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## **To Be Or Not To Be A State?**

### **Role Contestation In The Debate Over Scottish Independence**

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#### **Introduction**

The Scottish independence referendum was riveting, and rightly so. One of Europe's strongest economic and military powers faced the prospect of losing sovereign control over nearly a third of its territory, a significant part of its economic productivity, and the only place to park its sea-based nuclear deterrent. The prospect of sharing the pound with another sovereign country loomed large, resulting in significant investment anxiety and depreciation of the currency's value (Allen 2014). Several European states faced the potential for revitalized independence movements within their borders through the Scottish example, and the EU itself faced the uncertainty of exactly how it would handle the break-up of one of its most important member states and whether a newly independent Scotland would have to apply for membership. The United States watched with genuine consternation over the possible diminution of one of its strongest and most trusted allies, and NATO contemplated the strategic implications of a nuclear-free Scotland and exactly how it would, or would not, be integrated into the organization. For roughly a two-year window, the democratic decision of whether Scotland would become an independent country and what role it might then play held the key to a host of international economic, diplomatic, and security concerns.

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The Scottish case is also of real historical significance for the United Kingdom (UK). Scotland has been a part of Great Britain (and subsequently the UK) since the political union with England in 1707. Though the movement for Scottish independence and self-rule has a long history dating to the border wars of the 10th century, the most immediate pretext to the 2014 referendum is 1997, when a referendum indicated that Scotland was in favor of increased governing powers. The UK government passed the Scottish Act of 1998, increasing Scotland's autonomy and devolving a set of competencies to Scotland. The 1998 Act established the Scottish Parliament, created the Scottish Executive (*Scotland Act of 1998*, Section 44), renamed 'the Scottish Government' by the Scottish National Party upon taking power in 2007 (Government of the United Kingdom 2013), and gave the Scottish Parliament the power to levy taxes at varied rates (*Scotland Act of 1998*, Chapter IV). The Act also separated the "reserved powers" that were to remain with the UK government from the "devolved powers" that were granted to Scotland (*Scotland Act of 1998*, Schedules 5 and 6).<sup>1</sup>

Several political parties were represented in the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish National Party (SNP) first controlled the Scottish executive, in a minority government, from 2007. In 2011, the SNP won a majority of parliamentary support and under the leadership of Scotland's First Minister Alex Salmond, proceeded to pursue its stated goal of Scottish independence. In October 2012, UK Prime Minister David Cameron and Salmond signed 'the Edinburgh Agreement' which granted Scotland the right to hold the independence vote (Black 2012). From 2012 until the referendum in the autumn of 2014, the 'Yes' side (for independence) and 'No' side (for staying in the union) launched concerted efforts to sway the voters of Scotland.<sup>2</sup> The 2014 September referendum put to the voters one simple question: Should Scotland be an independent country? According to the Yes side, although sovereign, Scotland would remain within the Commonwealth and would keep Queen Elizabeth II as the Head of State. (The Scottish Government 2013)

Despite the fact that that Scotland ultimately rejected independence, the case has continued political importance for actors within and outside the UK. After the referendum, separatist movements around the world declared their intention to follow Scotland's example and to vote on their independence in a democratic fashion.<sup>3</sup> The lessons of role contestation and selection from the Scottish case may prove instructive for other cases. Moreover, given the 2015 UK national election outcome and the victorious Conservative party's plan to hold an in-out referendum on the EU, the failed bid for Scottish independence may be revitalized should the UK electorate choose an EU exit – something which is unpopular within Scotland (Brooks 2015). Combined with a landslide victory for the SNP in Scotland (taking 56 of the 59 UK parliamentary seats available), momentum for a revised independence movement is not out of the question. Subsequent efforts by actors within Scotland to revitalize the failed independence bid will undoubtedly be informed by the nature of the 2014 referendum and the role contestations it produced. Role debates in the referendum may also shape Scotland as long as it remains part of the UK. Although not sovereign, Scotland continues to be an international actor, practicing various forms of para- (or proto-) diplomacy.<sup>4</sup> Current and future relations between Scotland and the EU, the United States, and the Nordic countries, for example, may be influenced by the 'thought experiment' of the independence referendum. The Scottish Government's aspirations for its relations with the world after the referendum certainly reflected the themes of independence that the SNP advanced in the independence campaign (see, for example, The Scottish Government 2015).

From the point of view of role theory, the Scottish case is a distinctly interesting instance of role contestation, since most research on national roles assumes the state is already sovereign. This gives rise to two features of relevance to role theory and the processes of role contestation – sovereign role versus substantive role, and the internal-external ambiguities. First, taking place within the context of an independence referendum in

a pre-sovereign entity, role contestation as traditionally understood takes on the added dimension of contestations over sovereignty itself. Because it remained pre-sovereign during the referendum process, role contestation in the Scottish case involved both conflict over whether Scotland should be independent at all (the sovereignty role question), and if Scotland were to be independent, what type of role it should—or would be able to—adopt (the foreign policy role question). The second issue (foreign policy role) presupposes the first (the sovereignty role). Moreover, the foreign policy role question was used strategically to support both sides on the sovereignty role question. In a sense, this combines the question of which role to take with the question of whether or not to audition at all.

