

The Referendum
Schools Debate

SEPTEMBER 2013

MONARCHY

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MOTION:

**“SCOTLAND SHOULD
HAVE AN ELECTED
HEAD OF STATE”**



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INTRODUCTION

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The doctrine of popular sovereignty, the idea that political power rests with the citizenry and that government may rule over free people only by their consent, can be traced to the Declaration of Arbroath of 1320. This document was an apologia for Robert the Bruce and an articulation of Scotland’s natural right to be an independent country but it also asserted “the due consent and assent of us all” as a key political principle. Although the signatories to the declaration had only noblemen like themselves in mind, the emphasis they placed on the consent of the governed would echo down the centuries in the writings of liberal philosophers such as John Locke and Thomas Hobbes and would find new life in the opening words of the US Constitution: “We the People”. The tension between popular sovereignty and monarchy has been a fault line for much of Scottish history and it has re-emerged with the debate over independence. The question all these competing ideas pose for us is this: Who rules Scotland and by what right? In 2012, after a debate in the Scottish Parliament to mark the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee, MSPs overwhelmingly backed Alex Salmond’s motion that the Queen would remain the head of state in an independent Scotland [Ref: [Scotsman](#)]. Many argue that the institution of monarchy stands as a rock against social and political turmoil, a mark of consistency and purveyor of a long-term view for the good of its people, while also being a source of pomp and spectatorship that the electorate simply does not want to abolish [Ref: [Scotsman](#)]. However, others maintain that the monarchy holds real and undemocratic political power, such as the royal prerogative [Ref: [History Learning Site](#)], costs too much and makes ‘subjects’ out of ‘citizens’ [Ref: [Telegraph](#)]. Elizabeth II’s title itself would seem to fly in the face of Scottish history and a people that visibly has less of an appetite for monarchy; to some, Scottish independence should mark a republican fresh start [Ref: [Scotsman](#)].

Queen of Scots?

The First Minister's support for the monarchy has proven to be a source of contention, given the strong strain of republicanism in his party. Backbench MSPs, and even a minister, have voiced their preference for Scots to be asked, post-independence, whether they wish to retain the Queen as the head of state [Ref: [STV](#)]. Elsewhere in the pro-independence movement, radical voices say independence should be about more than leaving behind the UK state: it should also mean leaving behind the monarchy as an undemocratic anachronism. "Scottish independence must not be thought of as a finishing line," counsels republican commentator Fraser Matheson. "It should be considered a gateway to improvement... The abolition of an ancient entrenched privilege would send an important signal about the new, more equal Scotland that we should be working towards" [Ref: [Scottish Review](#)]. It is argued by some that Scots have less of an attachment to the monarchy than people elsewhere in the UK; there were only 100 road closures for the Diamond Jubilee celebrations in Scotland compared to 10,000 in England [Ref: [Herald Scotland](#)]. Supporters disagree, pointing to the many Scottish ties the monarchy holds today, particularly the popularity of Balmoral and the interest in the budding romance between the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge (or the Earl and Countess of Strathearn, to give them their Scottish titles) during their time at St Andrews University [Ref: [Scotsman](#)]. The latter couple's recent visits to Scotland have also proved popular [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. The commentator Allan Massie argues that, rather than being hostile to the Queen, the Scots simply manifest their admiration in the more measured tones of Scottish restraint and sobriety [Ref: [Telegraph](#)].

An anchor for a new Scotland?

Following the hung parliament resulting from the 2010 UK general

election, the presence of the monarchy was asserted by some as a safeguard against political chaos [Ref: [Telegraph](#)]. An unelected head of state can be seen as a buffer to the short-termism of party-politics and the whims of the electorate, and the Queen could perhaps provide a symbol of stability during the transition to an independent Scotland in the event of a Yes vote. However, republicans reject this view, claiming that such considerations take autonomy away from the public, deeming a head of state chosen through a lottery of birth as more capable of deciding the public's fate than they are themselves [Ref: [spiked](#)]. Supporters of the monarchy on the other hand point to the experience and skill the Queen has shown throughout her reign, and to her contribution to international relations, and believe that abolishing the monarchy is a pointless consideration in face of more pressing social concerns [Ref: [New Statesman](#)].

