

Democratic round-up: the Scottish independence White Paper

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By Democratic Audit UK

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*Yesterday, the Scottish Government published their 670-page White Paper on Scottish Independence. Democratic Audit's **Sean Kippin** takes a look at the best comment, coverage, and reaction to the publication of the document, which has predictably inflamed tempers and attracted criticism from pro-union commentators and politicians on both sides of Hadrian's Wall.*



The Scottish First Minister, Alex Salmond (Credit: mark and delwen, CC by 2.0)

The Telegraph's Scottish Political Editor Simon Johnston succinctly [describes](#) Alex Salmond's plan, claiming that 'the SNP would be happy to keep Bank of England bail-outs, Thatcher's EU rebate and EastEnders, but not nuclear submarines and God Save the Queen'. The piece is a useful guide to the implications of a 'Yes' vote next year, and the arguments that the White Paper deploys to persuade people both of their appeal and feasibility.

The [Guardian](#) report the White Paper's contention that the Westminster Government and the Prime Minister would be in breech of the undertakings that were made to the Scottish people if an independent Scotland were denied access into a currency union. Salmond said: "The Bank of England and sterling are as much Scotland's assets as London's assets. They are certainly not George Osborne's assets. We put forward in this paper our willingness to accept liabilities. We are also entitled to the share of assets."

Writing in the [Scotsman](#), the pro-independence columnist [Michael Fry](#) argues that the Westminster Government would be unable to force Scotland to stop using the pound and sustaining a *de facto* currency union without irrevocably harming their own interests. He says:

In the end, the only way to enforce the ban on Scotland would be for the government in London to introduce comprehensive exchange controls on all overseas transactions, reducing itself to the same

level in international commerce as Poland or Turkey. Just to thwart the Scots, David Cameron and George Osborne would have achieved a degradation of sterling even worse than what Harold Wilson or Norman Lamont brought about – and, among other things, terminally ruinous to the City of London.

But Sterling is not the only contentious issue on the table, with question marks hanging over the status of the BBC, North Sea oil, the monarchy, and Scotland's status *vis* international institutions such as NATO and the European Union. Salmond offered reassurances that NATO and EU [membership](#), in particular, would be secured by an independent Scotland, and that he has a plan in mind to persuade other members of the merits of his case.

Alex Massie at the [Spectator](#) argues that the publication of the White Paper represents the next stage in a process which has seen the notion of independence move from 'unthinkable' to almost 'sensible', noting its evolution from a fanciful emotional argument to an almost dry and technocratic one. And while the publication is perhaps less than definitive on some of the slightly thornier issues that independence raises, it is wrong to dismiss it as insignificant or lightweight: "So it strikes me that asking *where's the beef?* is an inadequate response to this paper. There are good reasons to be sceptical about some of its claims but that does not dent the fact that it is, on the whole, a serious publication."

Also writing in the [Spectator](#) (curiously for a Labour politician attempting to appeal to a Scottish audience) the "Better Together" campaign's [Alastair Darling](#) has attempted to rebut the First Minister's claims, arguing that the White Paper doesn't really change anything. He states, unequivocally: "The simple fact is that the nationalists have ducked the opportunity to answer any of the big questions about our country's future. They promised us facts. What they have given us is a wish list with no prices attached."

Writing on the [New Statesman's](#) [Staggers](#) blog, George Eaton puts the case that the SNP's hopes for a yes vote in the forthcoming independence referendum rest on the political recovery of the Conservative Party south of the border. [He says](#):

With just one Conservative MP in Scotland (compared to 41 for Labour), the fear of another five years under the Tory yoke, and a government wedded to permanent austerity, could help to push many towards independence. But if Labour is still comfortably ahead in the polls in September 2014, far fewer will fear what lies ahead. For this reason, a Tory recovery is perhaps the essential precondition of a Salmond victory.

An earlier post from [Eaton](#) may also be of interest here. While most discussions about the implications of Scottish independence have focussed on Scotland itself, there are also enormous political implications for England and Wales, with the residual UK set to become a rather more Conservative country. However, having crunched the numbers, Eaton concludes that Labour would still be competitive in General Elections, though put at a serious disadvantage by the loss of some 40 safe Labour seats.

On the same site, Guy Lodge and Graeme Cooke – both of the IPPR – [describe](#) the White Paper as indulging in fantasy economics and point out the extent to which they feel Scotland is dependent on the union to be able to meet its higher welfare costs, with independence likely to see these increase yet further. They conclude by saying: "Independence [...] would permanently break the UK's social union, weakening the ability of Scotland to cope with the fiscal and demographic pressures welfare states the world over face."

[Professor Paul Cairney](#), writing on his personal blog, analyses the political vision outlined in the SNPs plans for independence. He describes it as:

...a broad statement about economic policy being conducive to business (including small business) and geared more to Scotland than the South East of England (a point used partly to justify a potentially-right-wing-looking drop in corporation tax (and air duty), 'to counter the gravitational business pull of London'), a detailed account of current policy intentions and some strong criticism of current UK Government policy.

Writing for the Scotsman, [Dr Matt Qvortrup](#) – a noted expert on referendums – argues that the White Paper, though so detailed as to be almost 'ridiculous', will not on its own win Salmond the referendum, impressive though it is. He points out:

Referendum campaigns are not won by those who try to set out rational arguments – nor are election campaigns. To win you need to have a single-minded determination, and be willing to use all available means. Just think back to the 1998 referendum on the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland in 1998. In this referendum Tony Blair and others supporting a 'yes' simplified the argument and exploited fear and uncertainty to good effect. Yes Scotland needs to do the same if they are to have any chance of winning. For politics is not a gentle debating contest, but a war of words.

A number of commentators have pointed out that the White Paper is part consultation document, part draft legislation, and part party political manifesto. However a number of the more eye-catching promises made by Salmond and his Deputy, Nicola Sturgeon, seem to have escaped the mainstream media's attention. Fortunately, the [Daily Mash](#) have noticed, and report on some unusual promises which could just swing the balance towards independence in the contest: an independent Scotland, they claim, will have a jacuzzi, a state-of-the-art multi-room audio and an 'intelligent fridge'. How could anyone possibly vote 'no' with that in mind?

Note: To read more about the future of the union between Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland, take a look at our related pieces [here](#). Please read our [comments policy](#) before posting. The shortened URL for this post is: <http://buff.ly/18nyYu6>

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