Second, the Scottish referendum on independence also challenges role theory's traditional categorizations of ego versus alter and domestic versus foreign. In prior research, ego is considered the state and alter are other states or other actors external to the state; internal contestation occurs within ego and external socialization (and the role location process) occurs between ego and others. In the Scottish case, the terms are less clear-cut. Were, for example, UK Prime Minister Cameron and Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne (two prominent leaders in the debate over independence) part of ego or part of alter? 'Ego' could be defined as the whole of the UK and domestic politics as politics within the UK state. Defining the referendum debate this way, the contestation would be whether the UK continues as a sovereign state and if not, what its constituent parts' foreign policies would look like. For the purposes of this chapter, we define ego and the domestic arena as Scotland and the Scottish representatives, leaders and interest groups within Scotland, associated with the Scotland-based 'Yes' and 'No' campaigns. The citizens of Scotland are, of course, also part of the ego for our purposes; UK citizens residing outside of Scotland had no vote in the referendum. Non-Scottish based UK politicians and interest groups, along with non-UK based actors such as members of the European Union, NATO and the United States,

are categorized as ‘others’ and foreign actors for this chapter. We return in the conclusion to the implications of the ambiguity of ego versus other and domestic versus foreign in the Scottish case. Our focus here is on the internal role contestation, but by necessity we must also consider statements by actors outside of Scotland but within the rest of the UK.

### **Contestation over Sovereignty and an Independent Scottish Foreign Policy**

Domestic role contestation within Scotland was an important part of the independence referendum. The ‘Yes’, pro-independence, campaign was primarily led by Alexander Salmond, the First Minister (Chief Executive) of Scotland since 2007 and leader of the SNP) which controlled a majority of seats in the Scottish Parliament. Another leading figure on the ‘Yes’ campaign was the Scottish Deputy First Minister (subsequently First Minister), Nicola Sturgeon, key spokesperson for the SNP on independence during the referendum campaign and responsible for preparing the Scottish government for possibility of independence. On the ‘No’ (later ‘No, thanks’) side of the debate was Better Together, a cross-party organization that included leaders from the Scottish Labour, Conservative, and Liberal Democratic parties. Better Together was led primarily by Alastair Darling, who was Chancellor of the Exchequer under Prime Ministers Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. Darling was assisted by former Prime Minister Brown in the latter stages of the campaign.

Better Together urged a ‘no’ vote on the sovereignty question. In support for this argument, they described independence as a risky venture for a small, less powerful state. Better Together argued that a devolved Scotland had ‘the best of both worlds,’ with elements of self-governance but still stronger for being a part of the UK. In contrast, the Yes campaign argued for a ‘yes’ vote on the sovereignty question, using as support a vision of a Scotland that would be a greener, more peaceful, and more egalitarian global citizen.

The context of the referendum, then, clearly demarcated the two competing sides and provided a fairly coherent political venue for observing the processes of role contestation. Typically when scholars have examined role contestation they have had to determine the different viewpoints by looking to specific important actors or by scrutinizing debates that are prompted by an event or a particular foreign policy being considered. The democratic referendum forced actors to publicly and specifically state role implications of Scottish independence, and thereby provided a bounded, if complex, focal point for examining the nature and extent of role contestations. In November 2013, the SNP, the majority party in the Scottish Parliament and the primary actor in favor of independence, released a 670 page white paper entitled *Scotland's Future*, with a chapter devoted to foreign and security policy and references to sovereignty and an independent Scottish place in the world throughout the document” (The Scottish Government 2013). We use this as a key source for our empirical enquiry, since it represents the SNP’s articulation of Scottish independence and was a target at which opposing parties and actors took aim. We also use other ‘campaign’ materials, public statements, and the two televised debates<sup>5</sup> for evidence of national role conceptions and role contestation.

### **Vertical Role Contestation**

The primary locus of role contestation in the independence referendum was vertical, between the elites who favored or opposed independence and the voters in the referendum. Each side attempted to persuade the public to vote to support independence or stay within the UK. We consider this vertical contestation because some of the public contested the leaders of the Yes side’s proposed role of sovereignty, while others support it. The public’s influence in the sovereignty role selection was critical as the democratic referendum gave the majority

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of the voting public the authority to establish a sovereign role for Scotland. Both parties made their case directly to the voting public, most prominently in two televised debates between Darling and Salmond, but also via a myriad of public events throughout the campaign, and mass publication and distribution of campaign materials

