



**We're different
up here...**

**...How different
are we?**

**A comparison of Social Attitudes
in Scotland and Northern England**

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...Ah, but we're different up here.

Scots, it is frequently stated, are progressive or radical, even left wing. This, on some readings, gives independence a radical potential. Posed slightly differently, independence is deemed necessary to preserve a welfare state that is cared about here, but by implication not elsewhere. "We're different up here" is the assertion. But who are we different from? And how different are we?

Given much of current debate around independence is to a certain extent predicated round the idea that there is a gulf in attitude North and South of the border this is no small matter. Supporters of independence tend to argue differences are considerable. Their response is of course that such differences be given a political reinforcement in the form of being citizens of different states.

If the comparison is between Scotland (population 5 million) and England (53 million) it's no real surprise to find some diversity of views. A Nuffield foundation report in 2011, concluded that in terms of being 'more social democratic in outlook than England, the differences are modest at best'. In what perhaps should serve as a warning for those who would conflate constitutional and social change they also note that "Like England, Scotland has become less – not more – social democratic since the start of devolution." (study available [here](#))

But what if a less disproportionate comparison is used?

The data below suggests that when it comes to our fifteen million closest neighbours, the 3 Northern regions of England, we are no different at all. This is perhaps unsurprising. After all, our problems of unemployment, industrial decline and exploitation are much the same. Yet currently many are increasingly content to define our difficulties as being a *national* question while theirs are an *economic* question. Such an analysis ignores the realities of the political and economic power wielded by business and capital. Much of the Scottish economy is owned and controlled at a UK level. But for the North of England as much as Scotland 'the UK' in this context is really a synonym for the City of London. (See Richard Leonard in

The Red Paper on Scotland 2014 for details, a shorter version is [here](#)).

Insisting progress for people in Scotland *depends* on independence is saying that those with similar problems and outlook to our own must be written off as partners in building something better.

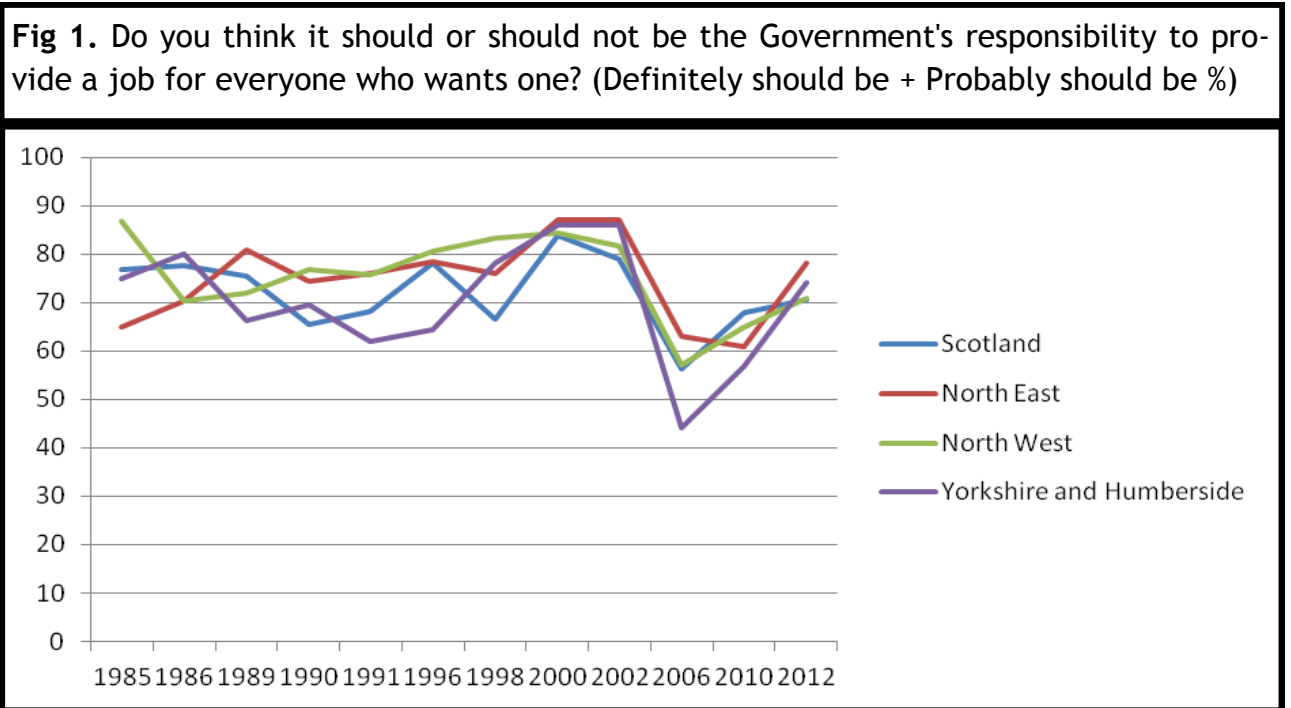
The information contained in this study is extracted from British Social Attitudes (BSA) Surveys. These have examined opinions in the UK since 1986. The BSA data can be broken down by a number of categories (age gender etc) including Geographical. Mainland UK is divided into the ten standards regions of England, Scotland and Wales. This study compares opinion in Scotland with that of our closest neighbours; the English North East, North West, Yorkshire and Humberside. Figures and tables detail responses to questions asked on a range of issues which might indicate some level of progressive opinion (eg role of government in tackling unemployment, support for taxation to fund services, attitude to benefit claimants etc). I have included responses that have relevance to measuring support for progressive attitudes and which had been asked frequently enough to provide a reasonable spread of data over time. (All data available at <http://www.britsocat.com/Home>)

