



**Universidad**  
Zaragoza

## Trabajo Fin de Grado

Press and Politics by the Hand: the Manipulation of  
the British Press in the Scottish Road to Independence

Autor

Marta Villalba González

Director

Dra. Mónica Calvo Pascual

Facultad de Filosofía y Letras / Grado en Estudios Ingleses  
2014

# Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. Analytical Development</b>	<b>3</b>
2.1. Understanding Scotland	3
2.1.1. Scottish Political History	3
2.1.2. Scottish National Identity	6
2.2. Press and Politics	8
2.2.1. Scottish Current Political Situation	8
2.2.2. The Opinion of the Press	9
2.2.3. The Influence of the Media on Public Perception	12
2.2.4. A Comparison of Approaches	13
<b>3. Conclusion</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>4. Works Cited</b>	<b>26</b>

# 1. Introduction

On 5 May 2011, the fourth and last general elections to the Scottish Parliament held so far took place. The Scottish National Party won a parliamentary majority for the first time in the history of the Scottish Parliament. Thanks to this result, the new SNP government got sufficient support in the Parliament to hold a referendum on Scottish independence. On 18 September 2014, the day set for the referendum, the ‘No’ campaign secured 55.3% of the vote, a result that would cause Alex Salmond to resign as Scottish First Minister just a few hours later. Despite the independence defeat, the ‘Yes’ won in Dundee, West Dunbartonshire, Glasgow and North Lanarkshire.

The successful participation at the polls was due largely, if not entirely, to the role of the media, which justifies the importance of the analysis below. The media made it possible for citizens to be aware of every step taken by their government and know both the advantages and disadvantages of an independent Scotland. However, their function was not only to inform but their positioning could also serve to persuade in favour of one ideology or another. This being so, to what extent can it be said that the media became a political weapon? Great Britain is still a nation of paper readers where the newspaper has become one of the most representative and influential publication formats for creating opinion in society. For this reason, I found it particularly interesting trying to find an answer by solely focusing on a comparison of approaches by the British press. Furthermore, the manipulative ability of this medium, I believe, goes more often unnoticed because of its seniority and thus prestige, which is yet another reason why this project is of particular importance.

To accomplish a full analytical development on the degree of influence of the British press in the Scottish referendum, I will be dealing with the following subjects: a review of the Scottish political history and Scottish national identity as possible causes of the referendum; a brief introduction to political and ideological Scotland today (pre-referendum); a

classification of the major British newspapers depending on their stance; a critique of the influence of the media on public perception; a comparative analysis of seven British newspapers, three daily UK newspapers and four daily Scottish newspapers, in relation to the key issues of the referendum; and, finally, a very brief note on the international impact and meaning of the referendum.

The seven newspapers that I have chosen for my analysis are: *Daily Mail*, *Daily Mirror*, *The Guardian*, *Daily Record*, *Evening Times*, *Evening Express*, and *The Scotsman*. Selection criteria have been based on accessibility, diffusion capacity, popularity, ideology and date of publication (17/12/2013-18/09/2014). This means that I have given priority to those titles that have official online sites without compulsory subscription; that is, those which are easily accessible and affordable for all kinds of readers and their level of dissemination is consequently higher. Moreover, they are among the newspapers that show the highest circulation figures in the country so their opinion reaches a wider audience. In terms of ideology, they do not share similar political affiliations, which will allow me to show a greater variety of approaches and also check whether they agree on their ultimate purpose. Once arrived at this specific selection of newspapers, I will be only referring to online articles published in their official websites due to my location outside the UK while doing this research. More specifically, my selection of some articles over others will depend on the strength, clarity of opinion or relevance of their headlines. Headlines are the first—and sometimes only—thing that people read, therefore, their words are the most influential and thus will be the most relevant and concluding for this project.

## **2. Analytical Development**

### **2.1. Understanding Scotland**

#### **2.1.1. Scottish Political History**

The pro-independence spirit that today inhabits the homes of up to 44.7% of the Scottish population is not a new surge of nationalism but it drags centuries of history behind.<sup>1</sup> Since the proclamation of Kenneth McAlpine as the first king of Scotland in 843, and until the death of Alexander III in 1286, Scotland was immersed in a process of expansion and consolidation of its monarchy. Gradually, the power of the kingdom took shape and character until becoming what it is today; however, quarrels with the English would always be a constant. During this period, particularly notable are the battles for the conquest of territories such as Northumbria, Lothians or Starthclyde, which belonged to the British dynasty.

In the late thirteenth century, the conflict between the two kingdoms got worse when Edward I of England used the problem of succession to the throne caused by the sudden death of Alexander III, who had left no offspring, to interfere in Scottish affairs. First trying to marry his eldest son to the heiress to the throne of Edinburgh, and then strategically taking sides in favour of John Balliol in the succession struggle, his annexation purposes reached their peak when invading Scotland. As a result, the long wars of Scottish Independence started (1296-1357) and they would become especially relevant because of the victories of William Wallace and King Robert the Bruce at the Battle of Stirling Bridge (1297) and Bannockburn (1314) respectively. These two popular characters have passed into history as heroes of the nation, which says a lot about the patriotic feeling that still remains today in Scotland. Once both wars ended, Scotland was able to maintain its status as a free and independent nation.

