



Political Studies Association

Scottish Independence - latest predictions with 3 months to go

Media Briefing Pack

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Political Studies Association Briefing on the Scottish Referendum for London based media: 17 June 2014

The State of the Referendum Race

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This is a brief presentation of some of the key findings from the commercial opinion polls that have been conducted to date in the referendum. A comprehensive collection of the results of referendum polls can be found at whatscotlandthinks.org, together with regular commentary on the portents of the polls.

The first half looks at the relative standing of Yes and No in the polls. The second half examines what appear to be the key factors influencing people's preferences (Slide 2).

The last week has seen a flurry of renewed excitement about the state of the referendum race. As Slides 3 and 4 (from which those who say they do not know how they will vote have been excluded) show, both Survation (47%) and Panelbase (48%) have put the Yes vote at a record high. However, while a third poll from ICM (Slide 5) showed an increase in Yes support compared with last month, the result (45% Yes) was not exceptional as compared with previous ICM polls.

Individual polls can of course produce exceptional results simply as a result of 'sampling error', the random variation to which all polls are subject. We are on safer ground looking at the broader trend across a series of polls.

Whatscotlandthinks.org now maintains a regular poll of polls (Slide 6). This is simply the average level of Yes and No support in the last six polls (once Don't Knows have been excluded). It currently stands at Yes 44%, No 56%. As can be seen (Slide 7), this poll of polls has moved up and down in recent weeks, but the No lead has consistently been narrower in this period than it was last year or earlier this year.

An even longer view can be obtained by calculating the average Yes and No vote in all polls conducted during relatively long time periods. As Slide 8 shows, doing so confirms that the No lead has narrowed during the course of this year. The Yes vote increased on average by four points during the winter, following the publication of the Scottish Government's White Paper on independence in late November and the Chancellor's announcement in mid-February that an independent Scotland would not be allowed to share the pound with the rest of the UK. Until the most recent excitement, however, the polls had appeared more stable during the spring, though Yes support has edged up on point on average since the end of March.

There are though substantial differences between the results being obtained by different pollsters. As Slide 9 shows, during the course of this year three pollsters, Panelbase, ICM and Survation have put the Yes vote on average at around the 45% mark. Three other pollsters, TNS BMRB, YouGiv and Ipsos MORI put the figure closer to 40%. We do not know which set of pollsters is the more accurate. Clearly they

paint a very different picture of how close Yes are to the winning post. Any average figure, as shown at whatscotlandthinks.org assumes that the truth lies somewhere in between the two, and at any point in time can vary depending on the particular mix of pollsters that have polled most recently.

Most polls find that around 15% say that they do not know what they will do. This is not a particularly high number as compared with the proportion who said they did not know how they would vote in polls taken just 6-8 weeks before the referendum on introducing the Alternative Vote in elections to the House of Commons. However, TNS BMRB report a far higher proportion of Don't Knows. The explanation seems to be that TNS BMRB ask people what they *intend* to do in September rather than what they *think* they will do or what they would do if the referendum were held now.

Still, that suggests that there is not a clearly defined group of people who are undecided. Rather TNS BMRB's own polling (Slide 11) suggests that people lie at different points along a spectrum of indecision. Just over half are apparently resolute in their determination to vote Yes or No. The remainder are to varying degrees open to persuasion – but many do have a current view. That suggests that if there is to a significant change in the polls then one campaign or the other will have to persuade people to change their (provisional) minds rather than simply win over the wholly undecided.

The Scottish Government's White Paper puts forward three key arguments in favour of independence. First, Scotland is a nation and should be able to govern itself. Second, an independent Scotland would be a more equal society, more in tune with the country's social democratic ethos. Third, independence would help boost Scotland's economy.

The first of these arguments is partly about identity. And those who feel Scottish rather than British are more likely to say they will vote Yes (Slide 12). However, a strong sense of Scottish identity does not appear to be a sufficient condition for people to cast a Yes vote, while many people feel a dual sense of identity. In any event, people's sense of identity is relatively stable over time, and thus there is little prospect of winning votes by trying to change people's sense of identity (Slide 13).