It cannot be said that on any of these issues, with a single possible exception, (see Fig 9) Scotland appears significantly different or even particularly distinct from the three English regions. Rather it is the continuity with the spread of Northern English opinion which is striking. It can of course be argued that during this time frame Scotland operated largely within the same political and economic environment as the 3 regions sampled so a degree of congruity is to be expected. This would be to miss the point. It is not simply that Scottish opinion was and is the same as these places – it is that in response to the same issues Scots reacted in the same way.

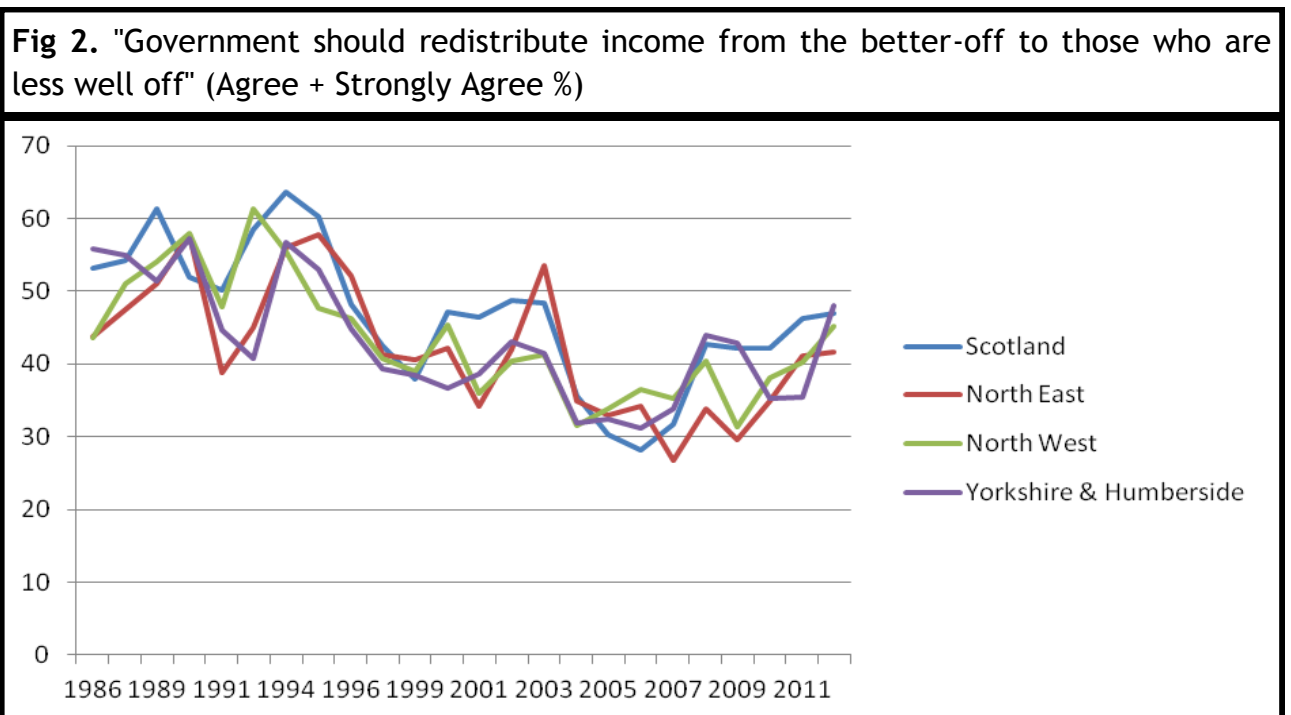
How different are we?

In answer to the question (Fig1) as to whether they think ‘it should or should not be the Government's responsibility to provide a job for everyone who wants one?’ a majority appear to have accepted this proposition to a degree right through the

Thatcher era rising to a peak in the late 90's but falling markedly everywhere in all areas after 2000. It is noticeable that support has begun to climb again when this question has been asked since the onset of the financial crisis. It can't be said that the results from Scotland are different from those of the English regions on this issue.