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<sup>1</sup> All historical information listed below was taken from McCrone, 2001, and the Historical Timeline in *Education Scotland*

In spite of everything, the following years brought along crucial reforms and changes for the country's history and its relationship with such a difficult neighbour. The late fourteenth century saw the new Stuart dynasty ascend to the Scottish throne, which for the first time would succeed in uniting the crowns. More specifically, it was in 1603 when James VI of Scotland also became James I of England upon the death of Queen Elizabeth I, the last Tudor monarch. Still, Scotland remained an independent kingdom until 1707, when the Treaty of Union or Union of the Parliaments was signed. This was an agreement involving the unification of the Kingdoms of Scotland and England (which included Wales) into a single United Kingdom called Great Britain. Consequently, the Scottish Parliament was dissolved and the new Parliament of Great Britain was set in Westminster, London.

It is important to note that, at that time, Scotland was going through a severe financial crisis as a result of the so-called Darien Scheme, the unsuccessful attempt to establish a colony on the Isthmus of Panama. With this union, Scotland could use the English subsidies thus soothing its plight (article 15 assured over 398,000 pounds so that Scotland could respond to the public debt). Meanwhile, England would secure the Protestant succession to the throne thus maintaining the exclusion of Catholics. In other words, the Treaty of Union was a "marriage" of convenience yet not well embraced by the Scottish population. In fact, its passing caused numerous revolts and protests among citizens that in some places would become even violent.

No matter who might disagree, both kingdoms, formerly enemies, now started a new period together based on the resentment generated by the continuous wars. Throughout the nineteenth century, the discontent of many turned into political radicalism mixed up with nationalist feelings. Those who most strongly disagreed sought to establish a Provisional Government, restore a Scottish Parliament and, ultimately, bring back the free and independent Scotland that had been taken from them. After all, the superiority and

domination of the English Empire over the Scottish Crown was undeniable and many people were not willing to get detached from their roots and culture. These are some of the most representative events of such social unrest: the Scottish Insurrection of 1820, a failed attempt to organize an uprising against the Government in southern Scotland; The “Great Disruption” of 1843, a schism within the Church of Scotland in which 450 Ministers broke away from it to form the Free Church of Scotland; the founding of The National Association for the Vindication of Scottish Rights in 1853; the beginning of The Scottish Home Rule Association in 1886, a political organization closely tied with the Liberals and aimed at the establishment of an assembly; and, finally, the formation of The Scottish Trades Union Congress in 1897.

Also, three important political parties were founded: the Scots Labour Party (1888), the National Party of Scotland (1928) and the Scottish National Party (1934). Despite their different ideologies, they all shared an initial common desire to establish a Scottish Assembly that, as the Claim of Right of 1989 reads, allowed “the sovereign right of the Scottish people to determine the form of Government best suited to their needs” (in Mitchell, 2014, p. 236). Actually, two Referendums in 1979 and 1997 were held in this regard, but only the second one succeeded and resulted one year later in the establishment of the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive by the Scotland Act. Since its official opening by Queen Elizabeth II in 1999, the Scottish Parliament has already held four elections. The first and second elections kept a Coalition Government (Scottish Executive) formed by Labour and the Scottish Liberal Democrats, whereas the third and fourth elections brought an SNP minority administration (known as the Scottish Government) and an SNP majority Government respectively.

### **2.1.2. Scottish National Identity**

As seen so far, Scotland and England—either as independent kingdoms or as a single United Kingdom—have never left hostilities behind. For many years, Scotland enjoyed independence and forged a very specific sense of identity that still remains today in Scotland as a nation. However, the Treaty of Union placed the Kingdom in a lower position of dependency on England, probably one of the main reasons why many citizens could have opted for a ‘Yes’ vote last September. What is more, in addition to all these historical events discussed above, there are a number of less influential factors in determining the causes of the referendum that, as a whole, are one more reason to consider.

Starting with the most obvious, the Scottish weather and topography have little to do with the rest of Great Britain. Unlike the typical English landscape of green meadows and plains, the North is characterized by its fjords and mountains. Wind, rain, snow and cloudy skies are mostly concentrated in this area and temperatures are generally lower. Another point of divergence in between nations occurs in the legal system. Scotland has what is known as the Scots Law, its own legal practices and institutions that are based on the Roman law and share features of both Civil Law and Common Law. Also, there are still three banking institutions issuing their own paper money: the Bank of Scotland, the Royal Bank of Scotland, and the Clydesdale Bank. Although these banknotes are not officially recognized as legal tender, in practice, they are accepted all around the United Kingdom. In this regard, we can find another example of the domination of England, the Bank of England, which, despite its name, is the central bank for the government of the whole United Kingdom.

