

25 Years of Scottish Devolution: Public Attitudes and Reactions

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Scottish Social Attitudes survey

- High quality (near) annual survey since 1999. Designed to (i) study policy relevant topics in depth (ii) chart attitude change over time.
- Cousin of annual British Social Attitudes survey, which has performed a similar role across GB since 1983. Some questions on the 2 surveys in common affording cross-border comparison.
- 1999-2019: Conducted face-to-face (with self-completion supplement) with random sample of respondents
- 2021: Parallel online panel and phone surveys
- 2023 -: Push to web design

Devolution debates

Strengthen the Union?

- Devolution would show that Scotland's distinctive needs and aspirations could be satisfactorily addressed within the framework of the UK

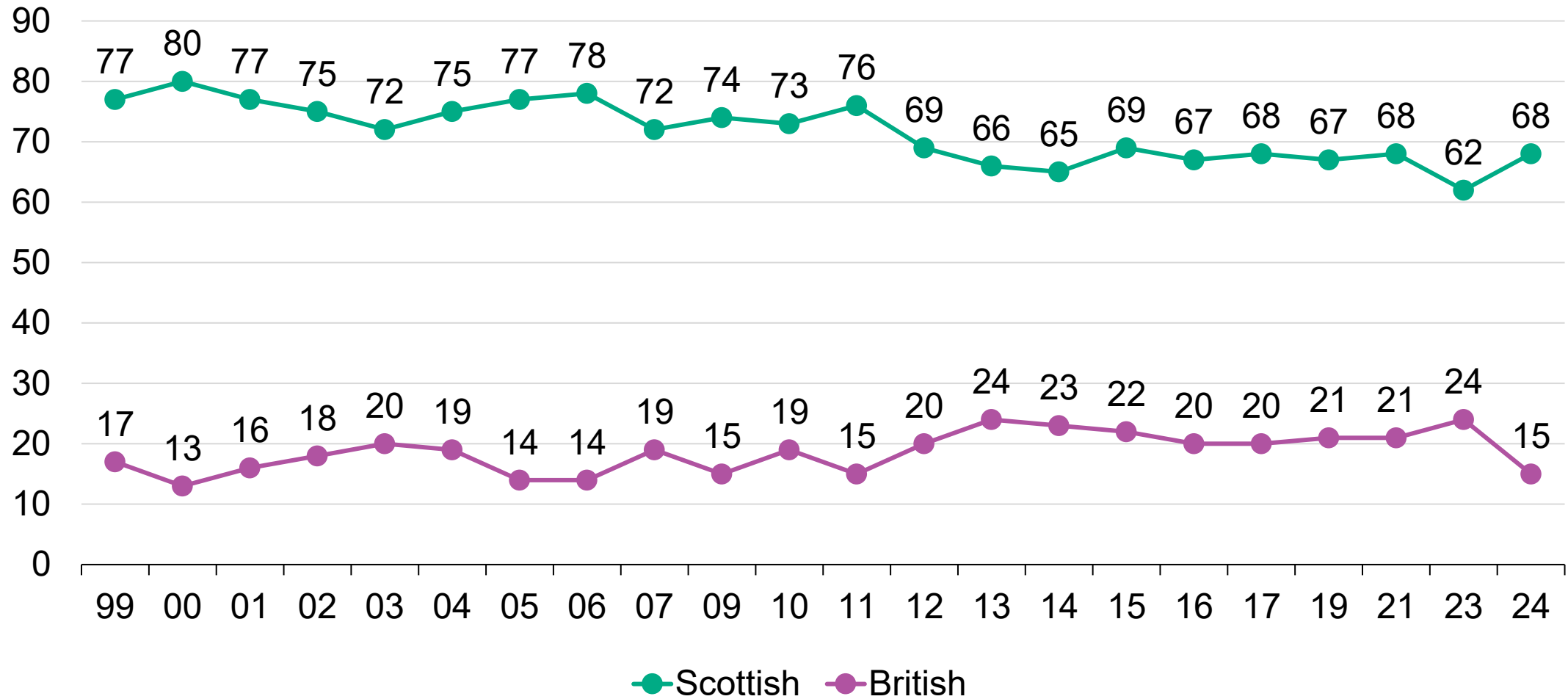
Or Weaken the Union?

- Establishment of a political symbol of Scotland's distinctiveness would weaken British identity and make independence look feasible
- Creating a policy space distinct from Westminster could result in a divergence of attitudes between Scotland and England.

Three parts

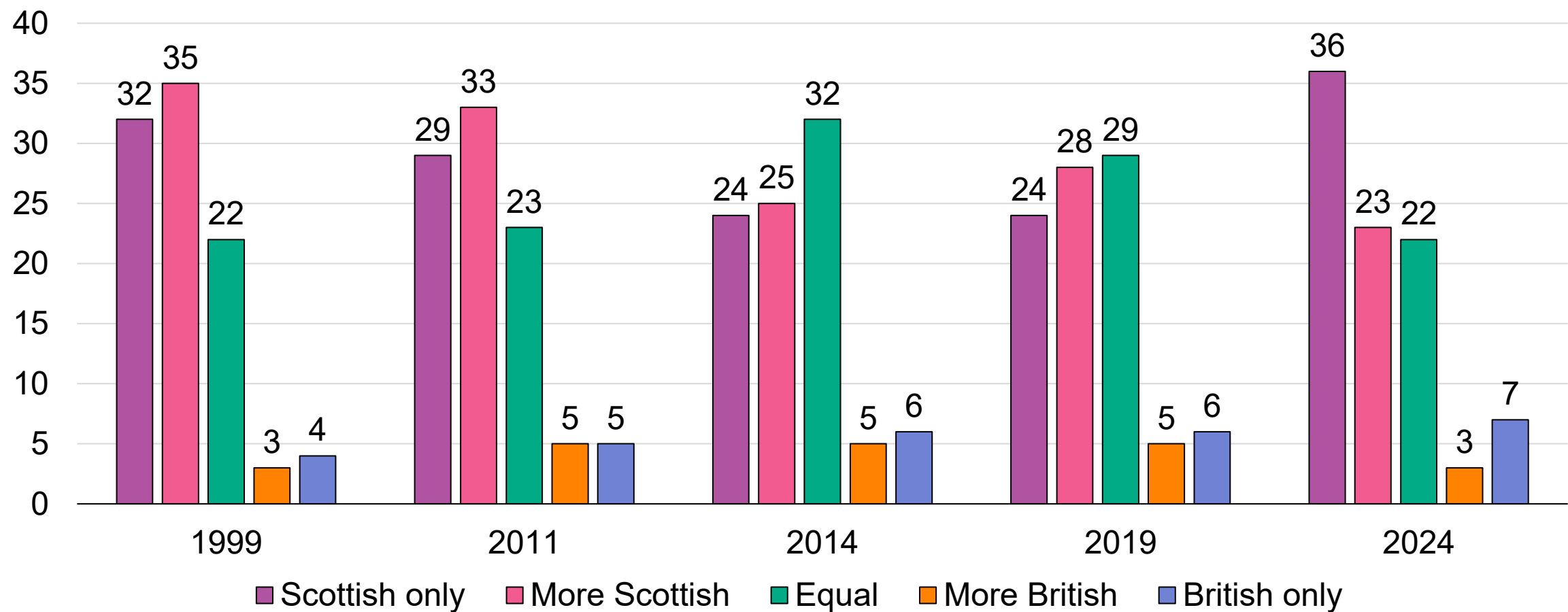
- Have identities and attitudes diverged?
- How well is devolution thought to have worked?
- What has happened to constitutional preferences?