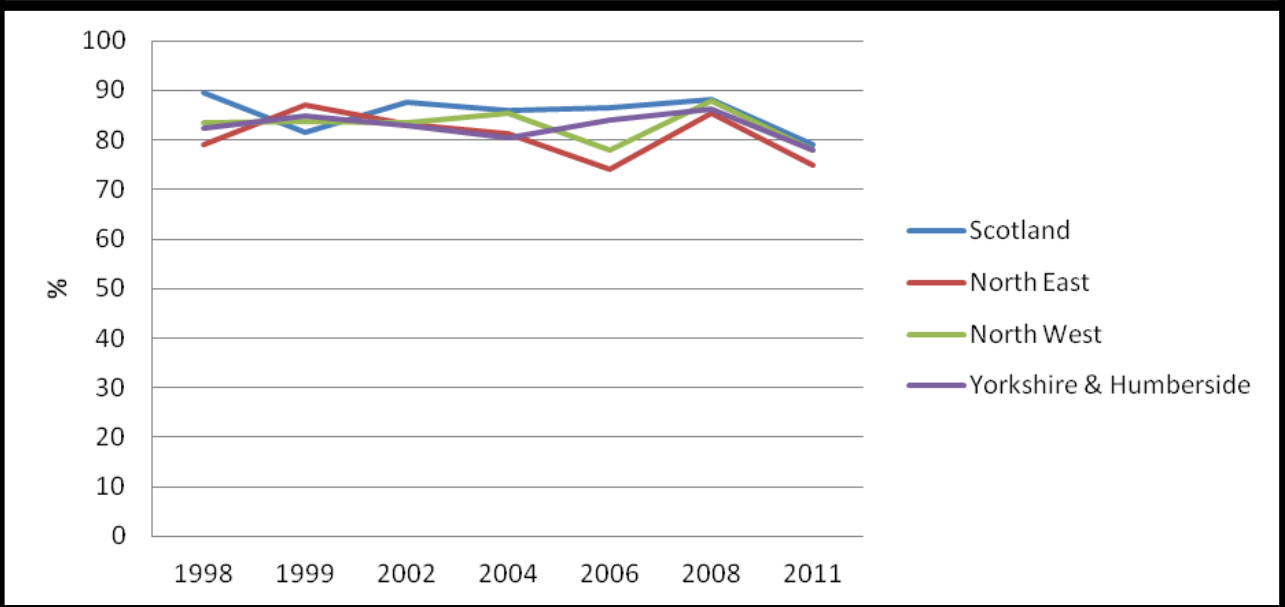


As to whether Government should redistribute income progressively (Fig 2) support fluctuates wildly over time but the overall the trend in support was downwards from the mid 90's until 2007 at which point support in all areas has begun to re-cover.



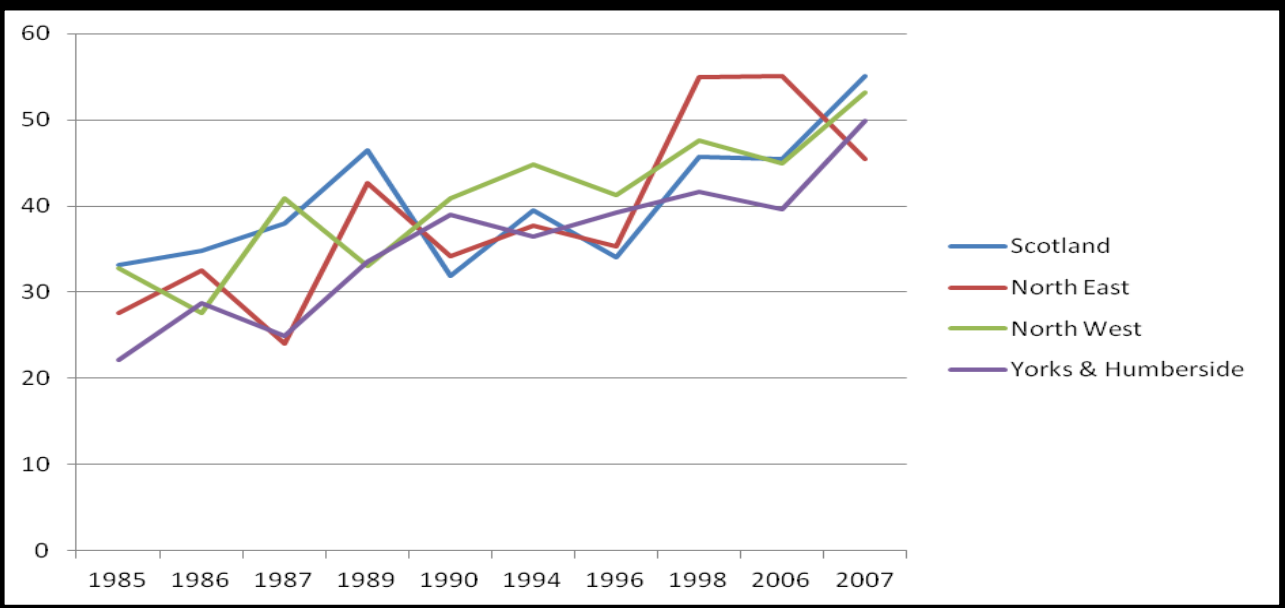
Support, or otherwise, for greater spending on benefits for carers has only been surveyed since the late 90's. Support remains high everywhere (Fig 3) but appears to have dropped slightly since 2008.

Fig 3. Would you like to see more or less government spending than now on benefits for people who care for those who are sick or disabled (More + Much More %.)



When considering the proposition that “business has too much power” (Fig 4) despite a degree of volatility a clear trend is discernible. Growing (from what some might think is a fairly low base) is a view that business does indeed have too much power.