Continuing with the differences, the sense of Scottish-ness is reinforced with the use of a unique family of languages and dialects of their own that can be divided into two groups: Celtic Languages and Germanic Languages. Scottish Gaelic is the only Celtic language still alive and spoken in some parts of the Highlands and the Hebrides. In the case of the



Germanic languages, there are two: Scots or Lowland Scots, and Scottish English (whose intonation and pronunciation are very particular). In the religious sphere, Scotland has its own official Presbyterian Church called Church of Scotland or, using the Scottish word, The Kirk. Unlike the Church of England, this does not belong to the State. Likewise, there are various sports associations at the national level such as the Scottish Football Association (SFA) and the Scottish Rugby Union (SRU), as well as private competitions apart from those from the rest of the country. To end this list of differential elements that, as has been seen, go beyond the cultural and traditional features typical of any community (these could be national symbols like haggis, Scotch whisky, bagpipes or the kilt), perhaps the most relevant hallmark for this project can be found in the media. Scotland publishes regional newspapers, broadcasts series and owns television networks such as BBC Scotland that, at the same time, has its own radio stations.

To a greater or lesser extent, all the foregoing provides Scotland with a strong sense of identity so ingrained in society that traveling there feels like traveling to a different country. Hence, it is not surprising that most Scottish people feel more Scottish than British and even some of them are determined to break the few ties that bind them to other nations. Saying this, this project does not intend to justify or to be biased in favour or against independence; however, it does aim to present some historical and social circumstances that are real and which, ultimately, will be useful to understand the degree of manipulation of the press. In other words, by knowing what the weaknesses and resentments of Scottish people are, readers will be able to identify, for instance, why an article extolling the benefits of losing Westminster's parliamentary sovereignty prompts 'Yes', while another that stresses the economic problems that Scotland would have to face being independent prompts 'No'.

## **2.2. Press and Politics**

### **2.2.1. Scottish Current Political Situation**

Before going into an in-depth analysis of the influence of the press in the referendum results, it is necessary to make a preliminary review of the current political situation of Scotland. Press and politics are often closely related, so determining the ideology of a specific political party will also determine the ideology of the newspaper with which it is affiliated. To start, the Scottish Parliament is composed of 129 representatives elected by the people that are known as Members of the Scottish Parliament or MSP. One of its main functions is to legislate about devolved matters, including education, justice, health and the environment. By contrast, the reserved matters continue to be the responsibility of the British Parliament and the Scottish Parliament cannot decide on them. These are, for example, foreign policy, defence or economy. Their implementation and development are in charge of the Scottish Government, which should not be confused with the Scottish Parliament, as they are independent bodies that have different roles and responsibilities (the Parliament supervises the Government's work and the Government ministers are accountable to the Parliament). According to the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002, all citizens can legally access the information held by a number of Scottish public bodies, among which are both the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government, and also local councils.

On 5 May 2011, the last general elections to the Scottish Parliament took place.

Below is the number of seats won by each party:

- Scottish National Party (69)
- Scottish Labour Party (37)
- Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party (15)
- Scottish Liberal Democrats (5)
- Scottish Green Party (2)

- One independent MP

The Scottish National Party won a historic parliamentary majority, which led the new SNP government to get sufficient support in the Parliament to hold a referendum on Scottish independence. First, Nicola Sturgeon, MSP and current leader of the SNP, introduced the Scottish Independence Referendum Bill 2013 to the Parliament on 21 March 2013. The Parliament debated it on 12 September and passed it on 14 November of the same year. Finally, the Bill received Royal Assent on 17 December 2013. From then on, the Scottish Parliament as a result of the 2011 election was split into two groups: one consisting of parties supporting independence, and the other consisting of parties against independence. Within the first group were the Scottish National Party and the Scottish Green Party (together with the Scottish Socialist Party, they formed the alliance for the Yes Scotland campaign led by former BBC journalist Blair Jenkins). Within the second group, all the rest: the Scottish Labour Party, the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party, and the Scottish Liberal Democrats (alliance for the Better Together campaign led by former Labour chancellor Alistair Darling).

### **2.2.2. The Opinion of the Press**

From then on, too, the press became a weapon of mass persuasion. On 3 May 2014, Scottish newspaper *The Herald* ran the headline: “*Sunday Herald* is first paper to back Scottish independence”. The next day, the front page of the weekly title confirmed, “*Sunday Herald* says Yes”, and it was accompanied by a drawing by pro-independence Scottish artist Alasdair Gray. This was the first but also the last, since on the day of the referendum no other national or regional newspaper had taken a stand for the ‘Yes’ Campaign. On the contrary, the vast majority of titles declared in favour of a ‘No’ vote, including most of best selling UK-wide and Scottish newspapers.