'Forced Choice' National Identity, 1999-2024 (%)



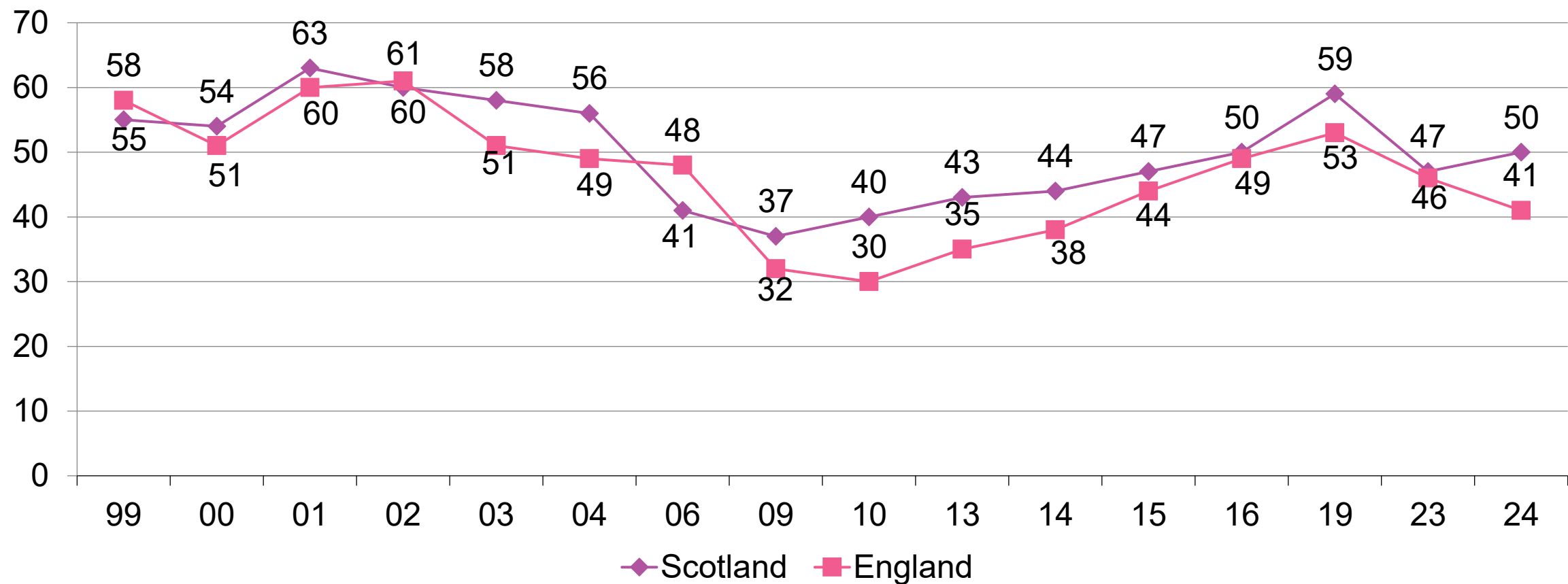
Source: Scottish Social Attitudes

Moreno National Identity (selected years) (%)



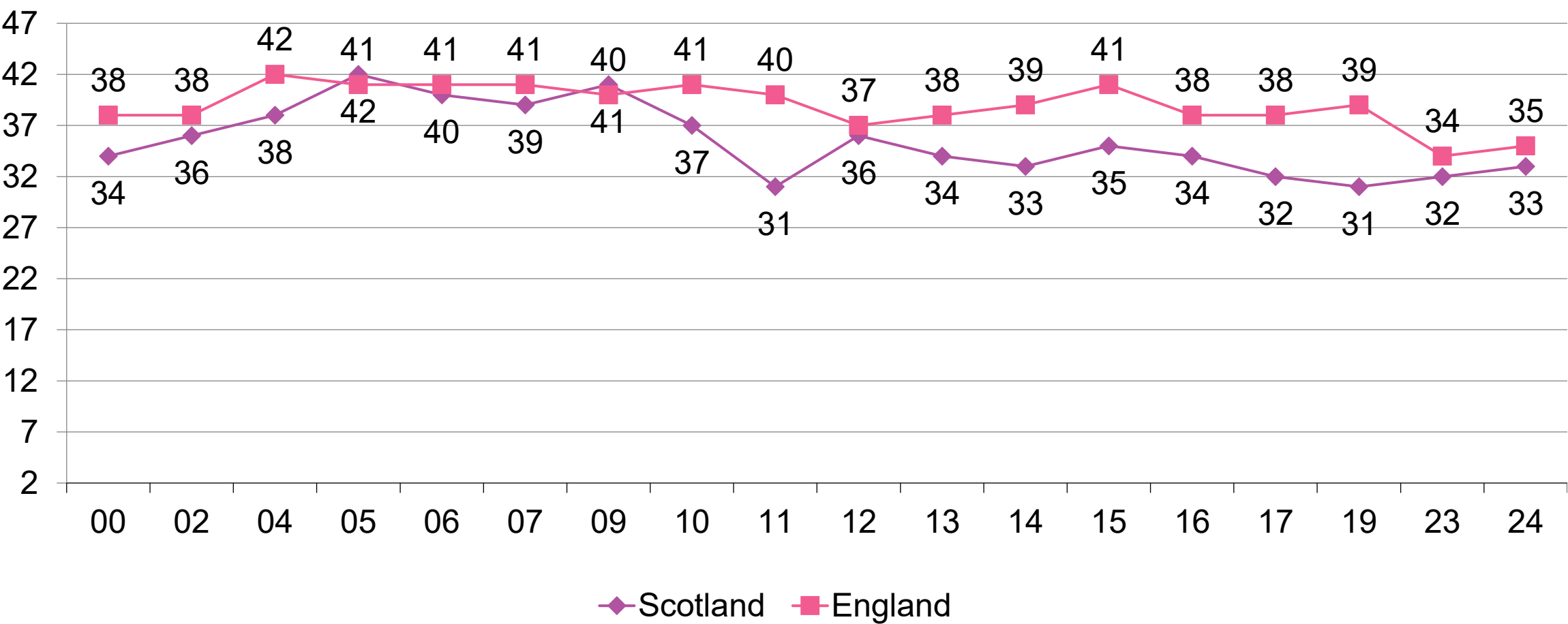
Source: Scottish Social Attitudes

More tax and spend? (%)