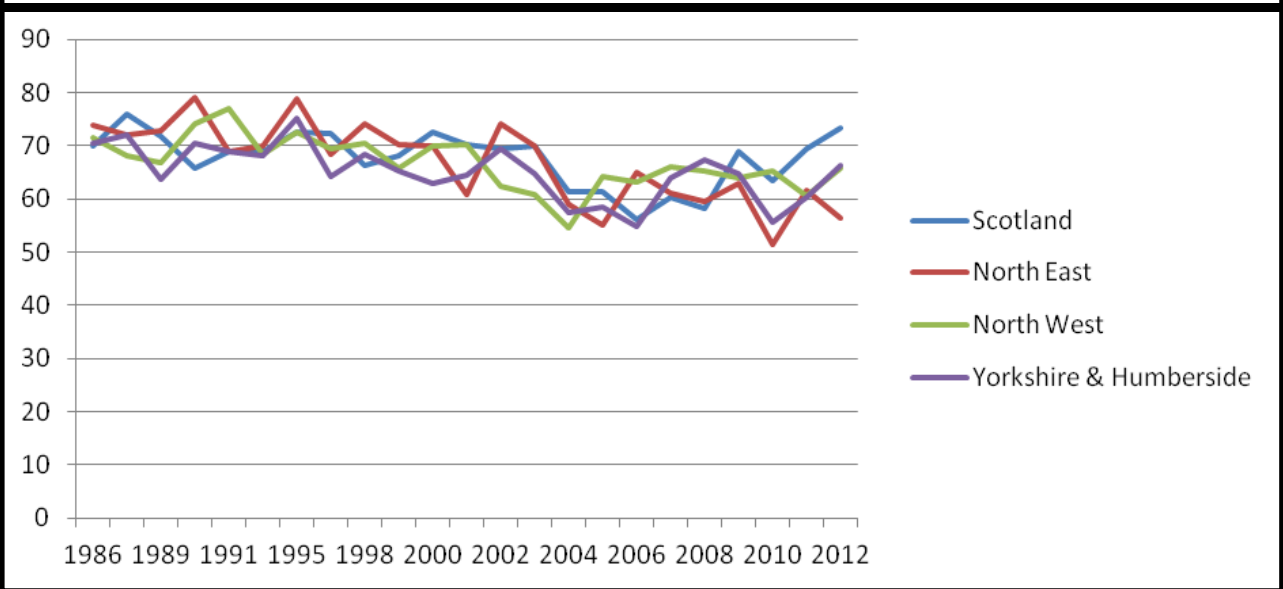
Fig 4. About business and industry...Do they have too much power or too little power? (Too Much + Far Too Much %)



The perception (awareness?) that working people fail to receive a fair share of the nation's wealth seems to some extent at least to be held by a majority (Figure 5). Perhaps paradoxically given widening inequality and the results to other questions,

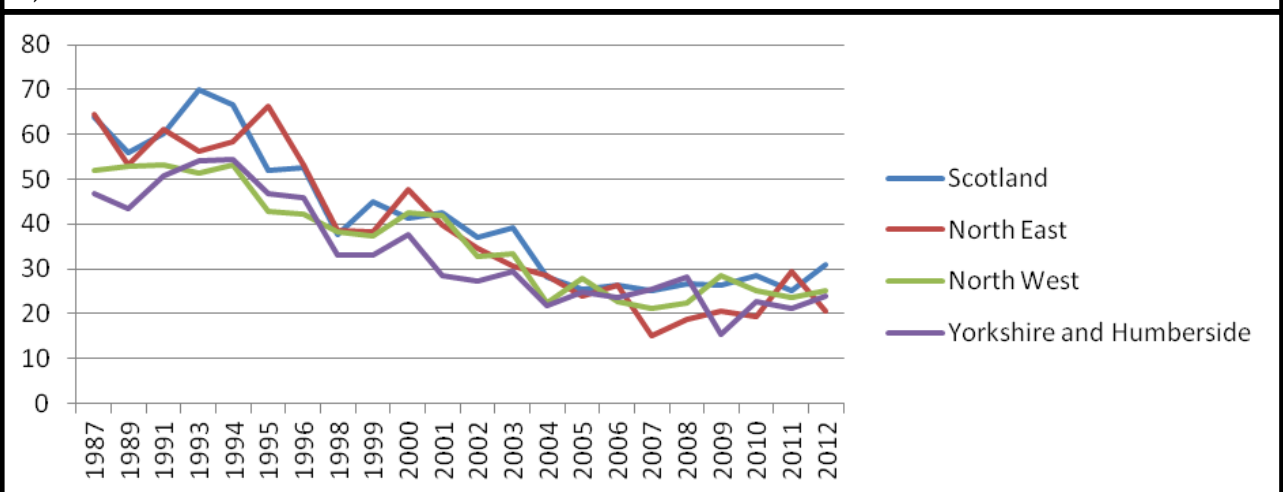
Perhaps paradoxically given widening inequality and the results to other questions, over the whole period (for all areas) is a small but definite trend downward in this view .