The following table has been extracted from two different publications in *Press Gazette*'s website (Ponsford and Turvill, 2014; Ponsford, 2014). Ranked by circulation in Scotland, it shows the Scottish daily and Sunday newspapers that have officially positioned against independence:

TITLE	CIRCULATION
<i>Sunday Post</i>	146,940
<i>Daily Mail</i>	93,321
<i>The Mail on Sunday</i>	83,079
<i>Daily Express</i>	48,636
<i>The Sunday Times</i>	46,927
<i>Scotland on Sunday</i>	30,297
<i>Sunday Express</i>	28,002
<i>The Scotsman</i>	27,208
<i>The Times</i>	20,420
<i>The Daily Telegraph</i>	18,599
<i>Sunday Mirror</i>	18,202
<i>Daily Mirror</i>	18,079
<i>The Sunday Telegraph</i>	16,543
<i>The Guardian</i>	10,623
<i>The Independent</i>	2,990
<i>Financial Times</i>	2,312

Although they are not included, *The Herald* and *The Shetland Times* could also be added to this list. Likewise, a large number of British newspapers have publicly opted for the

union. In alphabetical order, these are: *City AM*, *Daily Mirror* (also *Sunday Mirror*), *Sunday Express*, *The Daily Telegraph* (also *The Sunday Telegraph*), *The Economist*, *The Financial Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Mail on Sunday*, *The Morning Star*, *The Spectator*, *The Times* (also *The Sunday Times*), and *Western Mail* (from Wales).

On the other hand, many Scottish newspapers chose not to show obvious bias towards either side, neither pro-union nor pro-independence. Supporting this assertion, Britain’s *HoldtheFrontPage* website wrote: “Despite Scotland’s ‘genuine disillusionment with Westminster’, many of the big titles—including the *Daily Record*, *Aberdeen Press & Journal* and *Dundee Courier*—have sat on the fence, pursuing a neutral stance in the interests of editorial impartiality” (Hudson, 2014). Taking as reference once again the data provided by *Press Gazette*, it is possible to make up a second table, this time, with the name and circulation of those newspapers showing a declared neutral preference:

TITLE	CIRCULATION
<i>The Scottish Sun</i>	246,066
<i>Sunday Mail</i>	231,821
<i>Daily Record</i>	203,941
<i>The Sun on Sunday</i>	175,525
<i>Aberdeen Press and Journal</i>	62,177
<i>Dundee Courier</i>	48,955
<i>Daily Star</i>	41,799
<i>The Herald</i>	37,728
<i>Abderdeen Evening Express</i>	34,894
<i>Glasgow Evening Times</i>	33,397
<i>Edinburgh Evening News</i>	25,908

<i>Daily Star Sunday</i>	23,161
<i>Dundee Evening Telegraph</i>	19,766
<i>i</i>	18,712
<i>The Observer</i>	14,093
<i>Sunday People</i>	9,678
<i>Paisley Daily Express</i>	6,477
<i>Independent on Sunday</i>	5,896

However, to what extent is it safe to say that these titles have stayed neutral? Respect for truth and the public’s right to information are among the basic principles of journalism, but the reality is that the mass media often reveal a particular point of view in a way that can be more or less evident and also more or less intentional. In other words, neutrality—understood as objectivity—is a very difficult position when it comes to political issues, as it is the case here. In the same way, it is not easy to hold a particular political ideology when the real news, still unfiltered, is advantageous to the opposing ideology.

### **2.2.3. The Influence of the Media on Public Perception**

The unstoppable expansion and development of the new technologies has made it possible for most citizens today to have access to all kinds of information easily. Nonetheless, this can be seen as a drawback rather than an advantage if we consider that the sources change, and with them the perspective from which reality is seen. At the end of the day we have been victims of a phenomenon of information overload resulting in a public that is increasingly less demanding of truth and more conformist. Instead of comparing different approaches or wonder what is true and what is not, we have become accustomed to letting others decide, think and believe for us. Knowing this, the media seek the economic benefit of the employer

or business group that runs them, and often use their power to ideologically influence their audience.

To the topic at hand in this project, the press was the first means of mass communication to appear thanks to the invention of printing, which means it is also one of the mass media that inspires greater respect and reliability among the population. Daily or Sunday, the British press can be divided into three different markets: quality, middle market, and mass market. The quality newspapers (including *The Guardian*) are published in a broadsheet format, while the middle market (*Daily Mail*, for instance) and mass market (like *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Record*, *Evening Times*, *Evening Express* and the broadsheet-quality newspaper *The Scotsman*) are published in a smaller tabloid format. Generally, the ‘heavies’ or ‘broadsheets’ deal with serious-minded news (politics and overseas), while the ‘populars’ are more focused on celebrities and gossip. Significantly, British newspapers are not owned by the Government or political parties but individuals or publishing companies (although they can have political bias). For this reason, editors are usually allowed more freedom of expression.

