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# Scotland's *National Conversation*: Travails in Direct and Deliberative Democracy

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# I. Context of Scottish Independence

- on-going constitutional conversation
- 1978 devolution referendum - unsuccessful
- 1997 devolution referendum - successful
- 2007 Scottish Parliamentary elections - maiden victory for Scottish National Party
- long held policy on independence/autonomy
- “National Conversation” announced 14 August 2007

## II. Range of Issues

- Recasting of host-/sub-state relations
  - Novelty of ‘indigenously initiated’ referendum
- Array of procedural matters
  - Who are voters?
  - Who can initiate?
  - How and who frames the question?
  - Mandates and majorities
- Transformative capacity of ICTs?
  - Can the circumstances of deliberation be accommodated in a referendum process?

### III. Deliberative Problematics

- Assumption in constitutional/political theory that referendum processes not properly deliberative
- Inability to meet the key requirements of publicity, reason-giving and responsiveness (Gutmann and Thompson)
- ‘extreme majoritarianism’ & chilling / lobster traps’ & irreversibility (Chambers)
- architecture of serendipity, absence of (Sunstein)
- broader research project/engagement with Exec.

## IV. Scottish e-Democracy

Scottish Parliament, 1999 ff.

- e-petititons system
- website - webcasting/documentation

Scotland generally 2000 ff.

- emergence of cyber-Nats
- blogosphere (NB. not exclusively 'information cocoons')
- newspaper forums

# V. National Conversation & e-Dem

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/topics/a-national-conversation>

The screenshot shows the website for 'The Scottish Government A National Conversation'. The header includes the Scottish Government logo, the title 'A National Conversation', and the date 'Friday, October 3, 2008'. A navigation menu contains links for Home, About, Topics, News, Publications, and Consultations. A search bar is located in the top right corner.

The main content area is titled 'Choosing Scotland's Future' and features a sub-header 'Scotland's Future: A National Conversation'. Below this, there is a section for 'Events' with a paragraph: 'At the launch of the National Conversation in 2007 the FM asked every Scot 'to reflect not on the kind of country we are - but on the kind of country we could be, should be'. As the Cabinet went round the country, First Minister Alex Salmond and his Ministerial team held National Conversation events where local people have had the opportunity to ask direct questions about what matters to them.'

There are four event highlights, each with a photo and links for audio, video, and text summaries:

- Dumfries**: Includes an audio podcast and a text summary.
- Inverness**: Includes an audio podcast and a text summary.
- Pitlochry**: Includes an audio podcast and a video.
- Skye**: Includes an audio podcast and a video.

A sidebar on the left lists 'Conversation points' with several news items, such as 'Statement by 11 church leaders through Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS)' and 'Parliamentary Business Minister on the Church Without Walls idea'.

On the right side, there is a section for 'Something to say?' with a link to 'Make your point in the National Conversation' and a text input field. Below that is a 'What you need to know' section with links to 'Principal Choices', 'Join in', 'Any Questions?', 'Translations', and 'Fact File on Scotland'.

# V. National Conversation & e-Dem (cont.)

## Principal Choices:

### Choosing Scotland's Future

The Scottish Government believes that an independent, sovereign Scotland is the best option for the country's future and that the people should be invited to support that option through a referendum.

The Government also recognises that there are a range of views on Scotland's constitutional future other than independence and that these are represented in the Scottish Parliament.

- [Read the full document](#)
- [Full text of First Minister's launch speech](#)

However, the elections of May 2007 showed clear support across Scotland to move the country's constitution forward.

For this reason, the Government is initiating a wide-ranging National Conversation that will allow the people of Scotland to make an informed decision on their future.