People, might, however, conceivably change their minds about whether independence would bring about a more equal society or a more prosperous one. According to regular polling by ICM on these two subjects (Slides 14 and 15) people are somewhat more inclined to accept both arguments now than they were last autumn, though on the economy pessimists still outnumber optimists.

However, people's views about the economic consequences of independence appear to matter much more to voters in deciding whether to vote Yes or No than do their beliefs about its implications for equality (Slide 16). Nearly everyone who thinks that independence would be good for Scotland's economy say they will vote Yes, while conversely hardly anyone who thinks it would be bad for Scotland's economy state indicate that they will vote No. In contrast only around two-thirds of those who think an independent Scotland would be a more equal society go on to say they intend to vote Yes, while one in five of those who believe there would actually be more inequality say they still intend to vote Yes.

Moreover, as Slide 17 shows, the size of the No lead in ICM's polls has moved in line with the level of pessimism about the economy. The more pessimists that have outnumbered optimists in a ICM poll the bigger the No lead has tended to be. In contrast changes in perceptions of the consequences of independence for the degree of equality show little relationship with the size of the No lead

These findings from the commercial opinion polls on the importance of economic perceptions in shaping which way people will vote reflect the more extensive analysis of Scottish Social Attitudes data that is published today as part of the 31st British Social Attitudes report (freely available at www.bsa-31.natcen.ac.uk).

So, as Slide 18 notes, the referendum race has become closer, though important differences between the polls mean that we are not clear how close the race is. People's sense of national identity provides an important backdrop to the referendum, but evidently does not settle the issue on its own in the minds of many voters. Thus much of the campaign is focusing on the practical consequences of independence and staying in the Union – and above all the perceived economic consequences. The race looks unlikely to become any closer unless the Yes side can persuade more people of the merits of their economic case.

Devolution deficit: how the promise of further devolution can save the Union

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As the Scottish referendum campaign moves into the final three months the pro Union parties have emphasised their commitment to more devolution should Scotland choose to remain in the Union. Recently the Conservatives outlined plans to devolve additional tax raising powers to the Scottish Parliament, allowing it to raise 40% of the money it spends. According to the Strathclyde Commission “the Scottish Parliament should be responsible for setting the rates and bands of personal income tax in Scotland”. The Tory plans would also give Holyrood the additional responsibilities for welfare policies north of the border. Further devolution is also promised by Labour and the Liberal Democrats. Like the Tories, Labour's proposals would also give the Scottish Parliament the power to raise 40% of its total budget, and devolving three quarters of the 20p tax rate and control over housing benefit. The Liberal Democrats suggest that, “income tax paid by Scottish taxpayers should be almost entirely the responsibility of the Scottish Parliament” and should raise 50% of the money it spends and have control over income, capital gains and inheritance tax.

The SNP might be excused in thinking that the commitment to devolution amongst the major parties is as much a matter of electoral expediency as a matter of principle. The first wave of the British Election Study internet panel survey carried out between February 20th and March 9th, shows that almost three-quarters of Scottish voters want more devolution. Moreover, even amongst those intending to vote ‘no’ a majority (57%) say they want some or many more powers for Scotland (compared to 96% of ‘Yes’ voters).

The BES also asked about which institution voters thought should be responsible for 6 key policy areas (welfare, NHS, schools, defence, taxes and the police). Of these, defence was the only policy domain that a majority of Scottish voters thought should be reserved for the U.K Parliament. Whilst policy areas that are already devolved (schools, police, and the NHS) do very little to separate the ‘yays’ from the ‘nays’, those wanting devolution of tax and welfare policy lean towards ‘Yes’ but not decisively. A significant minority of these voters wanting more tax and welfare powers intend to vote No, suggesting that promises of more devolution do have the potential to shore up the ‘Better Together’ support.