#### **2.2.4. A Comparison of Approaches**

Since The Scottish Independence Bill received Royal Assent until the day of voting came, the news of the referendum have occupied a privileged place in the British press. The number of articles published about it is almost immeasurable; however, during my research I could notice that there were a number of themes that were constantly repeated. These are the referendum battlegrounds, the real issues at the heart of the debate. They were possibly the ones that raised more insecurity among the undecided and, therefore, the ones that most attracted media and public attention—ultimately, the most useful for the purpose of changing opinions. With this in mind, below I will proceed with the comparative analysis of the seven

selected British newspapers in a clear and orderly manner and addressing the following key points:

#### NEW CURRENCY

Despite the fact that it became a member of the European Union in 1973, the UK has managed to keep the pound as the currency system within its borders. The news about the referendum caused many people to wonder what the new currency situation would be in an independent Scotland, that is, whether it would keep the pound or it would welcome the euro. In this regard, the SNP said that, although separated, they would rather keep the pound and, with it, its monetary union with the rest of the UK. Unfortunately, Scotland could only choose between these three other options: using sterling informally (“sterlingisation”), joining the euro with all that that entails in terms of competence with other European countries, or creating its own new and independent currency.

In general terms, the press has been more focused on accentuating the fears of its readers through the use of warning quotes than reporting on each of these options. For example, the *Daily Mail* used Brussels economy chief’s words to warn that, “Independent Scotland [would] NOT be able to join the EU if it [was] still using the pound” (Chorley, 2014). The use of capital letters in the negative particle makes the message seem even more a decision without any possibility of change. And, for those who hoped to keep the pound without too much trouble, this piece of news is an unpleasant collision with reality. With the same effect, some months before the *Daily Mirror* published the headline: “Independent Scotland could not keep the pound George Osborne warns” (Beattie, 2014).

The *Daily Record* went a step further emphasizing Alex Salmond’s failure, who was “accused of a ‘huge deception’ over his plans for a currency union after a Yes vote” (Dailyrecord.co.uk, 2014). The fact that this headline is referring to an unsuccessful person instead of alluding to an unsuccessful plan could serve to increase distrust of the



independence leader and his leadership, which would ultimately prompt a negative vote. *The Guardian* and the *Evening Times* also quote unionist politicians so as to indirectly defend the stability that the union brings to Scotland. Respectively, they say, “Scottish yes vote on independence could lead to currency limbo” (Wintour, 2014), and the “poorest would lose most if an independent Scotland loses the pound” (2014). Finally, the *Evening Express* was the only one to give a vote of confidence to the separation stating that, “Panama experts say ‘Scotland can have strong economy like us’” (Mckiernan, 2014).

## EU MEMBERSHIP

Late last year, the President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy declared: “a new independent state would, by the fact of its independence, become a third country with respect to the Union and the treaties would, from the day of its independence, not apply anymore on its territory” (Remarks by President of the European council Herman Van Rompuy, on Catalonia, 2013). This statement was a cold shower for SNP leader Alex Salmond, who hoped his dreamed independent Scotland could become a member of the European Union without having to go through the full accession process under Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union.<sup>2</sup> With this piece of news, the independence plans began to falter and the press soon started to share its particular point of view on the matter.

In January, the *Evening Times* already predicted, “European membership is thorny issue for Salmond” (Paterson, 2014), while only three days to go before the referendum the *Daily Mail* was this categorical: “A Scottish ‘Yes’ also means exit from EU, NATO” (Associated Press, 2014). Meanwhile, the *Daily Mirror* confirmed in February that, according to EU boss, “It would be ‘impossible’ for Scotland to join if it split from Britain” (McTague, 2014). Likewise, the *Daily Record* also alluded to the words of EU Chef in its headline, “EU

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<sup>2</sup> The full document can be read in the Consolidated version of the treaty on European Union, 2002.

chief says Alex Salmond's Plan B for the pound won't wash" (Crichton, 2014). By naming a renowned character, like the President of the European Commission, these last two articles acquire an aura of respect and reliability that, after all, is precisely what readers are looking for. Hence, there are more possibilities that the latter are influenced by what they read (in this case criticism against independence) when making a decision. In contrast, the *Evening Express* showed in July a rather more optimistic perspective with the headline: "EU membership 'assured post-Yes'" (Press Association, 2014). However, the pessimistic headlines such as those already mentioned above or, for instance, this one from *The Guardian*, "Spain says it could take independent Scotland years to win EU membership" (Kassam and Traynor, 2014), have been the most common throughout the referendum battle.