Core policy statements/contributions  
Text, video, downloads

# V. National Conversation & e-Dem (cont.)

## Participation:

### Join the Conversation

The National Conversation is open to everyone

- submit [your contribution](#)
- Go to [joinin@anationalconversation.com](mailto:joinin@anationalconversation.com) and e-mail direct if you don't want your comments to be made public or if you want to ask a question
- Write to: A National Conversation, Constitution Unit, G-A North, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh EH6 6QQ

### Also worth seeing

- read comments on a [range of issues](#) from the paper, Choosing Scotland's Future
- read the [Ministers' blogs](#)

by email, letter  
ministerial blogs

# V. National Conversation & e-Dem (cont.)

## FAQs:

### Your Questions Answered

#### **What is the purpose of the document, Choosing Scotland 's Future?**

The document describes the basis for a National Conversation about Scotland's constitutional future, describing how devolution might be possible and the additional steps needed for independence.

#### **What happens next?**

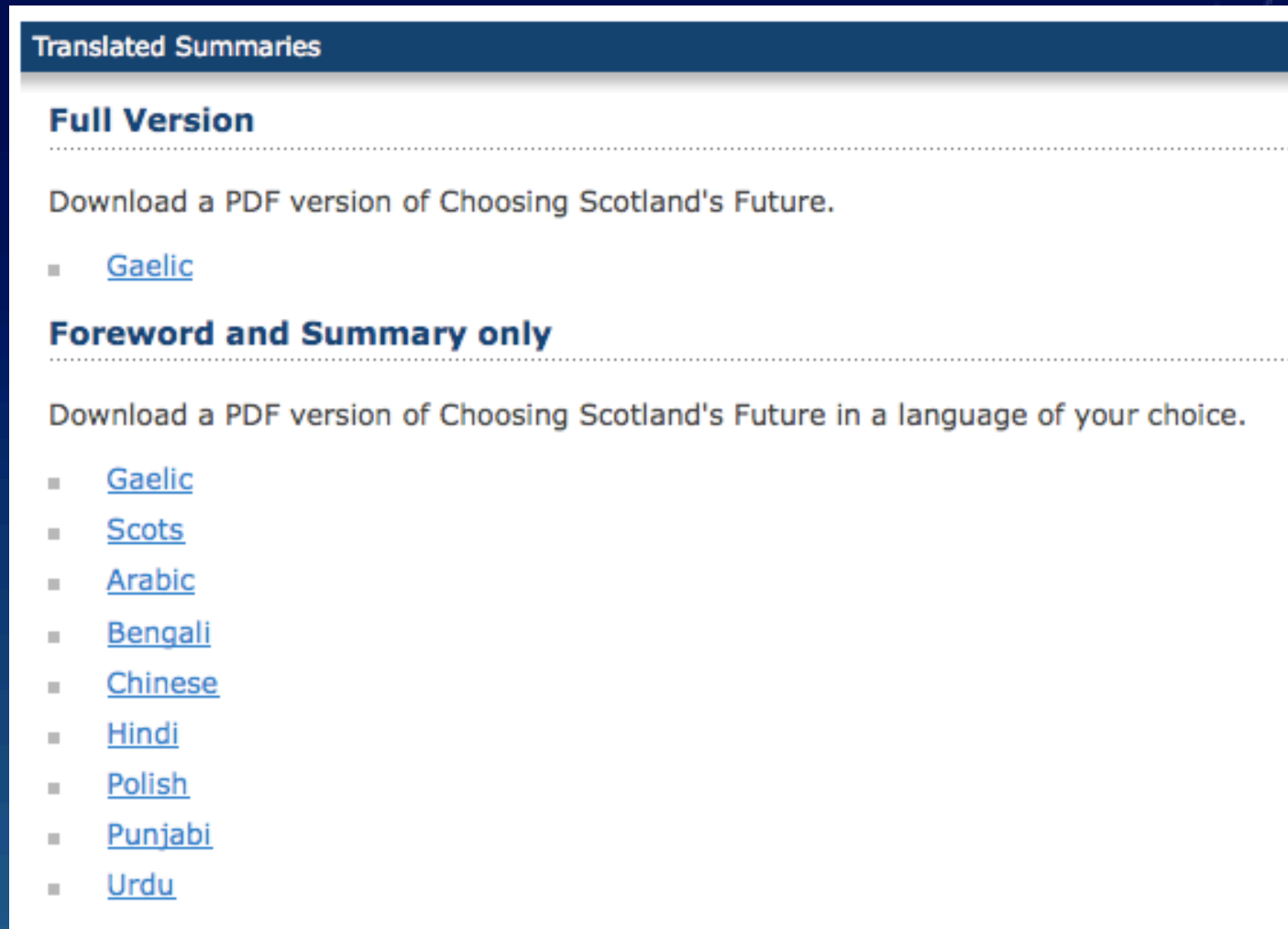
The paper invites people to sign up for the National Conversation - indicating how they want to contribute. The paper also invites people to suggest how the conversation would best be structured to ensure the greatest participation. A website and the public are invited to contribute. There will be public events and further publications.