What really matters then is not just the level of support for devolution but the extent to which supporters of further devolution think their aspirations will be met within the Union. Overall half of voters think that devolution will happen even if Scotland votes ‘No’. Figure 1 below divides the electorate into 4 groups depending if they want more devolution or not and whether they think it will happen¹. Crucially the largest group is those that want more devolution but think it will happen anyway (41%). Of these only 35% say they will vote ‘Yes’ in September. Contrast this with the 71% of those wanting more devolution but not expecting it who intend to vote yes. In other words wanting devolution is not sufficient for support for independence. It has to be accompanied by a belief that this will not be achieved in the Union.

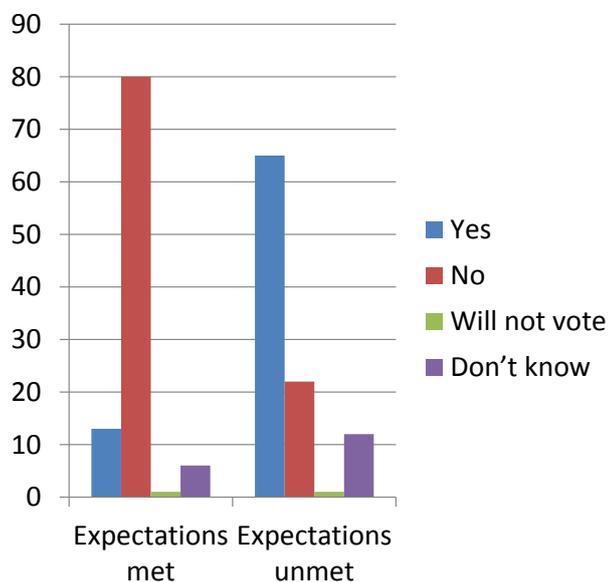
¹ ‘Don’t knows’ are excluded from table so does not add to 100%

Figure 1. Devolution preferences and expectations: proportion of total BES sample by sub-group².

		Want more devolution	
		NO	YES
Think devolution will happen anyway	NO	11%	26%
	YES	9%	41%

Another way of looking at this is to count everyone who expects to get less devolution if Scotland votes ‘No’ than they would like. By this definition, 42% of Scottish voters have a devolution-deficit, two-thirds of whom intend to vote ‘Yes’. In contrast 80% of the rest say they will vote ‘No’ (Figure 2). The Yes Scotland campaign therefore has two related problems. One is that not enough voters are convinced that their demands will be unmet within the Union. The other is that even amongst those who do not expect the Union to satisfy their wishes, a substantial minority say they vote ‘No’ anyway or are undecided.

Figure 2. Referendum Vote intention by ‘devo-deficit’



To test whether the devolution-deficit matters to support for independence, even after taking other factors into account, we use a method called logistic regression modelling. The table below list the factors which contribute most to explaining whether respondents said they would vote yes. Other factors included in the model but which were not statistically significant were Scottishness, age and gender. Overall, the model correctly ‘predicts’ 93% of cases.³ The results of the model underline the importance of the perceived economic impact of independence, whether in terms of the effect on the personal economic situation of voters or on the economy as a whole. Those

² Wording for the two questions is provided below.

³ This means that in 93% of cases the observed voting intention was the same as that predicted by the model.

saying it is very or quite likely that they would be personally better off under independence were nine times as likely to say they will vote yes after allowing for other factors. By contrast those thinking it likely that the general economic situation in Scotland will be worse were nearly ten times less likely to support independence. Approval of the Scottish Government's performance was also associated with higher levels of support for 'Yes', perhaps for obvious reasons. The large number of Scottish voters who are unsure what will happen under independence are much less likely to vote 'Yes', suggesting the fear of the unknown could still play an important part in the final outcome. What is of note to the devolution debate is that the model confirms the importance of the promise of further devolution: even after allowing for all these other factors, those who expect to get less devolution than they would like, and those who want more tax raising powers, are much likely to vote Yes.