## OIL AND GAS

Today, the North Sea oil and gas reserves are the main source of income for Scotland. Its separation from the UK could threaten the sustainability of its current level of spending if we consider that today it is Great Britain's global economy which benefits from such income. Taking the latter into account, the success of the new country would be determined by the characteristics of its share of the inheritance of the North Sea oil (either a geographical share—the most likely—or one based on population size), and also by the production and price of oil. Since both oil and gas are non-renewable natural resources whose production rates tend to be very unstable, even in the best of cases, the financial fate of Scotland would be uncertain.

Once again, the press mainly covered this topic by leaning on different comments by experts and other characters of public life whose personal opinion were more likely to attract people's interest. That said, in February, David Cameron warned nationalists that, "Oil investors won't get off Scot free" (Beattie, 2014). His words appeared in an article by the

*Daily Mirror*, which later continued, “Scotland could risk losing £200billion worth of investment in oil and gas reserves if it goes it alone”. Although these words do not belong to the newspaper, the fact of publishing a quote in which the disadvantages of an independent Scotland are shown demonstrates its intention to make readers believe that Scotland is best within the UK.

The very intention of ending, as the *Daily Mail* says, “Alex Salmond’s great oil wealth fantasy” (Brummer, 2014), can be seen in this headline by the *Daily Record*: “Dwindling North Sea oil supplies would hit Scotland within 15 years, says Sir Ian Wood” (Gall, 2014). As an independent Scotland could not survive without the North Sea oil and gas reserves, saying this is like putting an expiration date to Scotland and its prosperity alone. In other words, the allusion to 15 years leads separatists to think about which one of these two options they like the most: achieving independence and living happily for only 15 years, or remaining united and living happily for ever. It is in the obviousness of the answer where the implicit manipulation lies. Likewise, the *Evening Express* said that, “18% of oil firms back independence” (Press Association, 2014), thus implying that, very significantly, 82% of oil firms back the union.

Finally, from a more neutral perspective, *The Guardian* acknowledged the importance of the matter by simply stating that “North Sea oil is key to an independent Scotland” (McCrone, 2014). With a message a little more oriented toward the ‘Yes’ vote, the *Evening Times* claimed just a few days before the referendum that “Oil expert votes Yes and wants more exploration” (2014). This can be considered a pro-independence headline because the word “expert” goes together with “Yes”, which leads to the thought that, if a person who knows everything about oil has considered that the problem of oil in Scotland is not as serious as to remain in the UK, then, there is no need to stay British.

## TAXES AND BANK DEBT

Continuing the theme of inheritance, Scotland on its own could inherit good things but also bad things, like public debt. According to the data provided by the official site of the Scottish Government, “The UK national debt is expected to peak at 86 per cent of UK GDP, almost £1.6 trillion in 2016/17” (What will Scotland’s share of national debt be and how will it repay it?, 2014). Scottish independence would raise the question of how to share public debt per head, either equally between the new country and the rest of Great Britain or on the basis of income. On its part, The Scottish Government online claimed that, “Under any realistic scenario, Scotland’s projected share of the UK debt as a percentage of Scotland’s GDP will be less than the debt of the rest of the UK expressed in the same terms”. Still, with so many risks involved and the fear of not being able to cope with a possible situation of financial crisis, it is logical that Scottish people have paid special attention to those articles related to their economic destiny.

Concerning the share-out, the *Daily Record* announced: “Top economist says dumping our share of the UK debt could benefit an independent Scotland” (Clegg, 2014). The hopeful tone of the word “benefit” contrasts sharply with the idea transmitted by Alistair Darling in his following assertion collected by the *Daily Mail*: “Scottish independence would be worse than the 2008 banking crash” (Chorley, 2014). The 2008 worldwide crisis was extremely devastating; thus, saying something as hard as this is saying a lot. Moreover, mentioning the crisis to promote the ‘No’ vote could be considered even ironic if we take into account that it has possibly been one of the main instigators of independence in Scotland in recent years.

*The Guardian* seems to be positioning in favour of union as well when publishing: “Independent Scotland would face immediate £23bn debt – thinktank” (Carrell, 2014). In general, speaking of numbers has an alarming and very negative effect among citizens as they

nourish the fear that Scotland would not be prosperous enough to cover expenses of these dimensions on its own. To compensate, the *Evening Times* also spoke of numbers but, this time, showing them as profit if Scotland voted ‘No’: “Scots ‘£1,400 better off’ after no vote, says Danny Alexander” (2014). On the other hand, the *Evening Express* published in August: “Debt threat backed by economist” (Press Association, 2014). Again, the reference to an expert, in this case, an economist, adds credibility and therefore convinces people more easily that, indeed, public debt would be a serious problem for Scotland. Finally, the *Daily Mirror* favoured the ‘No’ vote as well: “Gordon Brown promises more devolution if country votes no” (Beattie and Hiscott, 2014).