### *Yes on Scotland*

The Yes campaign, led by Salmond and the SNP, argued affirmatively on the sovereignty question. Indeed, the campaign was largely based on the value of sovereignty itself: if independent, Scots would be able to make their own choices, in both domestic and foreign policies. As Salmond said in the second debate, “This referendum is about the future of Scotland, and the future of Scotland should be in the hands of the people. We believe we can govern ourselves better than anyone else can ... We only have to believe in ourselves. This is our time, our moment. Let’s seize it with both hands.” (*C-SPAN* 2014: 1:25:03). The Yes campaign pointed out that some popular domestic policies would not change. Because Scotland already had devolved powers, it already controlled many policy areas, including health care, policing, and education. The changes that the ‘Yes’ campaign claimed could occur with independence were an effort to tap into popular support for a ‘fairer’, more ‘socially just’, and ‘greener’ country. (Baxter; n.d.; Mccarthy 2014) Pro-independence advocates pointed to Scandinavian welfare states as role models for Scotland and argued, with some evidence, that Scottish voters tended to embrace more wealth redistribution and post-materialist values and policies than English voters (Brooks 2015; Brooks and Carrell 2014; Curtice and Ormstom 2011; Raines 2014).<sup>6</sup>

The UK’s plurality-based electoral system is the basis for these arguments. Many Scots do not feel represented by the UK government in Westminster: there is very minimal support for the Conservative party in Scotland, yet Scotland had been governed by a

Conservative-led UK government since 2010, and many other times historically. Although devolved Scotland has control over most internal policies, the Yes side argued that an independent Scotland would have more opportunities to shape a more social democratic, less market-oriented political, economic, and social system.

A central plank of the ‘Yes’ campaign was that Scotland would be better off economically if it were independent (Macnab 2014). In the second debate, for example, Salmond made this argument, pointing to all the ways Scotland was being held back by the UK government. Since devolution began in 1998, he said, “life has been better. We introduced free care for the elderly. Removed tuition fees for the next generation of students” (C-SPAN 2014: 2:20). But, he continued, more devolution alone, without an independent sovereign role, was not the solution because too many problems remained as a result of the union. “But it is much, far too much, that is still controlled at Westminster.” (C-SPAN 2014: 2.20) He concluded his opening statement by making a direct appeal to the voters: “Now we have the opportunity to change all that.”

The currency to be used in an independent Scotland was one of the central questions of the referendum. If independent, would Scotland create its own currency, continue to use the pound, or seek to be admitted to the Eurozone? Salmond argued that Scotland would continue with the pound, because this made the most economic sense—for both Scotland and the rest of the UK. He also argued that the Bank of England would be unable to prevent Scotland from using the pound because it is an internationally traded currency. The Yes side’s position on the currency issue was aimed at capturing support, as a ‘clear majority’ (close to 60% of survey respondents) favored an independent Scotland keeping the pound (Bell, Delaney, and McGoldrick 2014: 4, 11). In the second debate, Salmond pushed further, arguing that a ‘yes’ vote on the referendum would give him the backing of the Scottish people, and he would take this ‘mandate’ to the Bank of England in negotiations.



The SNP and the Yes side also addressed the more specific foreign policy role question. Although foreign policy and security matters were not at the forefront of public concerns in the referendum (Black 2014; Anderson, 2014), the SNP articulated foreign policy-based arguments in their effort to persuade votes to support a sovereign role. The SNP's vision of an independent foreign policy was both similar to and different from current UK foreign policy. Like the UK, an independent Scotland would have been a liberal trading state, committed to multilateralism through membership in international organizations. Scotland would also seek to retain membership in the EU; Scottish voters generally support EU membership and regional integration efforts more than English voters do (Brooks 2015; Raines 2014). The SNP also eventually accepted NATO membership (in 2012) as part of its proposed foreign policy, although this was horizontally contested (discussed below). The party's change in position was likely a response to the public's view. According to one poll, in mid-2012, 75% of survey responses supported Scottish membership in NATO (STV 2012).<sup>7</sup> This is a clear example of vertical contestation with the public contesting long-standing preferences of the SNP and the SNP responding by changing its platform.

There were two primary differences between the SNP's vision of an independent foreign policy and its characterization of UK foreign policy. The first concerned nuclear military capabilities. The SNP promoted a non-nuclear status for Scotland, a position that is generally very popular among the Scottish public (*Herald Scotland* 2015). They pledged to negotiate the removal of the UK's Trident nuclear submarine bases, now stationed at Faslane and Coulport in Scotland. The SNP's arguments against nuclear weapons were three-fold: that they are a useless deterrent against the kind of security threats faced by a modern Scotland, that they are an expensive waste of money that could be put toward other values, and that they are immoral weapons of war. According to the SNP's white paper, "Trident is an affront to basic decency with its indiscriminate and inhumane destructive power" (The

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Scottish Government 2013:232). Salmond further clarified this anti-nuclear, moral role for an independent Scotland, stating in the much watched second televised debate, “A policy that removes nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction because they are a phenomenal waste of money as well as being totally morally wrong” (*C-SPAN* 2014: 1:07:43). Later in the debate Salmond reiterated the point to applause. “It is ludicrous to suggest that we should harbor the largest concentration of weapons of mass destruction” (*C-SPAN* 2014: 1:13:31).