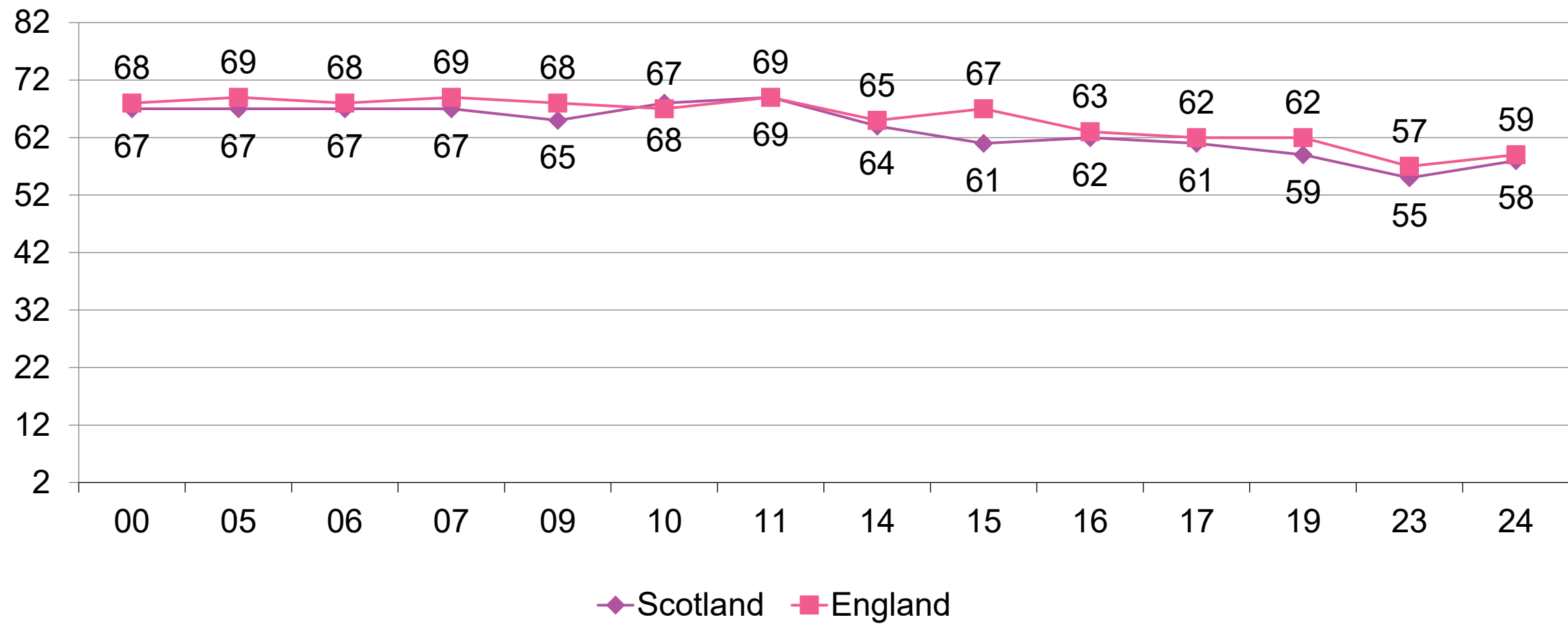
Source: Scottish and British Social Attitudes

Trend in Left-Right scale measure (%)



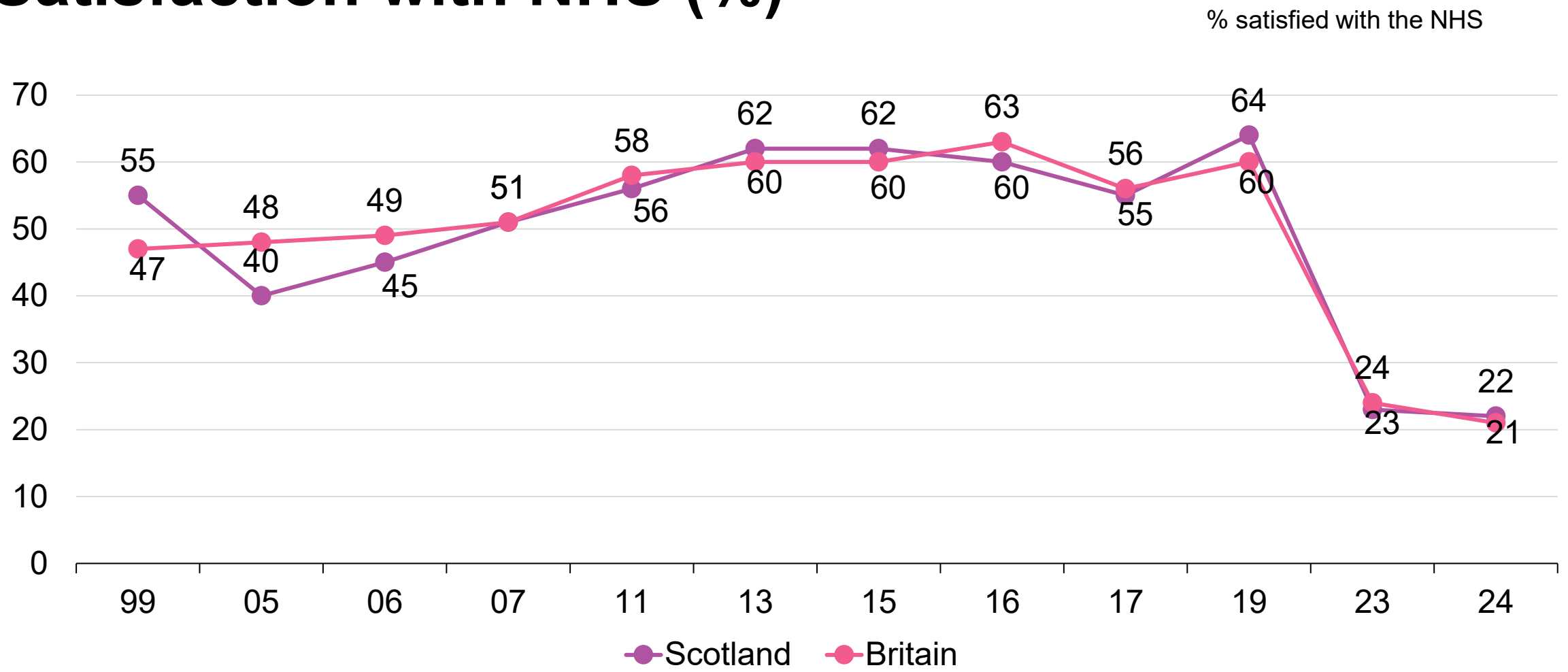
Source: British and Scottish Social Attitudes. Higher score = more right-wing