Fig 5. How much do you agree or disagree that ordinary working people do not get their fair share or the nation's wealth (Agree + Strongly Agree %)



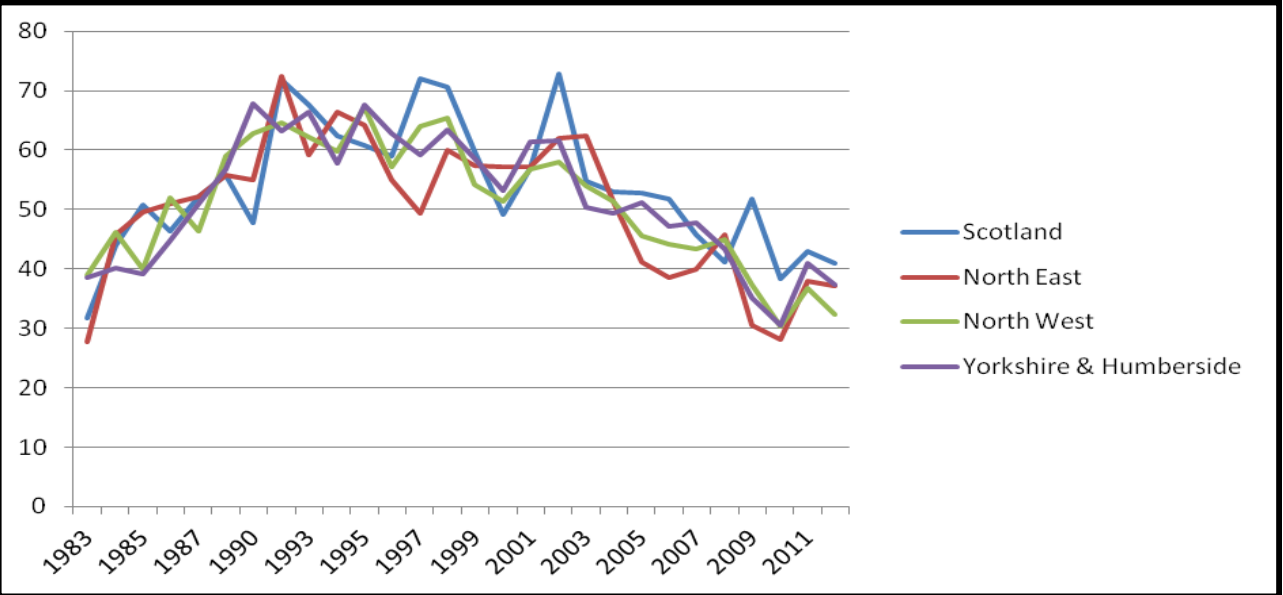
In stark contrast to media representations of opinion, and certainly of political action in response to perceived opinion, it seems (Fig.6) as though the false idea that generous benefit levels encourage people into some state of passive dependency has been falling and not rising over time.

Fig 6. How much do you agree or disagree that “if welfare benefits weren't so generous, people would learn to stand on their own two feet”. (Disagree + Disagree Strongly %)



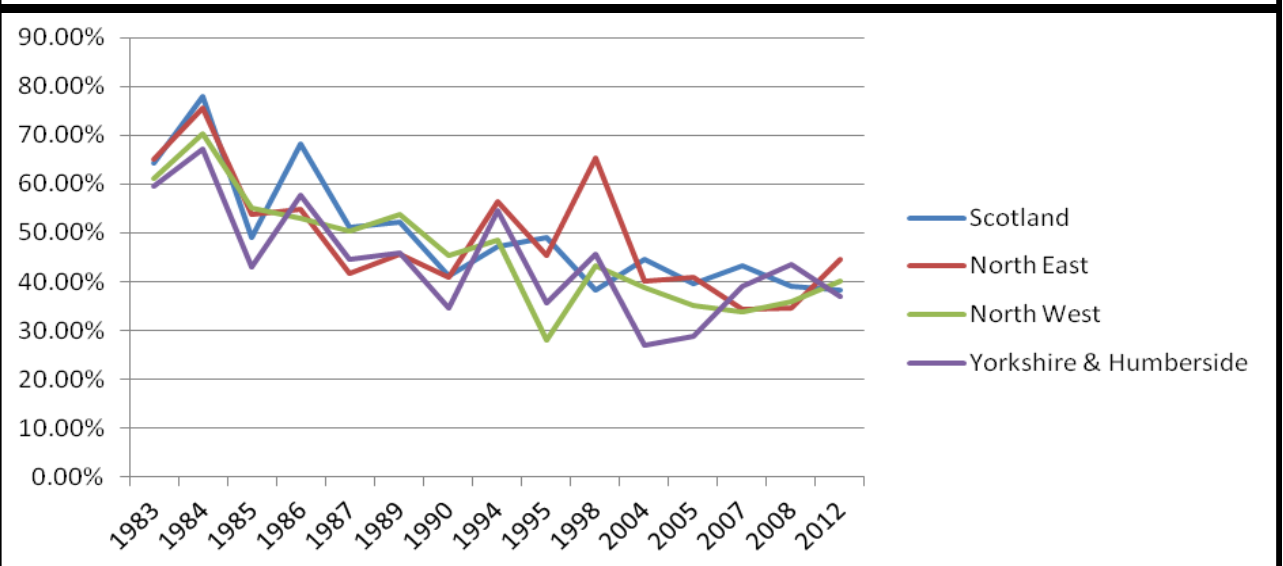
As Fig 7. shows support for increased taxation has waxed and then waned since the 1980's

Fig 7. About the government choosing between these three options. Which do you think it should choose? Reduce taxes and spend less on health, education and social benefits OR keep taxes and spending on these services at the same level as now OR increase taxes and spend more on health, education and social benefits? (Increase Spending %)