The second difference between a Scottish and UK foreign policy, as articulated by the Yes campaign, concerned Scotland’s vision of itself as a more civilian power. The Yes side asserted that if Scotland had been independent, it would not have participated in the unpopular invasion of Iraq in 2003, as did the UK (see, for example, *The Economist* 2012). Pro-independence statements endorsed a values-based foreign policy that would promote international law, international development, climate justice, and human rights. The white paper depicted an independent Scotland as a “champion for international justice and peace” and put forward the values of “international development, human rights, climate change, and climate justice” (The Scottish Government 2013:225). The SNP proposed a ‘Do No Harm’ policy, stating: “As an expression of the values driving our foreign policy, this Government will ensure that other Scottish Government policies do no harm to development countries, do not undermine international development aims and ideally contribute to international development success” (The Scottish Government 2013: 231). SNP leaders also articulated a “Nordic Model” as a possible template for Scotland’s role in the world; notions of an “Arctic state”, a “European state”, a “good friend of the United States” and a “Commonwealth state” were also advanced. Finally, Salmond presented an independent Scotland as less militarized than the UK, and that this referendum represented a chance for the Scottish people to change Scotland’s international relations. In a union with the UK, “We cannot stop illegal wars. ... We cannot stop countless billions being wasted on weapons of mass destruction” (*C-SPAN*

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2014: 3:18). But a Yes vote would grant sovereignty and would allow Scotland to shape its role in the world.

The promotion of a civilian power role was meant to tap into Scottish voters' foreign policy values. According to one survey,

“a majority of Scots polled (52%) think that British foreign policy should be based at least in part on ethical considerations, rather than simply pursuing the national interest at all times (33%). Londoners tend to agree (47% to 35%). But this is in marked contrast to the rest...[of the UK – the South, Midlands and North of England and Wales] in which national interest trumps ethics (most clearly in the North: 38% to 47%). Scots are [also] less likely than others to think the UK should seek to be a ‘Great Power’... (Raines 2014).

The same survey demonstrated that Scottish respondents were also more supportive of international development aid (Raines 2014). Yes-side political elites clearly targeted these values in the Scottish public, as least as they perceived them.

### *No, Thanks*

The Better Together campaign also participated in the vertical role contestation when presenting its arguments to the public. In this case, vertical contestation was between the public supporters of independence and the No side's preference for the status quo. Better Together urged a no vote on the sovereignty role question, and supported this argument by articulating a very different foreign policy role conception from the one set forth by the Yes campaign. Many of the ‘No’ campaign arguments were direct contradictions to claims advanced by the other side. Better Together answered the sovereignty question by arguing that Scotland already had (or could have, with increased devolution<sup>8</sup>) all the advantages of sovereignty without the risk that would, in their view, inevitably accompany independence.

Better Together countered the foreign policy question by pointing out that Scotland would lose all the benefits of a relationship with the UK and would be left to figure out the international system alone, as a small, new, unsecure state.

The main argument made by Better Together was that the status quo offered Scotland ‘the best of both worlds’: devolution that granted a degree of self-governance, along with the guarantee of security that comes from being a part of the UK. Better Together also argued that the social benefits that are promised to Scots, and that Scots already enjoyed, were guaranteed most reliably as part of the UK (Politics Home 2014). Scotland’s Labour leaders also noted that UK policies opposed by the SNP were opposed by Labour as well because they are *Conservative* party policies, and thus not inherent to the UK. Under a Labour UK government, the argument went, these policies would change and give Scotland what it wants, without secession.

Better Together made these appeals—that independence was risky, and that being a devolved part of the UK offered a predictable and secure future—directly to the voting public. Darling made the argument in the public debates that independence was, fundamentally, a risky decision. “The basic difference between Mr. Salmond and me, his priority is to create a separate state, no matter what the risk and what the cost. . . . I know that people want change, but they also want security on jobs, pensions, on their children’s future” (*C-SPAN* 2014: 4:53). He continued, arguing that a ‘no’ vote on independence would bring increased devolution, not simply the status quo, about which Scottish voters had concerns. “That is why my message [is] that ‘no thanks’ will not mean no change. That is why there will be more power on taxes, welfare” (*C-SPAN* 2014: 4:53).

Darling and Better Together pushed particularly hard on the Yes campaign’s promises of what currency an independent Scotland would use. In so doing, they contested the value of sovereignty, arguing that ‘no’ was the only appropriate answer as a result of the risk and

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uncertainty surrounding the currency question. In the second debate with Salmond, Darling said, “Let me tell you why currency matters. Currency is about jobs in huge numbers. Currency is about what we pay at the shop. It is about interest rates, mortgages, and the value of our pensions. Critically, the money we use is about being able to pay for the public service[s] upon which we all depend. That is the real threat to our National Health Service, not the ones [Salmond] is trying to scare us with” (*C-SPAN* 2014: 4:53). Darling maintained that Salmond must explain his ‘Plan B’ for when the UK refused to allow an independent Scotland to use the pound (*C-SPAN* 2014: 49:25).