Table 1. Factors affecting 'Yes' vote in order of statistical importance⁴

1. General economy worse under independence
2. Personal economic impact
3. Scottish Government approval
4. Uncertainty about independence
5. Wants Scottish tax raising powers
6. Devo expectations met
7. Born in Scotland
8. Believe can keep the £

So the British Election Study data clearly demonstrates a high level of demand for more devolution, but unfortunately for the Yes campaign, it also shows a large proportion of voters think this will be achieved without independence. With the Yes side still trailing in the polls they will need the support of those who are still undecided. Eight percent of the BES sample said they were very likely to vote in the referendum but hadn't decided which way. The good news for Alex Salmond is that that this 8% are somewhat less likely than the sample as a whole to expect devolution preferences to be met if Scotland remains in the Union. Whilst the result remains unclear, whatever the outcome, the possibility of a vote for independence is already re-shaping the future powers of the Scottish Parliament.

Notes

All data from British Election Study Internet Panel wave 1. Data collected between 20th February and 9th March 2014

Question wording

If Scotland votes to remain part of the United Kingdom, **should** the Scottish Parliament have more powers than it does at present, fewer powers, or should the Parliament's powers stay about the same as they are now.

⁴ Order is determined by the standardised regression coefficient.

And if Scotland votes to remain part of the United Kingdom, do you think that the powers devolved to the Scottish parliament **will** change?

Labour devolution proposals:

http://s.bsd.net/scotlab/default/page/file/26e0eb4bdf4c775d14_ram6b81bk.pdf

Liberal Democrat proposals:

<http://scotlibdems.org.uk/files/Federalism%20the%20best%20future%20for%20Scotland%20web.pdf>

Conservative proposals:

http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wpcontent/uploads/2014/06/Strathclyde_Commission_14.pdf

Political Studies Association: Media Briefing 17 June 2014

Young voters in the Scottish independence referendum

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Key findings

- Under 18 year old voters largely oppose independence (64% no compared to 36% yes when those undecided are excluded)
- There has been an increase for yes in this age group compared to 2013 (by 8 percentage points from 28%)
- Voter turnout expressions have risen with 72% saying that they are very or rather likely to vote in the referendum
- 62% of eligible voters still wish they had more information before finally deciding (2013: 67%); yes supporters on average now feel somewhat more knowledgeable than no supporters
- The most commonly used news sources by 14-17 year olds are social media and broadcasting programmes
- The media type associated with the greatest informational value is the print newspaper
- Expectations about the economy in an independent Scotland are the strongest correlate to voting intentions of young people (similar to adults)
- 14-17 year olds are less likely to prioritise their Scottish identity over their British identity compared to adult age groups
- 14-17 year olds are substantially more favourable towards the European Union than 18-24 year olds and adults overall

Executive summary

A distinctive feature about the referendum on Scottish independence in September 2014 is the lowered voting age allowing 16 year olds to take part in a country-wide poll in Scotland for the first time. As under-18 year olds usually are not part of the electorate they tend to be disregarded from electoral studies. Because of this reason we conducted a telephone survey of those under 18 eligible to vote in September. In April/May 2013 this included 1016 14 to 17 year olds (of whom nearly all will be 16 at the time of the vote. This year we repeated the survey with 1006 respondents aged 14-17 again in April and May of whom 726 will be 16 on 18 September. The survey is the only comprehensive and representative survey of this particular age group in relation to the referendum.⁵

The results for 2014 showed that of those currently less than 18 years old, but of eligible voting age on 18 September, 29% would vote yes, 52% no and 19% are undecided. Once those undecided are disregarded, yes support is at 36% and no at 64%. On the one hand this represents an increase by 8% compared to 2013 (when yes was at 28% and no at 72%), however no retains a stronger lead in this age group than in the overall adult population. Of the polls conducted over April and May the lowest recorded yes vote stood at 39%, though most polling companies saw it above 40%. Under 18-year olds are also less likely to vote yes than the next older age group of 18-24 year olds. In the recent Ipsos Mori⁶ poll conducted at the end of May for example 16-24 year olds recorded a 45% support for yes once undecided respondents were discarded.