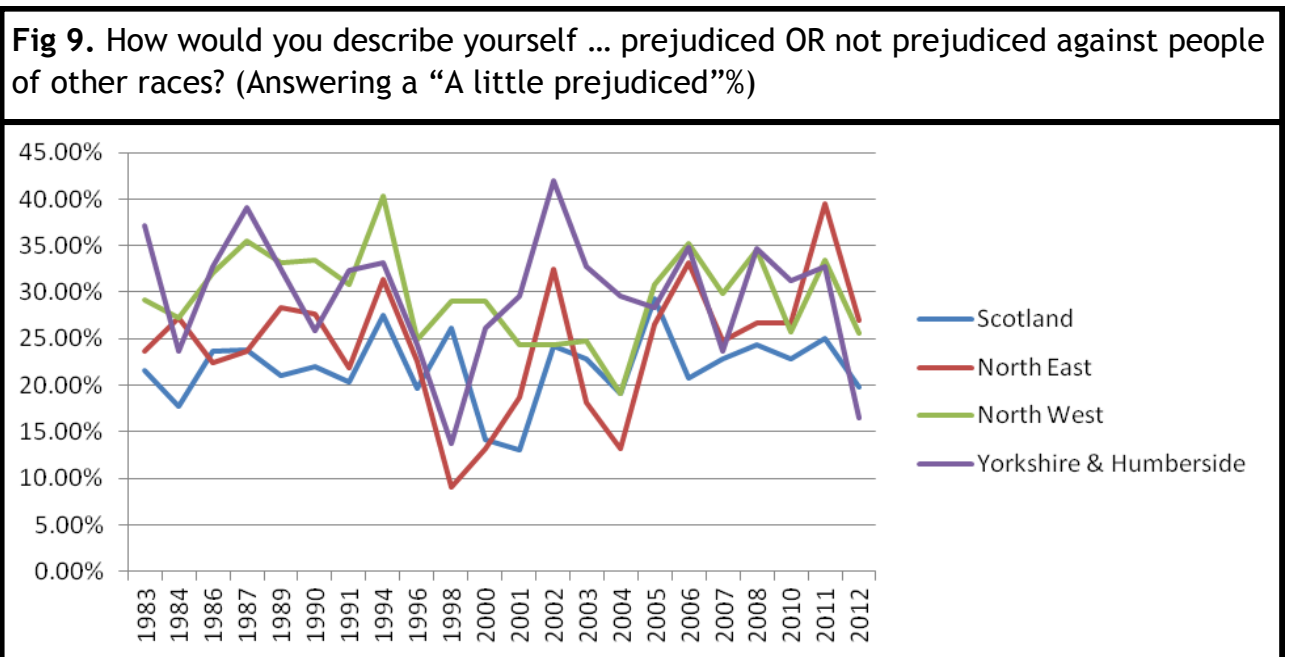


The question which most approximates to measuring support (or not) for abortion rights that has been asked with any regularity is “Do you think the law should allow an abortion when ... the woman decides on her own she does not wish to have the child?” as can be seen (Fig 8) this has moved over the years in all the areas under discussion from a minority to a majority position over the years – although support remains far from unanimous.

Figure 8 About circumstances in which a woman might consider an abortion. Do you think the law should allow an abortion when ... the woman decides on her own she does not wish to have the child?” Answering No %



Only when it comes to the question of attitudes to race do we see a small difference of sorts between Scotland and the North of England. Scots as it seems (Fig 9) a bit less likely to describe themselves as being a bit racist than are our counterparts South of the Tweed. Whether this reflects less prejudice North of the border or just a greater reluctance to be open about it is perhaps an interesting question. As indeed is just how prejudiced “A little prejudiced” is (numbers describing themselves as ‘very prejudiced’ are, thankfully, small in all areas). Both these questions lie outside the scope of this short survey. But for those who seek satisfaction in ‘the narcissism of small differences’ this is an area where it can be found.



How different do we want to be?

Overall the opinions expressed show a contradictory picture. Over the long term (1986 onwards) support for redistributive policies has declined as has sympathy for those on benefits. At the same time the view that ordinary people ‘don’t get a fair share’ has stayed almost static, but the idea that business has too much power has gained support. What the data doesn’t show is support for the contention that Scots hold noticeably more progressive views than our nearest neighbours.

So if ‘we are different up here’ does have any measure of truth – then it is fairly clearly not the fifteen million who are our actual neighbours that we differ from. Which begs the question as to why effort must be made to separate ourselves from

them, rather than making common cause with them against similar problems?

The problems facing Merseyside and Clydeside have the same causes and as we have seen, people feel similarly about them. Maintaining that the difficulties of the former are 'economic' and the latter are 'national' is to take the advocates of nationalism at face value. Accepting rather than analysing their claims, and ignoring the reality of class power.

Insistence that *only* by severing the existing relationship can advances be made in tackling problems common to both Scotland and the English North (about which we hold practically identical views), is saying quite bluntly; "Connection with you is holding us back". Those who advocate such a course seldom show any signs of having considered how Scotland's retreating from tackling issues on a UK basis, in pursuit of a possibly illusory sectional advantage, will impact on those they wish to leave behind in pursuit of a new Scotland.