Trend on Libertarian-Authoritarian scale measure (%)



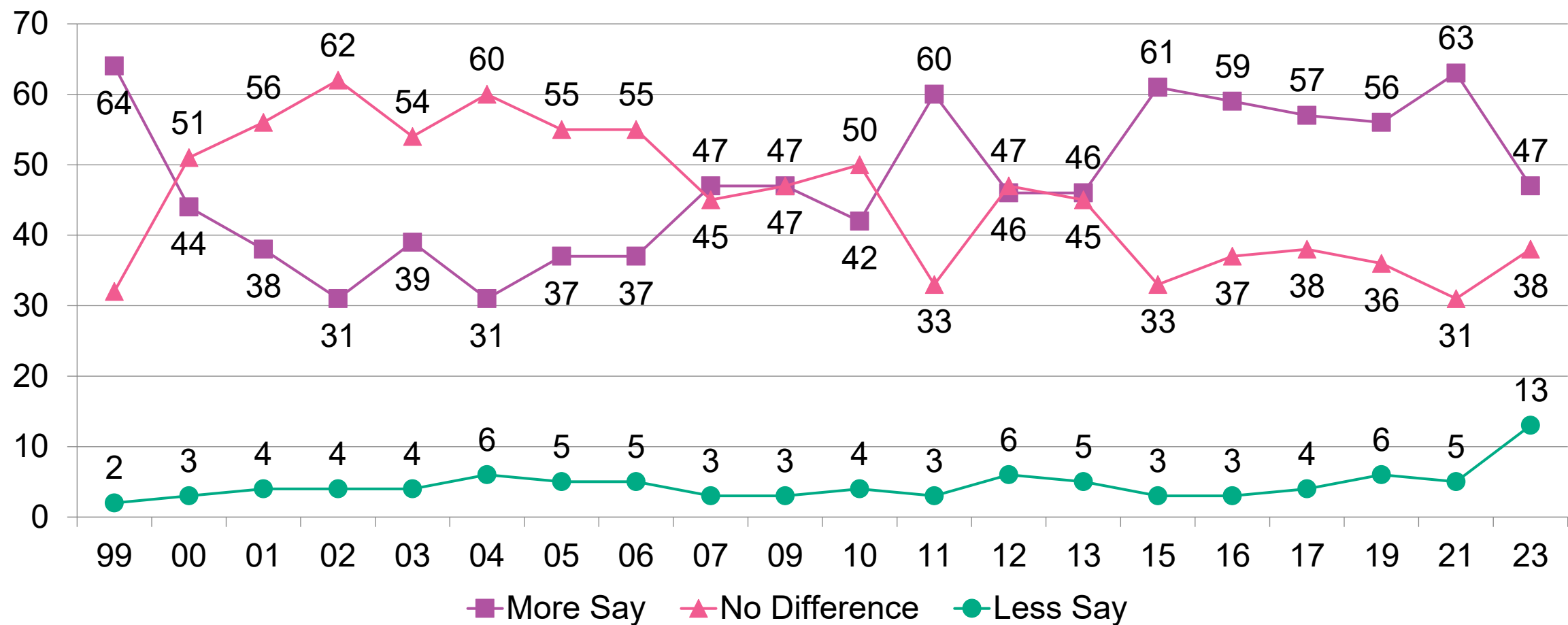
Source: British and Scottish Social Attitudes. Higher score = more authoritarian

Satisfaction with NHS (%)



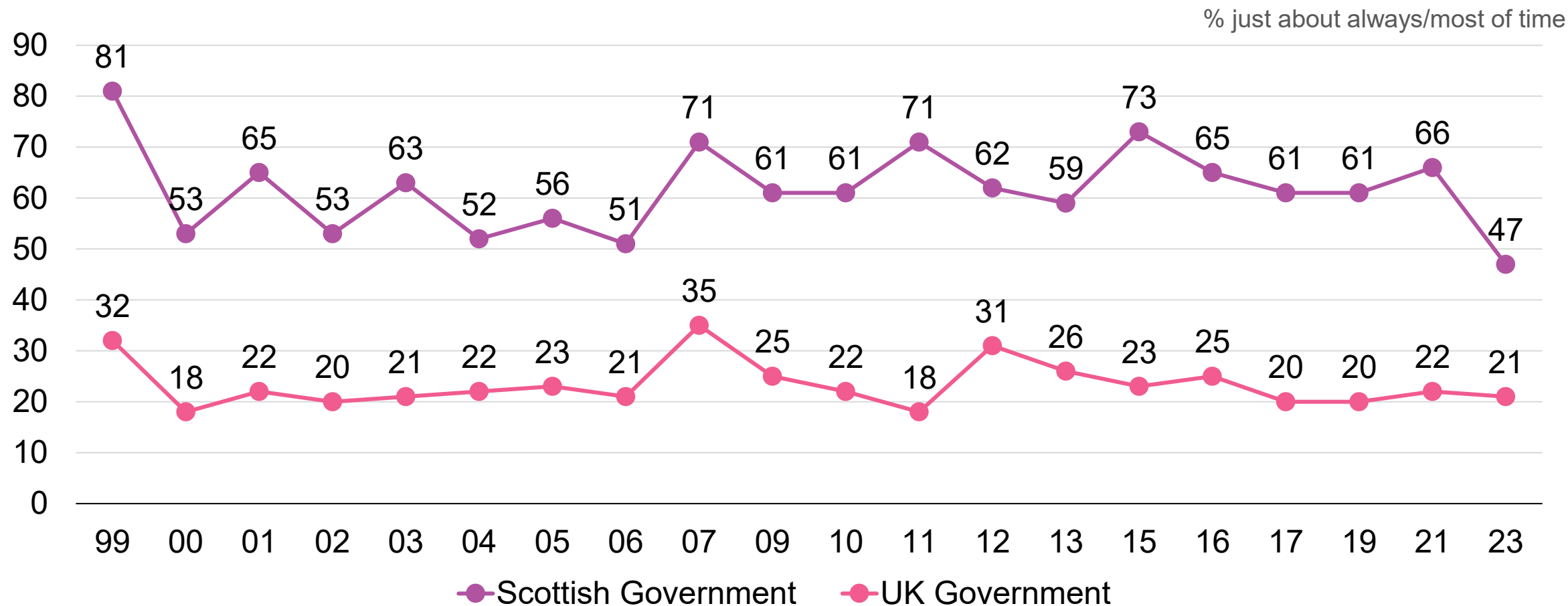
Source: Scottish and British Social Attitudes

Holyrood giving ordinary people more say? (%)