Better Together also addressed an independent Scotland’s more specific foreign policy role. One argument was that because Scotland’s interests are so similar to the UK’s interests, an independent Scottish foreign policy would hardly be different. In addition, Better Together questioned the feasibility of the SNP’s plans for a foreign policy—for example, with regard to NATO and EU membership. These arguments are similar to horizontal role contestation and will be covered in greater depth below. Better Together made these foreign policy arguments directly to the voters with to influence voters contesting Better Together’s preference. Urging a no vote on the sovereignty question, Better Together argued that independence would be risky for Scotland partly because, without the protection of the UK, it would be a small, defenseless nation without a seat at the top table of the international system. Staying within the UK means, the ‘No’ side argued, that Scotland’s interests are represented wherever the UK has a voice—at the UN Security Council, for example, and other prominent international organizations. Where the Yes side argued that Scotland deserved its own seat at the table, Better Together argued that independence would not offer Scotland a chance to have its own voice because it would be too small to make a difference; independence would just leave Scotland unrepresented (Watt, Brooks, and Wintour 2014).

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Better Together also contested the Yes campaign's vision of Scottish foreign policy as a civilian power. In the second debate with Salmond, Darling argued that there was a contradiction in the Yes campaign's NATO policy. While the SNP sought to rid Scotland of Trident, it was simultaneously seeking to join NATO. To applause, he argued, "I understand, people believe we should have no part in nuclear weapons, but I cannot understand the part that seeks to join NATO, a nuclear alliance. It does not make any sense" (*C-SPAN 2014: 1:14:08*). As an example of what an independent Scotland could expect in the international system, Darling at times compared an independent Scotland to Iceland, Ireland, and Panama (*C-SPAN 2014: 8:48, 50:34*). Darling also countered the argument that Scotland could defend itself and enjoy security: "I think the greater concern is the disruption and the uncertainty that takes place. [Salmond] is talking about a Scottish defense force—frankly, they have not set out any coherent vision of what a Scottish defense force would look like" (*C-SPAN, 2014: 1:15:39*).

Thus, where the Yes campaign argued about the inherent value in voting Yes on the sovereignty question, the Better Together campaign urged a no vote on the sovereignty question, highlighting the risks associated with independence. To support their arguments, Better Together contested the role that Yes outlined, arguing instead that a small, defenseless Scotland would be adrift in the international system without the backing of and representation in the UK. Both sides aimed to generate support from the public, and change the minds of those who contested their preferences, by highlighting the values and benefits (from the Yes side) vs. the risks and uncertainty (from the No side) of a sovereign role and a substantively different foreign policy role.

## *Other Actors*

The main actors on both sides of the independence referendum—the SNP and the Yes campaign, and Better Together—all engaged in vertical contestation of Scotland’s role. But expanding the circles of actors slightly reveals a multitude of other organizations that, with varying degrees of directness, attempted to influence the outcome. The intervention into the independence debate by business firms based in Scotland is one form of vertical contestation because pronouncements by elites from businesses and unions were aimed at influencing the voting public, contesting one side or the other. Standard Life (Morris and Chu 2014), BP (Morris and Chu 2014), the Royal Bank of Scotland (Treanor, Collinson, and Jones 2014), and Lloyds banking group (Scuffham 2014) claimed they might leave an independent Scotland, for fear of credit rating drops and mixed regulatory schemes. The head of Shell Oil also warned of the risks and uncertainties of independence (Carrell 2014).

Not all organizations were opposed to independence. British Airways (Riley-Smith 2014) and RyanAir (Bennett 2014) stated that independence might be a good development for the airlines. There were trade unions on both sides of the debate, with some supporting independence (some Scottish branches of the Communications Workers Union (STV News, 2013), the Prison Officers Association (BBC News, 2014a) and the National Union of Rail, Maritime, and Transport Workers (BBC News, 2014a)) while others voted to endorse staying in the UK (Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF 2013), the broader Communication Workers Union (BBC News, 2014b) and the Scotch Whisky Association (Williamson 2014)). Thus, while vertical contestation clearly took place between the leaders of the main campaigns and the voting public, it also occurred in a broader context where business and industry leaders attempted to influence voters in Scotland.

### ***Horizontal Role Contestation***

Horizontal contestation occurred between the political parties of the UK and the leaders of the 'Yes' and 'Better Together' campaigns. The same issues that were vertically contested between the voting public and the two main campaigns were contested between the campaigns and within the broader political system. In other instances of domestic role contestation, horizontal contestation is typically most significant as there is often a particular foreign policy decision under scrutiny that requires an institutional choice to be made by the ruling elites. By contrast, in the Scottish referendum, vertical contestation was much more pronounced. Because the contestation took place in the context of a democratic referendum, disagreement among elites was much less central than were their appeals to the voting public. The referendum relocated the power of decision making into the hands of the public and thus elevated the importance of the vertical contestation process.

Elements of horizontal contestation were evident, however, in the broader political context in which the referendum debate took place. Key events were set to occur in rapid succession following the independence vote: the UK national elections to choose a parliament and Prime Minister were set for May 2015. All the major parties in Scotland also sought representation in Westminster. Further, the next general election in Scotland was to occur by 2016. The parties used the referendum to vie for position in advance of these elections.