Democratic?

The journalist and essayist Walter Bagehot argued that a constitutional monarch has "the right to be consulted, the right to encourage and the right to warn". However, some commentators point to the anti-democratic failings of an unelected head of state. Whilst the Queen is famously reticent on matters of political and social controversy, Prince Charles is often condemned for using his position to further his campaigning interests [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. For others the Royal Prerogative is a symbol of how the monarchy can allow Parliament to be circumvented in the name of the Crown. Described by the constitutional theorist AV Dicey as "the residue of discretionary or arbitrary authority which at any given time is legally left in the hands of the crown," the Royal Prerogative allows the executive to use those powers, often relating to foreign policy and war-making, which technically remain with the sovereign and may therefore be exercised

THE MONARCHY IN SCOTLAND DEBATE IN CONTEXT CONTINUED...

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by the Prime Minister without a vote in Parliament. An example of this is Tony Blair's use of the Royal Prerogative in 1999 to commit UK forces to the humanitarian intervention in Kosovo without a vote by MPs [Ref: [Politics](#)].

principle, the prestige and tourism arguably brought by the monarchy could benefit the international standing and the financial coffers of an independent Scotland.

Popular and good for the Scottish pocket?

Monarchists claim that the public gains more from the monarchy than it pays in, particularly through its attraction to tourists [Ref: [Telegraph](#)].

Arguably, these benefits accrue to England to a greater degree than they do to Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland [Ref: [Republic](#)] though supporters insist that the displays of public affection surrounding the Royal Wedding in 2011 and the birth of Prince George in 2013 attest to a desire on the part of Scots to keep the Queen [Ref: [Scotsman](#)].

However, in April 2012, an ICM poll found that whilst 51% of people living in other parts of the UK thought they would be worse off without the monarchy, only 42% of Scots agreed [Ref: [Herald Scotland](#)]. A poll conducted for the Sunday Express in August 2013 found overwhelming support for a post-independence referendum on the monarchy.

Sixty-three percent of respondents wanted the future of the Royal Family put to a vote, with 22% saying the Queen should automatically remain head of state in an independent Scotland [Ref: [Scottish Sunday Express](#)]. Equally, though, even if there is an emotional or cultural attachment to the monarch and the tradition he or she represents, there can be no avoiding the cost implications of funding an unelected head of state and his or her heirs and successors. A 2012 UK-wide poll found 52% of people wanting the Royal Family to receive less public money [Ref: [Ipsos Mori](#)]. If an independent Scotland faces tough economic choices as it erects new political, economic and institutional structures, the Royal Family could prove an unnecessary expense.

On the other hand, even if one supports the idea of a republic in

ESSENTIAL READING

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FOR

Queen of Scots? No thanks, Ma'am

Ian Bell *Herald Scotland* 12 May 2013

Thanks, your majesty, but it's time we Scots moved on

Fraser Matheson *Scottish Review* 24 July 2012

This royal frenzy should embarrass us all

Johann Hari *Independent* 15 April 2011

Goodbye to Royalty

Peter Tatchell *Guardian* 1 June 2007

AGAINST

Shut up, royal baby haters. Monarchy is awesome

Washington Post 23 July 2013

Why we need the Queen

Nelson Jones *New Statesman* 30 May 2013

Monarchy is anachronistic, privileged and unfair – but it works

Hamish MacDonell *Caledonian Mercury* 6 June 2012

Jubilee may make Scots think again

Peter Jones *Scotsman* 7 February 2012

IN DEPTH

Scottish monarchy depends on people's will

Michael Fry *Scotsman* 23 July 2013

Does the monarchy still matter?