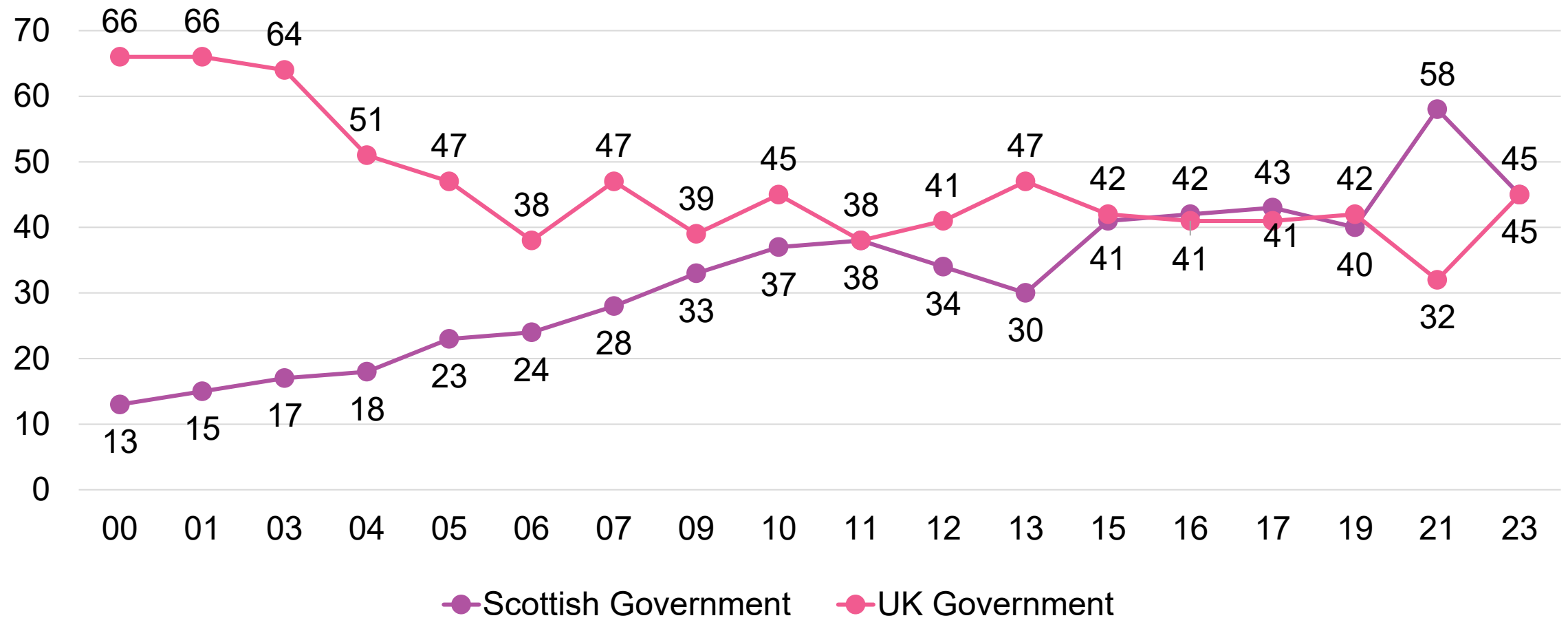
Source: Scottish Social Attitudes. In 1999 question asked whether having a SP will...

Trust to work in Scotland's best interests (%)



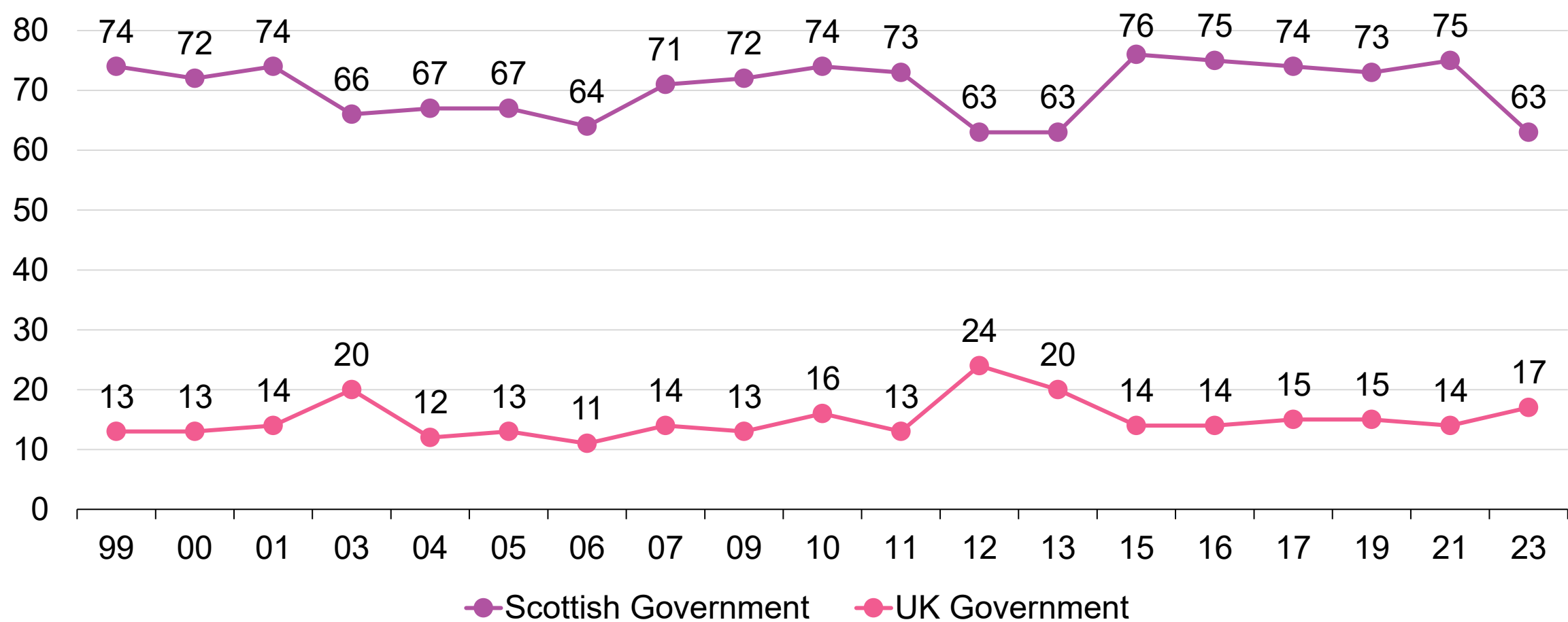
Source: Scottish Social Attitudes. 1999-2003: question asked of Scottish Parliament. 2004: half SP, half Scottish Government. 2005-23: question asked of Scottish Government

Who has most influence in Scotland? (%)



Source: Scottish Social Attitudes. 1999-2003: question asked of Scottish Parliament. 2004: half SP, half Scottish Government. 2005-23: question asked of Scottish Government

Who ought to have most influence in Scotland? (%)