There were two main questions that were horizontally contested during the referendum. The first was the feasibility and hence desirability of Scotland as a sovereign state, given its small size. An independent Scotland would be small, measured by all criteria (e.g. territorial size, population, size of economy). In their opposition to independence, Better Together and its associated political parties articulated a traditional, great-power-politics view of small states: they are expected to suffer as a result of their weaker capabilities and to eventually succumb to the preferences of larger states. As Lilliputians in Gulliver's world, it



is expected that these small states are largely constrained in their foreign policy choices. Scotland, according to this argument, would have much less influence and standing in the world if it tried for independence.

SNP leaders and other pro-independence elites countered that the majority of states in the world—and many in Europe—are small but do not have to fight for survival. Pointing to models like Norway and Sweden, they argue that small states can thrive and ‘punch above their weight’ by adopting ‘small but smart’ strategies, such as niche diplomacy and economic comparative advantages. Further, they argued, small states are seen to lack large threatening capabilities and so can be considered more credible—and may even be less frequently the target of political terrorism (The Scottish Government 2013).

Beyond the inter-party contestation, there was some internal party division within the SNP over what kind of foreign policy role an independent Scotland would play in the world. In October of 2012, for example, the Scottish National Party voted 426 to 332 to change its 30-year old opposition to NATO. The approved resolution allowed for an independent Scotland’s membership in the alliance, provided that Scotland would not host nuclear weapons and would only take part in UN-sanctioned NATO operations (BBC News, 2012a.). A few SNP members resigned following the vote. Although the SNP could not prevent internal party disunity, the leadership was successful in winning the vote (Carrell 2012).

### ***Outcome and Consequences of Contestation and Referendum***

The domestic role contestation in Scotland occurred in advance of the national referendum with a vote that was legal, viewed as legitimate, and would provide an end point for the referendum campaign. In the Scottish case, it is therefore possible—perhaps more than in other cases—to see consequences of role contestation. This manifests in both the outcome of the referendum (not becoming a sovereign state), as well as the consequences of

the contestation process itself about the potential role of an independent Scotland. While the answer to the sovereignty question was a firm ‘no,’ the future role of Scotland remained contested, especially as the promised further devolution became controversial in the wider UK political system. This section briefly explores the results of the referendum and how it was received domestically and internationally, and speculates about the future of role contestation within Scotland.

First, the outcome of the referendum was clear, despite uncertainty up until the end of the campaign. The No vote had led steadily throughout the campaign process, until mid-August, about one month before the final vote. At this point, polling data indicated a surge for the Yes vote, and some polls even put Yes in the lead for the first time since the Edinburgh agreement was concluded (What Scotland Thinks, 2014). On 18 September 2014, Scottish residents turned out to vote on the question, “Should Scotland be an independent country?” By the early hours of the next day, the answer emerged: a majority of 55% of the votes rejected independence (BBC News, 2014c). The turnout was 84.6%, unusually high (BBC News, 2014c), and an indication of the strength with which Scotland, broadly, was voting to remain a part of the UK and rejecting the role of a sovereign state.

It is very difficult at this point to know what factors were key in shaping the final referendum outcome, but the role contestation process seems to have played some part. Several demographic factors appear to have been relevant. Men, those in their mid-twenties and thirties, the less affluent and unemployed, and those born in Scotland were more likely to vote ‘yes’ (Curtice 2014). This last factor is related to identity, which appears to have been a significant predictor of support for, or opposition to, independence. Those indicating that they saw themselves as Scottish and not British were the most likely to vote ‘yes’, and the reverse was true for those who saw themselves as British and not Scottish. Those with a mixed self-identity fell in between, with those more Scottish than British more likely to

support ‘yes’ and those with more British than Scottish identity more likely to support ‘no’ (Curtice 2014). Scottish pride, Scottish history, and Scottish oil were important factors for ‘Yes’ supporters and not important for those leaning ‘No’ (Bell, Delaney, and McGoldrick 2014).

It can also be speculated that the uncertainty, particularly the economically uncertain role that an independent Scotland could play, was effectively raised by the ‘No’ campaign. ‘Yes’ voters were more willingness to take risks than No voters and No voters were more concerned about economic issues such as national debt, bank security, taxes, pensions, and inflation (Bell, Delaney, and McGoldrick 2014). The promise by the UK government for more devolved powers in the event of a no vote also may have convinced the remaining undecided voters in the last weeks of the campaign. In a sense, the nature of the role contestation over Scotland’s independent role shaped alter-casting efforts by the UK government, prompting it to offer the promise of additional material powers that diminished the added value of any role Scotland might have been able to choose. At this point, however, insufficient post-vote analysis has taken place to more directly connect individuals’ voting to factors related to roles and the role contestation process. It is likely, however, that theoretical perspectives on nationality, identity, and voting behavior are required to fully understand Scotland’s decision to reject the role of a sovereign state.