#### **What is the Government's view?**

The Government is a Scottish National Party Government and it states clearly that it intends to make the case for independence to a wide range of views in Scotland and the Parliament, and the paper explores how devolution could be extended in the interim.

# V. National Conversation & e-Dem (cont.)

## Translated Docs:



The screenshot displays a webpage with a dark blue header containing the text "Translated Summaries". Below the header, there are two sections separated by dotted lines. The first section is titled "Full Version" and contains the text "Download a PDF version of Choosing Scotland's Future." followed by a single bullet point with the link "[Gaelic](#)". The second section is titled "Foreword and Summary only" and contains the text "Download a PDF version of Choosing Scotland's Future in a language of your choice." followed by a list of ten bullet points, each with a language name as a link: "[Gaelic](#)", "[Scots](#)", "[Arabic](#)", "[Bengali](#)", "[Chinese](#)", "[Hindi](#)", "[Polish](#)", "[Punjabi](#)", and "[Urdu](#)".

**Translated Summaries**

**Full Version**

Download a PDF version of Choosing Scotland's Future.

- [Gaelic](#)

**Foreword and Summary only**

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# V. National Conversation & e-Dem (cont.)

Make Your Voice Heard:

Forums

## **Make your voice heard**

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**Thursday, August 14, 2008**

The Scottish Government is committed to bringing forward a referendum bill in 2010 but it be the people who ultimately decide Scotland's constitutional future. You points made by others.

First Minister Alex Salmond said:

"We are aware - as we will always be - of the sovereignty of our people, that the Scottish people are working in Scotland - and with no-one else."

# V. National Conversation & e-Dem (cont.)

Make Your Voice Heard:

Forums

## 85. Frank - Highland

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Wednesday, October 1, 2008 12:55

Kev, it is hardly surprising that MSPs of all parties are unwilling to consider the abolition of the Scottish Parliament, turkeys and Christmas spring to mind. Anyway if you are confident that the abolition option would command only Lord Sutch levels of support, you should have no qualms about including it as an option in any referendum. Secondly, with regard to your "follow follow" comment, I presume this is a sectarian jibe based on the misapprehension that I am a Rangers supporter. I am not even a Protestant. Finally and more importantly, you seem to suggest that I should leave Scotland if I am unhappy with the idea of British nationality being removed from me against my will. I was born here, have lived here for the majority of my life and I like it here, so I'm not leaving - why should I? That does not mean I will ever accept separation from the United Kingdom.

## VI. Round-Up

- Deliberation as a passion killer?
- NatConv site
  - no registration requirement
  - moderation
  - 'core information'
  - links to MSP blogs (graffitti?)
  - All supplemental to online activity.
  - serendipity?



## VI. Round-Up

- Enclave deliberation and cyber-nats
  - ”... in deliberating bodies, high-status members tend to speak more than others, and their ideas are more influential - partly because low-status members lack confidence in their own abilities, and partly because they fear retribution.” Sunstein
- French revolution, Chinese officials...