Some of course are explicit in advocating a lifeboat scenario, saying in effect 'It's all terribly sad for the Scousers, but it's nothing to do with us'. This attitude suffices for nationalists, who as Eric Hobsbawm put it, don't *really* care about anyone's country but their own. But for those who would claim to espouse any sort of politics of the left - this is an inadequate response.

The question of whether or not Scotland leaving the UK would be a progressive move depends of course on a range of factors far wider than the convergence of opinion between Scotland and the North of England. But that congruence of attitude is not a trivial aspect. Their issues of lack of accountability and economic democracy, the consequences of financialisation and external ownership are our issues too. They feel the same way about these things as we do. In such circumstances, surely the burden of proof lies with those who would argue for putting a political divide between us. They should show, rather than simply assert how independence would improve, or at least do no harm, to our capacity to jointly confront our common problems.

Tables

Fig1. Do you think it should or should not be the Government's responsibility to provide a job for everyone who wants one? (Definitely should be + probably should be %)

	1985	1986	1989	1990	1991	1996	1998
Scotland	76.68	77.71	75.43	65.5	68.17	78.25	66.43
North East	64.86	70.25	80.73	74.45	75.98	78.38	75.9
North West	86.7	70.39	72.04	76.69	75.7	80.58	83.34
Yorkshire and Humberside	74.83	80.03	66.36	69.59	62.07	64.36	78.16

	2000	2002	2006	2010	2012
Scotland	83.71	79.05	56.41	67.77	70.6
North East	87	87.08	62.98	60.94	78.2
North West	84.35	81.73	57.15	64.95	70.8
Yorkshire & Humberside	86	85.99	44.11	56.91	74

Fig2. Government should redistribute income from the better-off to those who are less well off" (Agree + strongly agree %)

	1986	1987	1989	1990	1991	1993	1994
Scotland	53.22	54.25	61.38	51.9	50.15	58.41	63.72
North East	43.73	47.46	51.09	57.76	38.76	45.1	55.99
North West	43.54	51.09	54.09	57.88	47.93	61.25	55.53
Yorkshire & Humberside	55.76	55.04	51.49	57.32	44.58	40.71	56.75

	1995	1996	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Scotland	60.32	48.17	42.62	37.99	47.15	46.4	48.75
North East	57.73	52.1	41.24	40.6	42.16	34.22	42.09
North West	47.75	46.18	40.75	38.93	45.4	35.93	40.43
Yorkshire & Humberside	53.05	44.92	39.35	38.45	36.73	38.61	43.11

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Scotland	48.42	35.69	30.33	28.19	31.64	42.72	42.24
North East	53.57	34.96	33.05	34.19	26.76	33.89	29.62
North West	41.24	31.62	33.85	36.54	35.34	40.39	31.42
Yorkshire & Humberside	41.44	31.95	32.37	31.15	33.88	43.96	42.81

	2010	2011	2012
Scotland	42.15	46.3	47
North East	34.9	41.19	41.7
North West	38.04	40.29	45.2
Yorkshire & Humberside	35.23	35.46	48

Fig3. Would you like to see more or less government spending than now on benefits for people who care for those who are sick or disabled (More + Much More %.)

	1998	1999	2002	2004	2006	2008	2011
Scotland	89.51	81.66	87.55	85.82	86.44	88.07	79.12
North East	79.04	87.12	83.08	81.15	74.04	85.37	74.96
North West	83.54	83.71	83.34	85.33	78.03	87.94	77.86
Yorkshire & Humberside	82.25	84.79	82.85	80.55	84.13	86.25	78.05

Fig4. About business and industry...Do they have too much power or too little power? (Too Much + Far Too Much %)

	1985	1986	1987	1989	1990	1994	1996
Scotland	33.11	34.81	38.04	46.45	31.85	39.5	34.06
North East	27.6	32.56	24.11	42.65	34.12	37.71	35.29
North West	32.8	27.64	40.95	33.07	40.95	44.82	41.31
Yorkshire & Humberside	22.14	28.77	24.99	33.51	39.02	36.51	39.22

	1998	2006	2007
Scotland	45.71	45.48	55.1
North East	54.95	55.12	45.42
North West	47.62	44.94	53.17
Yorkshire & Humberside	41.71	39.62	49.9

Fig 5 How much do you agree or disagree that ordinary working people do not get their fair share of the nation's wealth (Agree + Strongly Agree %)

	1986	1987	1989	1990	1991	1993	1995
Scotland	69.82	75.9	71.66	65.72	68.89	68.86	72.47
North East	73.94	72.06	72.82	79	68.88	69.94	78.86
North West	71.58	68.13	66.73	74.15	76.99	68.33	72.61
Yorkshire & Humberside	70.58	72.09	63.7	70.55	68.78	68.16	75.06

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Scotland	61.42	61.32	56.02	60.33	58.27	68.97	63.49
North East	58.87	54.95	65.06	61.07	59.55	63	51.46
North West	54.47	64.29	63.09	65.93	65.18	63.98	65.37
Yorkshire & Humberside	57.46	58.4	54.76	63.97	67.34	64.68	55.69

	2011	2012
Scotland	69.37	73.3
North East	61.53	56.4
North West	60.66	65.9
Yorkshire & Humberside	60.37	66.3