After the referendum, Cameron and the UK government were looking to avoid the ‘neverendum’ phenomenon that has plagued Québec, with referenda held every generation (Fraser, 2014). So on the morning after the vote, Cameron seized the opportunity to welcome the Scottish decision and to reassure voters that he would follow through on his promises of devolution. Calling the outcome “a clear result” and promising “a devolution revolution,” he said, “There can be no disputes, no reruns—we have heard the settled will of the Scottish people” (Carrell et al., 2014). A government commission was then established, but

contestation over more powers for Scotland quickly grew into contestation over more devolved powers for the other constituent parts of the UK – England, Northern Ireland, and Wales – and into a wider discussion of a UK constitutional convention for reform (Renwick 2014). Indeed, Cameron sought to depict the Scottish drive for greater self-governance as complementary to the situation in England, saying, “The question of English votes for English laws ... requires a decisive answer, so just as Scotland will vote separately on their issues of tax, spending and welfare, so too England as well as Wales and Northern Ireland should be able to vote on these issues” (Carrell et al., 2014). Many Scots were reportedly upset, because the prospect of Kingdom-wide Constitutional reform was not part of the devolution debate during the referendum (Carrell et al., 2014). Thus, while the bid for a role as an independent state failed, it succeeded in revitalizing internal contestations about the appropriate roles to be played by regional governments within the UK.

Beyond the issue of devolution, the referendum vote had internal Scottish political consequences. Hours after the vote totals were released, Salmond announced he would resign as Scotland’s First Minister in November 2014. He was replaced by Nicola Sturgeon, the first female First Minister of Scotland. Despite losing the independence vote, the SNP’s popularity actually grew. In the week following the referendum, 17,000 people joined the party and within three months, the party’s membership tripled in size (*Herald Scotland* 2014b; Lundberg 2014). The SNP’s popularity continued into the UK general election in May 2015 where the SNP enjoyed an unprecedented victory, capturing almost all of the Scottish parliamentary seats in Westminster.

Within Scotland, there was not an overwhelming feeling that the independence question had been settled for generations. An Ipsos-MORI poll indicated 66 percent of respondents were in favor of another referendum within ten years; 58 percent want to see that referendum within five years (Gardham 2014). Talk of another referendum in the future was

reinvigorated when the Conservative Party won an outright majority in Westminster in 2015 while only taking one seat from Scotland—exactly as they had done in 2010. UK-Scottish relations were further complicated by Cameron’s election promise to hold a referendum on whether the UK should stay in the EU. Sturgeon, argued that the UK should leave the EU only if a majority in each of its four constituent parts (Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales, and England) votes to do so. (Maclellan and Smout 2014). Cameron soundly rejected this proposal. Sturgeon has not divulged her plans on future referenda, but has said that there would need to be a pressing reason to hold another vote soon. The kerfuffle with Cameron over the EU—or, if the UK were to leave the EU—might catalyze a call for another vote on an independent Scottish sovereign role (Wishart 2014).

Internationally, the referendum was broadly met with a collective sigh of relief. Where some international actors were reluctant to put their thumbs too heavily on the scales in advance of the vote, this caution disappeared once the results were out. Within Europe there had been significant concern that Scottish independence would only encourage other, more intractable secession movements—in Catalonia and Flanders, among others (Walker 2014). The reaction to the outcome amongst these concerned European actors was, therefore, uniformly positive. European Commission President José Manuel Barroso, Secretary General of NATO Anders Fogh Rasmussen, and a variety of other European leaders praised the outcome of the vote (Macdonald and Taylor 2014). German Chancellor Angela Merkel remained comparatively circumspect: "I will not comment on this but just smile" (Macdonald and Taylor 2014).

But fears of the Scottish referendum sparking secessionist movements across Europe remained. Mindful of secessionist threats in Catalonia and the Basque region, Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy had a more forceful reaction, saying, “The Scottish have avoided serious economic, social, institutional, and political consequences...they have chosen the

most favourable option for everyone” (Macdonald and Taylor 2014). But the rejection of independence by the Scots did not reduce enthusiasm among other independence campaigns in Europe. Undeterred by Rajoy’s rhetoric, the leader of Catalonia promptly scheduled an independence referendum for November 2014 (Macdonald and Taylor 2014). Although a majority of those voting in this election supported Catalanian independence, the referendum was not binding as the Spanish government had not endorsed it (Kassam 2014).

### ***Conclusion***

Role contestation within the context of an independence referendum affords us a unique opportunity to understand the interplay between both horizontal and vertical processes. In one sense, the referendum pushed horizontal contestation into something akin to an electoral context. While elites certainly battled over the role Scotland could play, this process of contestation was largely focused around the pending plebiscite. In this sense the referendum itself served as a channel for both horizontal and vertical contestation, thus blurring their distinctiveness as the elite became aware of key dimensions of public sentiment and then used these to contest one another’s advocated roles. Beyond focusing the contestation process, the referendum demarcated the actors involved and delineated key areas of concern about Scotland’s potential role as a new state. In this sense, the blurring of vertical and horizontal role contestation processes was accompanied by the clarity associated with a yes/no vote and the explanations for how role contestation was resolved may lie more in research on campaigns and elections than in theories on foreign policy decision making.