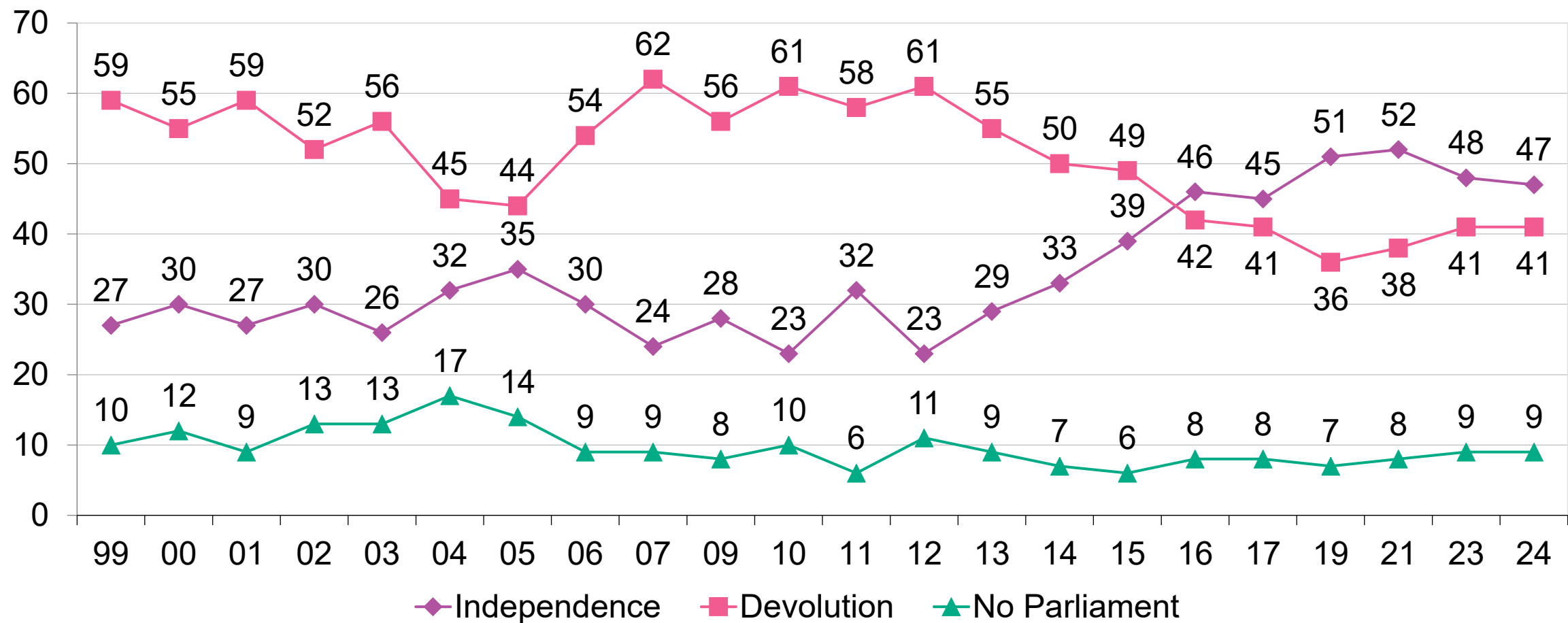


Source: Scottish Social Attitudes

SSA's long standing constitutional preference question

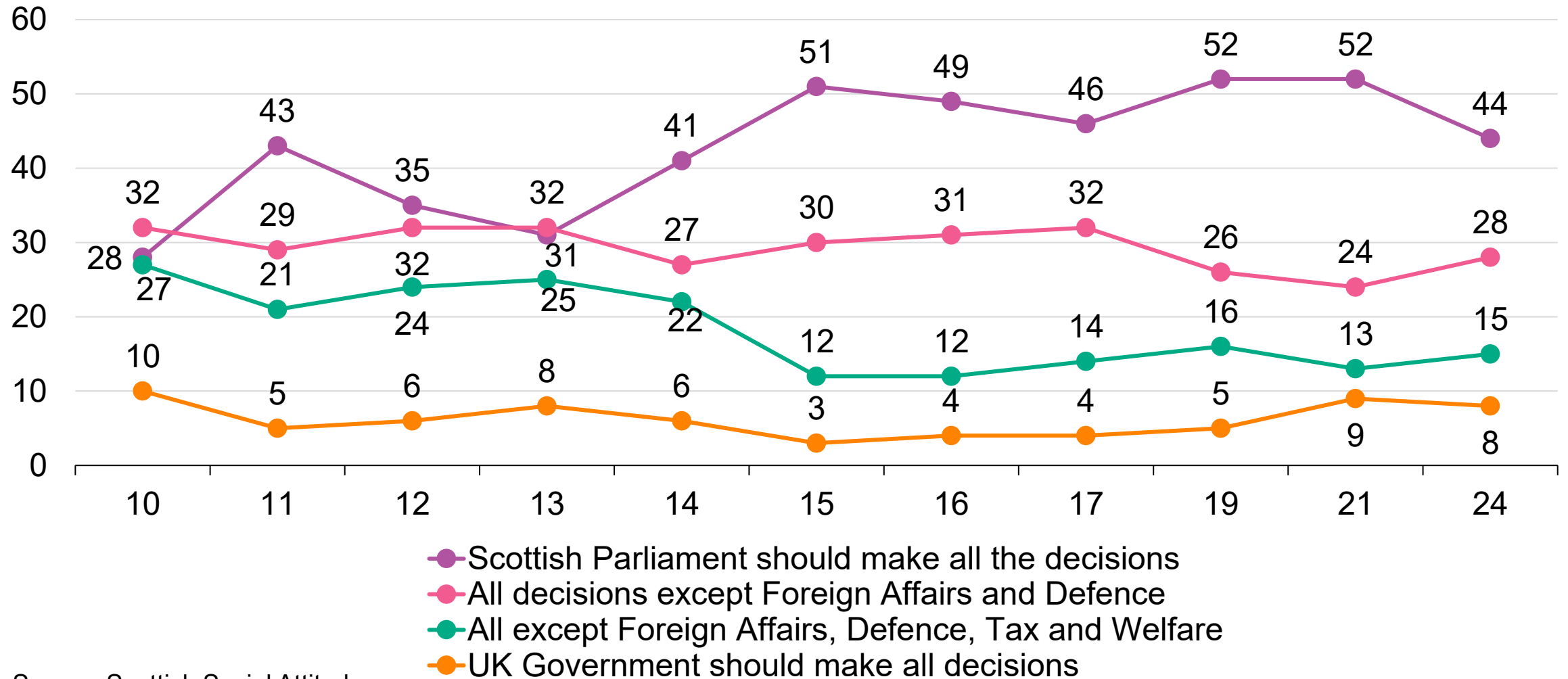
- Which of these statements comes closest to your view?
- Scotland should become independent, separate from the UK and the European Union
- Scotland should become independent, separate from the UK but part of the European Union
- Scotland should remain part of the UK, with its own elected parliament which has **some** taxation powers
- Scotland should remain part of the UK, with its own elected parliament which has **no** taxation powers
- Scotland should remain part of the UK **without** an elected parliament