The turnout amongst the newly enfranchised people can be expected to be high. While last year 66% showed a high intention to vote (40% saying they would be very likely and 26% that they would be rather likely to take part), the number increased to 72% (with 51% being very likely and 21% rather likely to vote). This puts the youngest voters close to the where many polls see adults in terms of participation likelihood⁷.

However, the majority of eligible voters under 18 still wishes they had more information before finally deciding (62%). There has only been a small increase in those saying they have enough information to make their decision from 33% in 2013 to 38%. This increase is nearly exclusively attributable to a greater feeling of yes supporters

⁵ Details on the methods of the survey and full headline results can be obtained here: <http://aqmen.ac.uk/youngscotsurvey2results>; The survey has been funded by the Economic and Social Research Council's Future of the UK and Scotland programme and is hosted under the umbrella of the Applied Quantitative Methods Network (AQMeN). The team carrying out the research consists of Dr Jan Eichhorn (coordinating the project), Prof Lindsay Paterson, Prof John MacInnes and Dr Michael Rosie (all University of Edinburgh, School of Social and Political Science).

⁶ See <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/Assets/Docs/Scotland/scottish-independence-referendum-tables-june-2014.pdf>

⁷ See <http://www.scotcen.org.uk/media/329095/ssa-13-who-will-turn-up-and-who-will-stay-at-home.pdf>

being better informed. Amongst them the proportion saying they still needed more information dropped from 63% to 52%, while the no levels stayed nearly stable (62% in 2013 and 60% in 2014). On average, young yes voters appear to feel more informed.

Most 14-17 year olds have used some public sources to seek out information that were not based on conversations – only 11% did not. The most commonly used sources were social media, such as facebook or twitter (64%) and TV or radio programmes (63%), followed by online news websites (46%), print newspapers (35%) and publicity materials from the campaigns (30%).

Yes voters had a somewhat higher likelihood of having used any of these sources (the most pronounced difference being for campaign materials which 35% of eligible yes supporters had consulted compared to 27% of no voters). Overall, under-18 year old voters do not attribute the same informational value to all sources. The greatest association with feeling knowledgeable about the referendum was observed for print newspapers (48% of print newspaper readers felt they were informed enough to make a decision compared to only 32% of those who did not use newspapers). The least informational value was associated with online news websites (40% of users said they had enough information compared to 35% who did not consult online news sites).

The 14-17 year olds are similar to adults in some ways: the strongest factor associated with the intention to vote yes or no is the expectation of how the economy in an independent Scotland would do (as has been found for adults repeatedly). Of those who think that the economy would do a lot better, 92% support independence. Conversely, those who think it would do a lot worse nearly unanimously oppose independence (95%).

But there are also important differences between the 14-17 year olds and older age groups that may help to understand why their actual vote differs from adults overall. 14-17 year olds are less likely to favour Scottish national identity over their British identity. This difference to older age groups can already be observed in contrast to those 18-24 year old (using comparison data from the 2013 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey). While about 4 in 10 14-17 year olds say they are equally Scottish and British, only 30% of 18-24 year olds do. However, 31% of the slightly older young people aged 18-24 say they are Scottish only (and not British) compared to only 15% of 14-17 year olds in 2014. In both groups fewer than 10% prioritise their Britishness over their Scottish identity, so it is not about the younger group being less Scottish per se, but they do appear to be less willing to favour one identity over another.

This finding is substantiated further when we look at the attitudes of 14-17 year olds towards Britain’s role in the European Union. They are markedly more positive about the EU than adults overall and their 18-24 year old contemporaries. Only 27% of 14-17 year olds wish to leave the EU or have the EU’s powers reduced, compared to 40% of 18-24 year olds and 59% of adults in Scotland overall. 44% of the youngest age group favour to leave things as they are and 23% support more powers for the European Union (compared to 37% and 20% for the 18-24 year olds and 25% and 11% for the adult population overall respectively). Large groups of 14-17 year olds seem to hold a view is favourable about promoting integration into larger unions and an orientation that does not favour border-restricted contexts.