#### WELFARE AND QUALITY OF LIFE

There are a number of issues that can be collected on just one key point relative to the quality of life of the population in the event of independence. What would happen to prices, employment, the welfare system, security, equality, tourism or mortgages? The following headlines aimed to give an answer to all these questions:

*Daily Mail:*

**“Cost of food will RISE in Scotland if country goes independent, warn supermarkets”**

**(Chorley, 2013)**

**“Defence giant BAE Systems warns Scottish independence would undermine ‘certainty and stability’ for thousands of jobs” (Chorley, 2014)**

*Daily Mirror:*

**“Drink up: Whisky prices could go up by £1 a bottle if Scotland goes independent”**

**(Horton, 2014)**

**“Gordon Brown on Scottish referendum: Independence would put pensions, healthcare**

**and welfare at risk” (Beattie, 2014)**

*Daily Record:*

**“Scottish Parliament may not be big enough to oversee security and intelligence services, say experts” (Dailyrecord.co.uk, 2014)**

**“What women want and it's definitely not Salmond: Daily Record poll reveals HALF of female voters intend to vote No to Scotland going it alone” (Clegg, 2014)**

*Evening Times:*

**“We must vote Yes to protect pensions” (Paterson, 2014)**

**“Equality campaign backs yes vote” (2014)**

*Evening Express:*

**“Independence ‘won’t hit tourism” (Press Association, 2014)**

**“Warning over rise in mortgage costs” (Press Association, 2014)**

In a representative way, among all this collection of selected articles there are only three messages that are promoting independence—the two headlines from the *Evening Times* and the first one from the *Evening Express*—, all the rest are giving reasons why gaining independence would lead Scotland to losing more.

These five key points just analysed were the most important but not the only ones. There are also a number of worth mentioning headlines that have somehow managed to get my attention and most probably that of many other readers. For example, *The Guardian* asked in January, “Who better to convince Scots to reject independence than English celebrities?” (Small, 2014). Most newspapers have published at some point lists of names of

celebrities from one position or another and whose personal opinion has become of public interest. Pro-independence Sir Sean Connery and unionist J.K. Rowling are among the most frequently mentioned. Obviously, the relative influence of their political orientation will depend on each person's particular appreciation towards a specific celebrity or the extent to which their decision may have repercussions in society (the opinion of the Queen of England does not have the same repercussions as that of an actor, for instance).

Other interesting headlines by *The Guardian* say: "We Scots have a clear moral duty this year – to stay British" (Deerin, 2014) and, "Alex Salmond and co are acting like spoilt children" (Kettle, 2014). The first tries to convince readers through emotional blackmail ("moral duty") that striving so that Scotland remains a nation of the UK is worth it. The second seems to be looking for the same result by accusing the independence leaders of being immature, which could lead to the idea that they are not sufficiently prepared to govern a country. The BBC, the most prestigious UK-based international public service broadcaster, has also been used to raise insecurities, as the *Daily Mail* did with the headline: "If Scots vote to leave the UK they will be voting to lose the BBC too, minister warns" (Chorley, 2014). The *Daily Mirror*, on its part, shows the bitter with the sweet by claiming that "The UK will be HOTTER, more sunny and get less rain if Scotland leaves" (Horton, 2014), while at the same time it shows "28 photos that show why the UK will be less beautiful if Scots vote Yes" (Oakley, 2014). Finally, I found Alistair Darling's words very interesting when he referred to the referendum as a "test of common sense", a statement that became headline in both the *Evening Express* and the *Daily Mail* (Press Association, 2014; Press Association, 2014). Intelligence is often related to common sense, thus these words question the intelligence of all those who want to leave the UK and, ultimately, try to make them reflect on the extent to which voting for independence would be such a stupid choice.

At this point in the analysis, there is just one last newspaper to explore: *The Scotsman*. The reason why I have not dealt with it so far is because, unlike the other titles, it made public on its online site an article under the title “Scotland’s decision: The Scotsman’s verdict” (2014). Here, it shared its own particular analysis of the referendum battlegrounds discussed above to conclude pleading openly against independence. To reach this conclusion that “we are better together”, it first dealt with different issues always in a reasoned manner and, in my view, quite objectively.

The article starts saying that, although “Scotland could be a successful independent country”, it is not clear whether the separatist option is “where the greatest success [would] lie”. It defines Scotland as “a nation of innovative and hard-working people, with a culture of altruism and egalitarianism” (“prosperous”, “peaceful” and “successful” are added later), but it ends up declaring, “Scotland’s best interests lie not in creating division but in continuing in the Union and using its strengths to help us continue in our success.” Regarding the economy, it writes: “an independent Scotland would, of course, be able to stand on its own two feet but under current proposals some of the levers needed would lie elsewhere and stability is under threat and that could come at a cost.” In other words, it promotes the idea that independence would do more harm than good, something that can also be seen in its words relating to the issue of defence (“we would be more secure as a member of a larger alliance, especially when it comes to intelligence sharing”) and EU membership (“Europe is generally seen as a good thing for Scotland, but the future for an independent Scotland in Europe is unclear”).