New Statesman 9 July 2009

ORGANISATIONS

Better Together

British Monarchist Society

Radical Independence

Republic

Scottish Republican Socialist Movement

The Royal Channel: The Official Channel of the British

Monarchy

Yes

BACKGROUNDEERS

Our monarchy works

Telegraph 13 August 2013

Royal baby: The fact that the monarchy is a symbol of inherited privilege is a reason to preserve it

Toby Young *Telegraph* 23 July 2013

Almost all Britons satisfied with the Queen as Monarch, but Prince William is the most popular Royal

Ipsos Mori 19 November 2012

Do we really need the monarchy?

The Cambridge Union Society *Huffington Post* 3 July 2012

She's still our Queen for a' that

Allan Massie *Telegraph* 1 July 2012

A long reign and a lost republic

David Hayes *Inside Story* 19 April 2012

Why the royal wedding might drive me to republicanism

Simon Varwell 25 April 2011

Long live the Queen!

Simon Walker *New Statesman* 9 July 2010

The Royal family is a bargain for Britain

Gerald Warner *Telegraph* 23 June 2010

The Queen and a hung parliament

Nicholas Witchell *BBC News* 7 May 2010

Gawd bless yer, Ma'am – a hung parliament shows how crucial the Queen is

Harry Mount *Daily Telegraph* 7 May 2010

The barriers to a Republic of Britain

Brendan O'Neil *spiked* 27 November 2009

Is it time for a Scottish referendum on the monarchy?

Judith Fisher *Progress Online* 23 July 2009

The dangers of a political king

Graham Smith *Guardian* 21 April 2009

The Queen's pearls of wisdom over 50 years

Christopher Howse *Telegraph* 22 December 2007

Lords scrutinise royal prerogative

Politics 11 August 2005

'The Royal Family are parasites, they cost us too much'

M Macleod *Scotsman* 28 December 2002

The Monarchy as entertainment: Is it more than a joke?

Frank Vilbert *openDemocracy* 14 November 2002

Tourism

Republic

How to win the argument

Republic

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IN THE NEWS

Scots demand vote on keeping the Queen
Scottish Sunday Express 31 August 2013

Scottish independence: Aileen Campbell says Scots should decide on monarchy
BBC News 13 August 2013

Prince Charles faces scrutiny by MPs over veto on laws
Guardian 12 August 2013

Scots 'should have vote on Queen' after Yes vote says SNP minister
STV 11 August 2013

Yes campaign split over Canavan's call for referendum on Royals
STV 29 July 2013

Scottish independence: Dennis Canavan reopens monarchy debate
BBC News 28 July 2013

Confidence in British monarchy at all-time high, poll shows
Telegraph 27 July 2013

Kirk calls for Scottish coronations if country backs independence
STV 25 April 2013

Scottish independence: Ditch the Queen, Salmond told
Scotsman 25 November 2012

MSPs vote to keep Queen as Head of State if Scotland Splits from UK
Scotsman 31 May 2012

Lib Dems demand clarity on the role of the Queen in an independent Scotland
STV 12 February 2012

The big day: Scotland celebrates the royal wedding
STV 29 April 2011

Kate and William return to St Andrews
Guardian 25 February 2011

Britain should get rid of the monarchy, says UN
Telegraph 13 June 2008

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ABOUT THE STV/DEBATING MATTERS REFERENDUM SCHOOLS DEBATE

Debating Matters has teamed up with STV to give secondary school pupils across Scotland the opportunity to debate the big issues in the run up to the referendum on Scottish independence in 2014. The Scotland wide competition will give school pupils, many of who will be eligible to vote in the referendum on independence, the chance to research and discuss issues which will affect the future of Scotland. STV will provide a platform for debates and cover the competition on air and online. Debating Matters has produced these special editions of our acclaimed Topic Guides on the motions for debate.

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- I am a sixth form student and would like further details about events in my area
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- I am interested in sponsoring/supporting Debating Matters
- Other (please specify)

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**“DEBATING MATTERS
TEACHES A WAY
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INTELLECTUAL
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