Fig6.How much do you agree or disagree that “if welfare benefits weren't so generous, people would learn to stand on their own two feet”. (Disagree + disagree strongly %)

	1987	1989	1991	1993	1994	1995	1996
Scotland	63.76	55.89	60.23	70.04	66.6	51.94	52.48
North East	64.42	53.18	61.22	56.13	58.36	66.35	53.27
North West	51.9	52.82	53.27	51.29	53.06	42.93	42.23
Yorkshire and Humberside	46.93	43.43	50.87	54.19	54.29	46.94	45.97

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Scotland	37.5	44.9	41.18	42.62	37.12	39.08	28.13
North East	38.54	38.26	47.59	39.88	34.54	30.59	28.57
North West	38.31	37.32	42.5	41.91	32.74	33.33	22.47
Yorkshire and Humberside	33.04	33.09	37.61	28.4	27.19	29.55	21.67

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Scotland	25.54	26.36	25.1	26.59	26.45	28.59	25.11
North East	23.8	26.41	15.03	18.65	20.46	19.25	29.54
North West	27.9	22.7	21.16	22.4	28.36	25.11	23.49
Yorkshire and Humberside	24.73	23.52	25.58	28.18	15.51	22.85	21.2

	2012
Scotland	31
North East	20.5
North West	25.2
Yorkshire and Humberside	23.8

Fig7. About government choosing between these three options. Which do you think it should choose? Reduce taxes and spend less on health, education and social benefits OR keep taxes and spending on these services at the same level as now OR increase taxes and spend more on health, education and social benefits (Increase Spending %)

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1989	1990
Scotland	31.68	43.99	50.84	46.39	52.18	55.86	47.78
North East	27.72	45.83	49.61	51.03	52.19	55.74	54.88
North West	38.87	46.25	39.88	51.96	46.45	58.91	62.72
Yorkshire & Humberside	38.46	40.12	39.04	44.77	50.92	56.7	67.77

	1991	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Scotland	71.81	67.56	62.31	60.79	59.08	71.95	70.66
North East	72.37	59.19	66.33	64.19	55.01	49.32	60
North West	64.53	62.25	59.83	67.18	57.23	63.97	65.4
Yorkshire & Humberside	63.1	66.31	57.79	67.6	62.86	59.09	63.48

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Scotland	59.81	49.25	57.05	72.72	54.85	53.01	52.85
North East	57.34	57.14	57.18	62.06	62.34	51.44	41.1
North West	54.24	51.34	56.72	58.06	54.04	51.34	45.64
Yorkshire & Humberside	58.65	53.13	61.3	61.57	50.3	49.4	51.15

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Scotland	51.69	45.76	41.24	51.85	38.39	43.01	40.9
North East	38.45	39.9	45.71	30.57	28.18	37.95	37.1
North West	44.11	43.33	44.93	37.43	30.34	36.75	32.4
Yorkshire & Humberside	47.09	47.74	43.32	35.12	30.56	40.95	37.4

Fig8 About circumstances in which a woman might consider an abortion. Do you think the law should allow an abortion when ... the woman decides on her own she does not wish to have

	1994	1995	1998	2004	2005	2007	2008
Scotland	47.30%	49.10%	38.30%	44.60%	39.50%	43.30%	39.10%
North East	56.40%	45.30%	65.20%	40.00%	40.80%	34.30%	34.60%
North West	48.50%	28.10%	43.30%	38.90%	35.00%	33.90%	35.90%
Yorkshire & Humberside	54.60%	35.50%	45.50%	26.90%	28.80%	39.00%	43.40%

	2012
Scotland	38.30%
North East	44.60%
North West	40.10%
Yorkshire & Humberside	36.90%

Fig.9. How would you describe yourself ... prejudiced OR not prejudiced against people of other races. (Answering “A little prejudiced” %)

	1983	1984	1986	1987	1989	1990	1991
Scotland	21.60%	17.80%	23.70%	23.80%	21.10%	22.00%	20.40%
North East	23.60%	27.30%	22.40%	23.60%	28.40%	27.70%	21.90%
North West	29.20%	27.20%	32.00%	35.50%	33.20%	33.50%	30.80%
Yorkshire & Humberside	37.20%	23.70%	32.70%	39.10%	32.50%	25.90%	32.40%

	1994	1996	1998	2000	2001	2002	2003
Scotland	27.50%	19.60%	26.10%	14.10%	13.10%	24.20%	22.90%
North East	31.40%	22.60%	9.00%	13.20%	18.70%	32.50%	18.20%
North West	40.40%	24.90%	29.00%	29.00%	24.30%	24.40%	24.70%
Yorkshire & Humberside	33.20%	24.40%	13.70%	26.20%	29.60%	42.00%	32.80%

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2010	2011
Scotland	19.10%	29.30%	20.80%	22.90%	24.40%	22.90%	25.00%
North East	13.20%	26.50%	33.10%	24.70%	26.70%	26.70%	39.50%
North West	19.10%	30.80%	35.30%	29.80%	34.50%	25.70%	33.40%
Yorkshire & Humberside	29.60%	28.30%	34.80%	23.70%	34.70%	31.30%	32.70%

	2012
Scotland	19.80%
North East	26.90%
North West	25.60%
Yorkshire & Humberside	16.50%