How Scotland would like to be governed (%)



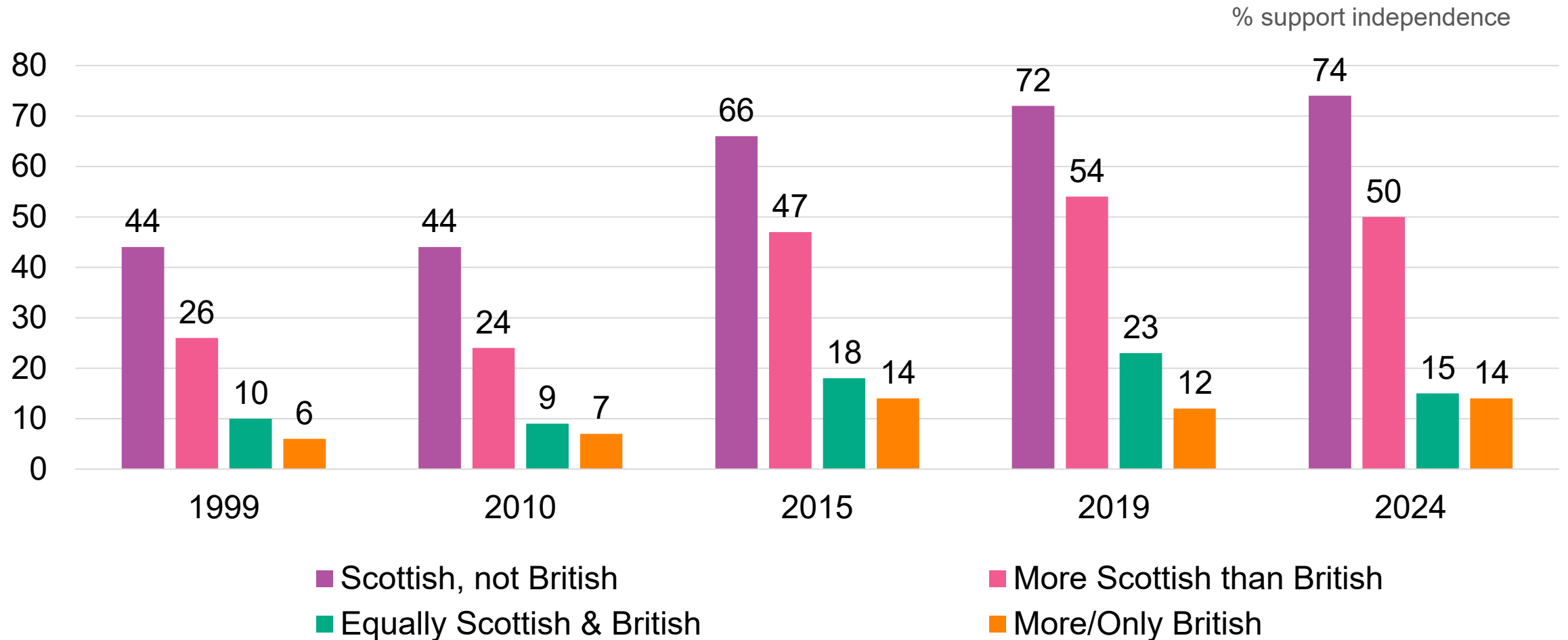
Source: Scottish Social Attitudes

Who should make which decisions? (%)



Source: Scottish Social Attitudes

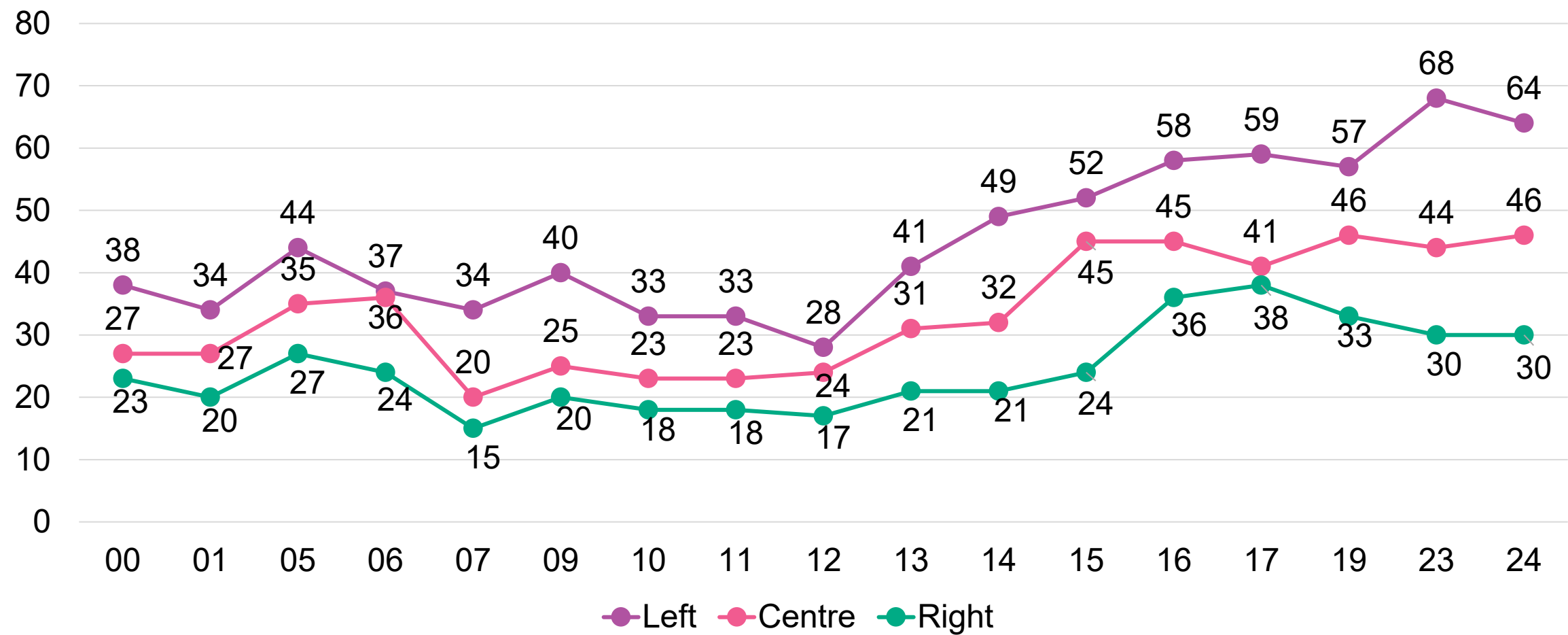
A strengthened link with Scottish Identity



