.058	0.069	-0.052	-0.838	0.403

DISCUSSION

These results confirm the accuracy of the hypothesis. A sense that membership of the EU undermined the UK's right to be an independent country that makes its own laws led to a significantly more negative assessment of EU membership. Moreover, Scottish respondents had a much more flexible attitude to sovereignty than the rest of the sample. Finally, given that there is no significant independent effect of being Scottish in Model 1, it is hard to maintain that divergent Scottish EU attitudes can be explained by a factor not included in our models.

Of course, other factors also shape perceptions of the EU, in both Scotland and the rest of the UK. Model 1 demonstrates the strong effect that perceptions of the material consequences of EU membership — like social policies, migration and the economy — have on perceptions of EU membership. However, even when these factors are controlled, the relationships between Scottish residency, sovereignty attitudes and EU attitudes that I anticipated are still present. Therefore, the existence of these other factors should not obscure the fact that Scotland is set apart from the rest of the UK by a different attitude to sovereignty, which enables a more pro-EU political culture to prevail.

However, these results are inconclusive as to whether the existing theoretical frameworks can explain why this divergent attitude to sovereignty persists in Scotland. The results of Model 3 run directly counter to Dardanelli's explanation that a declining sense of British identity in Scotland was key in generating a flexible attitude to sovereignty. In Model 3, however, national identity was a poor predictor of sovereignty attitudes. Admittedly, these results are not enough to

discredit Dardanelli's theory; his conclusions were based on data from the late twentieth century, and therefore it would be poor scientific practice to argue that these results collected over twenty years later repudiate his findings; it is entirely possible that the situation has changed since, in ways he did not anticipate but are compatible with his theoretical framework. Therefore, while fulfilling its intended purpose, this research leaves us with a tantalising finding and yet cannot explain its existence. Therefore, further research into this topic is needed.

Such future investigation should employ a different technique to the statistical analysis used in this paper. Sovereignty is a value which people experience contextually (Haesly 2001, p. 86). Therefore, the more granular one aims to be, closed questions — in which the researcher effectively supplies the context themselves — will become progressively less effective in capturing people's values accurately and impartially. In an interview format, using open-ended questions, however, interviewees could give nuanced answers that genuinely capture their attitudes. Of course, while one could analyse the content of these answers, they could not be used for statistical analysis, because they would not be formatted as the same kind of response. However, this is not necessarily a problem. From my research, we can say with confidence that the divide in attitudes we are seeking to explore does exist in the population, and so future researchers have less of a burden to prove that their results are generalisable. Therefore, such an approach is reasonable, and this paper should mark the beginning, not the end, of research into sovereignty attitudes in the UK.

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