The Scottish case also raises interesting theoretical questions with regard to the relationship between ‘sovereign state’ as a role, and the more specific roles that can actually be played by a sovereign state. These two aspects of roles have not been distinguished in research to date, since role theory has been exclusively applied to states that are already

sovereign. We may, however, gain insights when these two elements of roles are cleaved. Most significantly, the role of ‘sovereign state’ is profoundly connected to the nature of the role that such a sovereign state could adopt. In our case, arguments were often linked, such as claiming that Scotland should not become a sovereign state because the roles that it could have would be undesirable (weak, isolated, non-EU), or that Scotland should become a sovereign state because it would be particularly good at certain roles (moral, anti-nuclear, Nordic). In this sense, debates about becoming a sovereign state turned less on questions of freedom and the right of a free people to choose their own destiny, and more on the destiny that a free people might be able to choose.

Another key assumption of role theory that is challenged by the Scottish case involves the way in which contestation is conceptualized. Even among studies that disaggregate national roles by examining the processes of contestation within a state there has been a tendency to treat the state as a unitary actor comprised of a primary set of institutions within which horizontal contestations transpires and a primary public around which vertical contestations coalesce. The extant territorial divisions and devolved powers present in the UK meant that there was more than one set of institutional structures involved. Elite contestations happened in both the House of Commons and in the Scottish Parliament, for example, and nominally similar political parties (e.g. Labour and Scottish Labour) themselves represented arenas for role contestation. The locus of contestation, then, can itself be an important consideration when there is a significant territorial dimension at play and a singular focus on central institutions may miss important role dynamics.

The Scottish case also blurred the distinction between ego and alter, which has been central to applications of role theory. The state-based origins of role theory have taken for granted the proposition that sovereignty is a prerequisite for adopting a role within the international society of states, but our study suggests the importance of roles for aspirant

states as well. Role contestation can itself be a significant part of the state-formation process, but this requires us to distinguish between those seeking an autonomous role and those from whom such an autonomous role is being sought. While the demarcation was made easier by both the UK government's willingness to allow a referendum and the regional cogency and relative political autonomy of Scotland, determining exactly who was speaking on behalf of Scottish independence, or continued union, was not always clear. This particularly matters from a theoretical standpoint as role contestation has been seen as a matter of fractures within ego, not in itself as a practice of alter-casting between ego and alter(s). This then implicates the possible connection between role contestation processes and the role socialization process wherein international actors attempt to refine the role aspirations of a new state.

Indeed, the referendum can be seen from this broader perspective, as the domestic contestations spilled out onto the international arena, and both local and global international actors weighed into the debate to varying degrees (Walker 2014). The UK government played a key part here, arguing that Scotland would not be allowed to use the pound, and that the UK's status as an EU member would not transfer to a newly independent Scotland (The Guardian 2013; The UK Government 2014; Walker 2014). Other actors also intervened into the role contestation process. Various actors within the EU commented that EU membership for Scotland would not be automatic, while others countered that an independent Scotland's membership would not be particularly problematic (BBC News 2012; Roberts 2014; *Herald Scotland* 2014a). NATO cast doubt upon the future status of Scotland within the defense organization (Carrell 2013) and U.S. President Barak Obama tweeted on the eve of the election that he hoped the UK remained "strong, robust, and united." (Sanchez 2014). These rhetorical interventions can themselves be seen as akin to the socialization process of new states into the international system (Thies 2013), but happened here even before a state is sovereign. Although it is difficult to speculate on the exact influence that external forces had



## *Chapter 9*

on the outcome of the internal role contestation, it is clear that internal contestation and external socialization were interconnected in Scotland's deliberation over the question of to be, or not to be, a sovereign state.

### **Notes**

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<sup>1</sup> Devolved powers included education, health, internal transport, policing, and justice.

<sup>2</sup> Eligible voters included British, Commonwealth, Republic of Ireland, and EU citizens residing in Scotland. The Scottish Parliament passed a bill lowering the voting age to 16 for the referendum (<https://www.scotreferendum.com/questions/who-can-vote-in-the-referendum/>).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, McCurry 2014, 2015; BBC News 2014d.

<sup>4</sup> Para-diplomacy typically refers to international activities of sub-state or regional governments that do not have separatist intentions; proto-diplomacy is international activity of sub-state governments that are seeking secession from the central state (Lecours 2002).

<sup>5</sup> The first debate, named “Salmond & Darling: The Debate” was broadcast on STV on 5 August 2014. Their second debates was on 25 August 2014, billed as, “Scotland Decides: Salmond versus Darling,” and was broadcast on BBC One with more than 2 million viewers. In this chapter, we cite them as archived by C-SPAN, which provides a transcript and video with permanent link.

<sup>6</sup> Although surveys do suggest Scots are more leftist or social democratic than other parts of the UK, the differences are often exaggerated in political narratives (Brooks 2015; Curtice 2012; Curtice and Ormston 2011). In any event, during the referendum campaign, Yes side leaders appealed to the values they perceived the public held.

<sup>7</sup> Opinion on NATO membership became more divided during the referendum, although a majority remained in favor of membership. In 2013, for example, 41% of respondents supported membership, 36% against, and 23% responded “don’t know” (What Scotland Thinks 2013).

<sup>8</sup> As public opinion polls narrowed just before the referendum, the leaders of the three main UK political parties travelled to Edinburgh and promised additional devolved powers to Scotland if the referendum failed (Clegg 2014).