Source: Scottish Social Attitudes

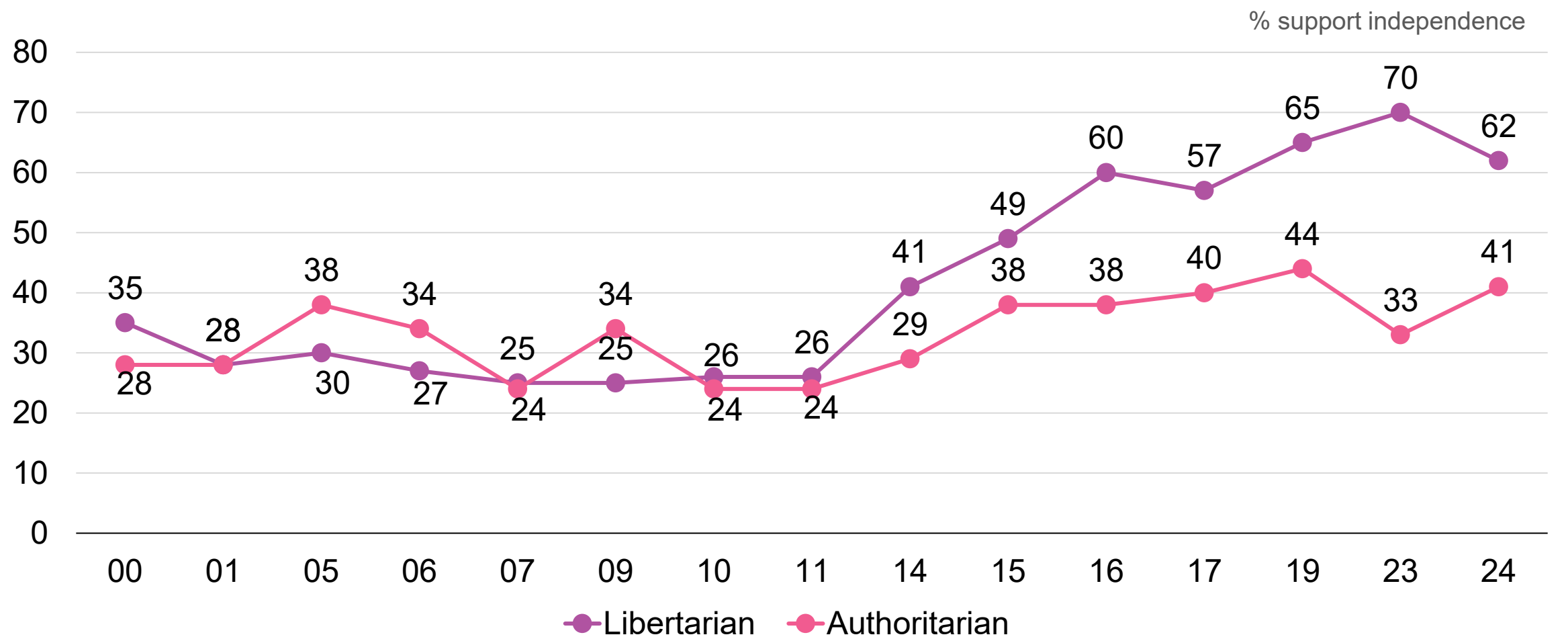
A widened gap between Left and Right

% support independence



Source: Scottish Social Attitudes

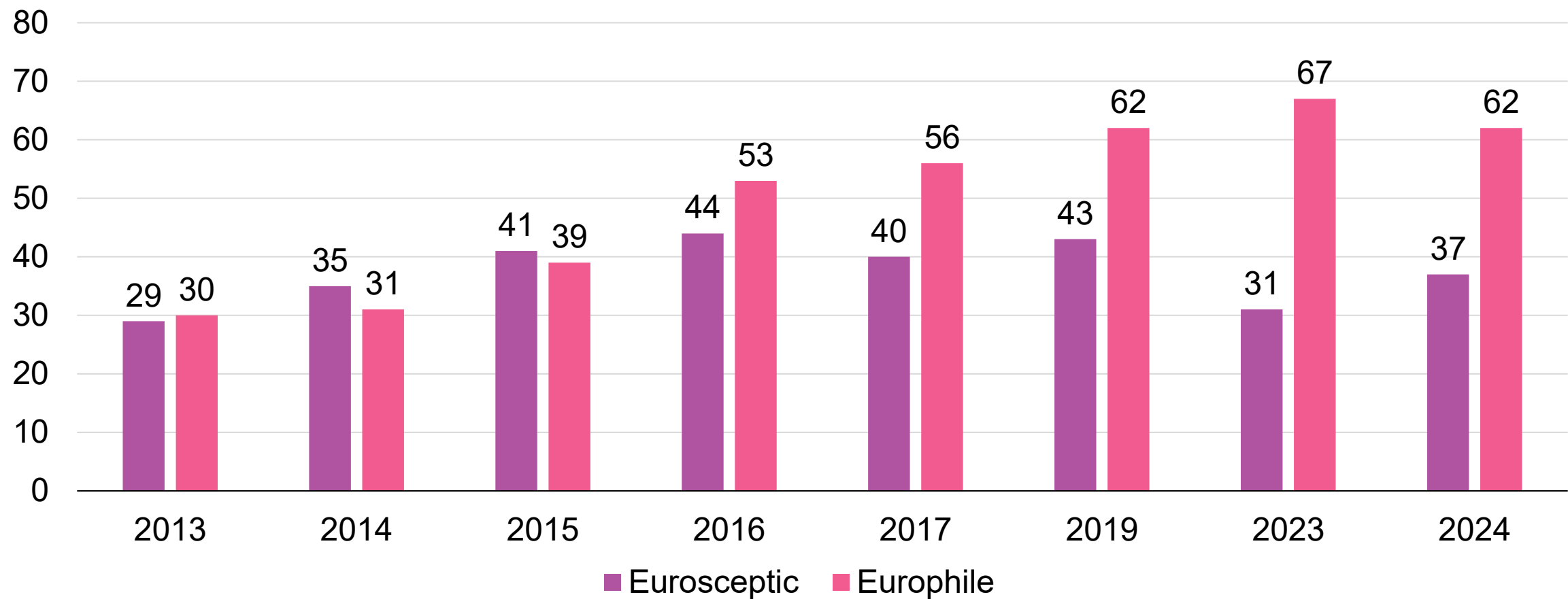
And a new one between Libertarians and Authoritarians



Source: Scottish Social Attitudes

In the wake of Brexit

% support independence



Source: Scottish Social Attitudes

Conclusion

- Scotland's identity and values have not diverged (further) from the rest of Britain
- Public perceptions of devolution have largely improved over the last 25 years
- But there has been a persistent gap between desired and perceived level of influence
- Support for independence is consistently higher now than in the early days of devolution – a legacy largely of the 2014 referendum
- Identity and values are now more significantly related to attitudes towards independence, making it a more polarising issue