It is notable that the consistency in views mainly applies to those who wish to maintain the status quo: Of those eligible to vote and currently aged under 18, the lowest support for an independent Scotland (22%) is found within the group promoting to leave things as they are with the European Union. The highest amount of support for independence is found both the in the group advocating to leave the EU (37%) – though this is a very small group, as discussed above – and those who wish to increase the EU’s powers.

Appendix with tables of statistics used in the written summary

Table 1: “Should Scotland be an independent country?”

	2013 (%)	2014 (%) (ALL)	2014 (%) (eligible voters only)
Yes	23	30	29
No	58	52	52
Undecided	19	18	19
Total (100%)	1018	1006	725

Table 2: "Should Scotland be an independent country?" – excluding those undecided

	2013 (%)	2014 (%) (ALL)	2014 (%) (eligible voters only)
Yes	28	37	36
No	72	63	64
Total (100%)	827	817	589

Table 3: Likelihood of voting

	2013 (%)	2014 (%) (eligible voters only)
Very unlikely	7	6
Rather unlikely	6	6
Neither likely nor unlikely	19	15
Rather likely	26	21
Very likely	40	51
Don't know	2	2
Total (100%)	1018	725

Table 4: Information need - "Thinking about the debate on Scottish independence so far, would you say..."

	2013 (%)	2014 (%) (ALL)	2014 (%) (eligible voters only)
I have enough information to make a decision	33	39	38
I'd like more information before I finally decide	67	61	62
Total (100%)	1018	1006	725

Table 5: Information need by referendum vote

2013	Yes	No	Undecided
I have enough information to make a decision	37	38	12
I'd like more information before I finally decide	63	62	88
Total (100%)	213	614	191
2014 (eligible only)	Yes	No	Undecided
I have enough information to make a decision	48	41	13
I'd like more information before I finally decide	52	60	87
Total (100%)	214	375	134

Table 6: Information sources used: "Have you followed the news about the debate on Scotland's future using any of the following source? Name as many or few as apply." (2014)

	All (%)	Eligible voters only (%)
Social media, such as facebook or twitter	64	67
TV or radio programmes	63	63
Online news websites	46	48
Print newspapers	35	37
Publicity materials from the campaigns	30	32
None of the above	11	10
Total (100%)	1006	725

Table 7: Relevance of media types for perceptions of having enough knowledge (2014) (eligible only)

	Percentage of users of this source saying they had “enough knowledge to make a decision”	Percentage of non-users of this source saying they had “enough knowledge to make a decision”
Social media, such as facebook or twitter	40	32
TV or radio programmes	41	32
Online news websites	40	35
Print newspapers	48	32
Publicity materials from the campaigns	44	35
None of the above	18	40

Table 8: Attitude towards independence by Expectations of the economy in an independent Scotland – “As a result of independence would Scotland’s economy become better, worse or would it make no difference (2014)

	A lot better	A little better	No difference	A little worse	A lot worse
Yes	92	65	33	3	1
No	4	13	39	89	95
Undecided	4	22	28	8	4
Total (100%)	79	193	186	241	167

Table 9: National identity by age group comparing 14-17 year olds to 18-24 year olds (using Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2013 for 18-24 year olds)

	2013 (%) 14-17	2014 (%) 14-17	2013 (%) 18-24 (SSA)
Scottish, not British	12	15	31
More Scottish than British	39	38	29
Equally Scottish and British	45	39	30
More British than Scottish	3	5	4
British, not Scottish	1	2	5
None of these/Don’t know	0	1	1
Total (100%)	1018	1006	93

Table 10: Views on the European Union by age group – “Which of the following statements comes closest to your view about what Britain’s long-term policy toward the European Union should be?” (2014) – in comparison to 2013 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey data

	2014 (%) 14-17	2013 (%) 18-24 SSA	2013 (%) 18+ SSA
To leave the European Union	5	5	19
To stay in the EU and try to reduce the EU’s powers	22	35	40
To leave things as they are	44	37	25
To stay in the EU and try to increase the EU’s powers	19	16	8
To work for the formation of a single Euro government	4	4	3
Don’t know	7	7	6
Total (100%)	1006	93	1497