In general, the most important idea in this article is that *The Scotsman* tries to show, in a reasoned way, how the future of Scotland on its own would be so uncertain that Scottish people would rather do not take the risk of losing the “security and stability” of the union. To reinforce this idea, it mentions the prosperity of its history and heritage, displaying all the achievements that have made them feel “confident in [their] national identity with [their] own



distinctive society.” Also, it is interesting to see how it questions the logic of those who have not reached the same conclusion by saying its comes from “seeing where the best interests of the Scottish people lie, understanding the benefits of working with the people in these islands...and seeing the opportunity to shape the strongest, most secure, fair and just society that we all want.”

All the headlines included in this project have been only a minimal representation of the voice of the press in the Scottish referendum. Once quoted and commented individually, it is also possible to draw a number of general observations. First, I have noticed that the number of articles on Scottish independence increased as the day of the referendum approached. Since the press is a game of supply and demand, this demonstrates the high level of interest of the British population in the political and social issues of their country. Secondly, most newspapers have taken advantage of the uncertainty that has surrounded the future of Scotland during all this referendum battle. Even those newspapers with a declared neutral position seem to have been publishing a higher number of news showing a negative vision of independence (on the day of the referendum, the front page of the *Daily Mirror* said: “Don’t leave us this way” [Scottish independence: referendum day newspaper front pages - in pictures, 2014]). Every article has appeared as an attempt to make determined readers doubt and undecided readers decide, usually until they reach a different conclusion to that of Alex Salmond. Third and last, most of the headlines analysed show a number of strategies to attract more attention, persuade or manipulate in one way or another. These strategies are:

- ✚ Repeated use of negation, in almost all cases, to show the disadvantages of independence. Also, the use of the verb “to warn” and words with negative connotations such as “deception”, “impossible” or “fantasy” that accentuate the fears and insecurities of citizens.

- ✚ The use of capital letters to draw attention to a particular word or emphasise an idea (“NOT”, “RISE”, “HALF”, “HOTTER”). Except the last one, the other three appear in headlines warning negatively on independence.
- ✚ Numbers (“15 years”, “18%”, “£23bn debt”, “£1400 ‘better off’”, “up by £1”, “28 photos”). Especially in the economic context, to include numbers serves to get the attention of readers and provides them with some accurate data that can make them change their opinion.
- ✚ Prevalence of the use of quotations to refer to the words said by others. In this manner, the newspaper shows the news from a less committed position that makes it gain objectivity and thus reliability (the more reliable, the more influential).
- ✚ The use and abuse of names of public or influential people (politicians, celebrities and experts). There are more chances that readers change their mind if their favourite actor, political party or an expert does not share their opinion, than if it is a newspaper that tells them to do so.
- ✚ On several occasions, the ‘Yes’ vote is shown as an illogical, immoral or unconscious act. For instance, this generalization by the *Daily Record*: “What women want and it is definitely not Salmond”, implies that supporting Alex Salmond would be unwise if we consider that women are often associated with wit and intelligence.

Whatever the case may be, thanks to the press and other media, the news of the referendum has reached other parts of the world that, like Scotland, have been asking for independence since ancient times. Catalonia, for example, a politically divided but socially prosperous community, has noted with envy that it is possible that a nation vote to decide on its future, an event that has tremendously revived its aspirations for freedom. In the end, the Scottish referendum was not only a debate on independence but also a reflection of the discontent with society of almost half of the population.

### 3. Conclusion

Throughout these pages we have made a tour of Scotland's past to discover that, before becoming an extraordinarily distinctive nation, Scotland was able to survive as an independent kingdom for hundreds of years. And I would like to emphasise 'able to', since the ability of Scotland to thrive in the event of independence has been the most challenged question by the British press prior to the referendum. My initial general classification of British newspapers depending on their stance showed how the vast majority of titles were weighted towards the union and only one, the *Sunday Herald*, openly supported independence. As for the seven British newspapers analysed, I can conclude that this pro-union trend was truly reflected in their articles. Among a total of 37 headlines, 30 concerning the referendum battlegrounds and 7 about other issues of lesser importance, only 8 somehow promoted a 'Yes' vote. All the rest, including the full article from *The Scotsman*, showed threats, warnings or, in general, a worse future for Scotland if it decided to separate from the United Kingdom.

While these results are a fact, it was also the ambiguity of the press. Except from *The Scotsman* and the *Daily Mirror* at the last moment, all the papers presented have written their headlines from a detached position, that is, repeating or paraphrasing the words of somebody else or reporting on relevant facts without showing a clear opinion. For this reason, I find it difficult to determine which has been their degree of manipulation, that is, whether they were indirectly influencing or rather staying neutral but, coincidentally, there were more news favouring the union. In any case, in general it has prevailed a sceptical tone towards the future of Scotland (especially with regard to its economy) that, intentionally or not, may have been responsible for the 55.3% of 'No' votes.

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