

The Demographics Of Independence

A study of polling on and since the 2014 referendum

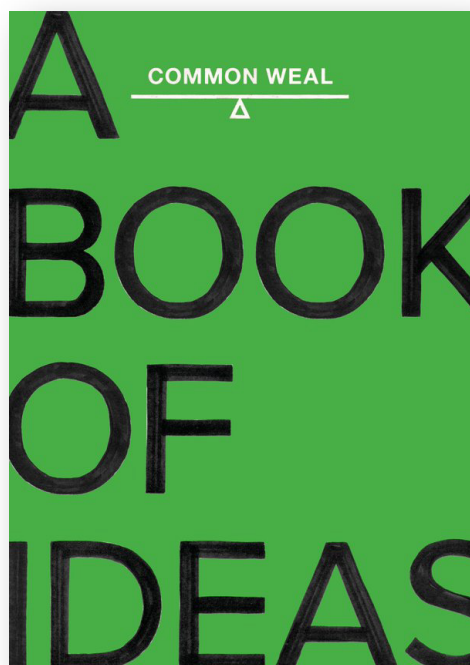
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COMMON WEAL POLICY



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Preface

Despite regular polling before, during and after the 2014 Scottish independence referendum there appears to have been little analysis of which segments of Scotland's society voted in a particular way. Less still has been conducted in the time since with most of the headlines and attention given over to not much more than the overall Yes/No split.

This paper investigates many of the polls published since September 2014 in an attempt to draw out trends which other reporting may have passed over. Through this, the independence movement may be better able to understand how the “materially changed” circumstances which have triggered the upcoming independence campaign may have also affected voters intentions and preferences. By better understanding the current priorities and preferences of voters, it will be easier to build a new independence campaign which specifically targets those voters who need to be convinced or re-convinced of the merits of independence.

Key Points:

- As of January 2017, the overall headline Yes/No poll lies at roughly the same as it was at the time of the first independence referendum in September 2014. Approximately 45% Yes, 55% No.
- Age remains a very strong correlator of voting intention. Voters aged 16-41 are more likely than not to vote Yes whereas voters above 41 are more likely to vote No.
- The median age of Scotland's voting population is 48 implying that there may exist a “natural majority” for No based solely on age.
- A significant rural/urban split has been identified. Council areas with a higher population density were significantly more likely to vote Yes than council areas with lower population density.
- There was a general trend of increasing voter turnout correlated with age although the then newly enfranchised 16-17 year old voters were particularly motivated to take up their first ever opportunity to vote.
- Since 2014 there has been a steady decline in support for independence amongst SNP voters, particularly since “Brexit”. This decline has been largely counter-balanced by an increase in support amongst Labour, Liberal Democrat and (marginally) Conservative voters.
- Since 2014 there has been a steady decline in support for independence among voters within the C2DE social grades. The ABC1 social bracket has been largely static.
- That said, the ABC1 bracket saw a significant “bounce” in support around the time of the EU referendum but this has proven short lived and has since decayed away.
- Gender and age will prove important. Voters of both genders who are aged 16 to 25 years old display a consistent increasingly pro-independence trend. Males aged 25-55 are trending slightly downwards whereas the trend in males aged 55+ is static.
- Since the Brexit vote, support for independence amongst females aged 55+ has fallen precipitously from 37% to 22%. All other female age groups show a rising trend in support for independence.
- Given the disparate nature of the various segments of the Scottish voting population an independence campaign based on targeting any one group or based on the political ideology of any one party would be highly unlikely to succeed.

Introduction

In the two and a half years since the 2014 Scottish independence referendum the debate has never far left the Scottish political consciousness. Almost all political polls since then have put the independence question to those they have polled resulting in a continuous stream of data regarding not just the attitudes towards independence and how they have evolved through the changing circumstances since the vote but also a glimpse at who holds those attitudes and how support for independence has waxed or waned amongst different segments of society. It is vital that those who continue to advocate for independence understand both their current core voting base and those that they wish to win over in the upcoming campaign so that a successful and convincing argument can be placed to the nation. Whilst few democratic movements can ever hope to achieve unanimity, it would do the independence campaign great harm to focus efforts on a strategy or a series of messages which drove away more voters than it won over.

The Demographics of Scotland's Democracy

Between the census conducted in Scotland every ten years and the annual mid-year population estimates conducted by the National Records of Scotland¹, it is possible to measure to a good degree of precision the population and demography of Scotland down to a council area level which is convenient for the purposes of this study as this is also the level at which the results of the 2014 independence referendum were published². This allows a great deal of correlation between various aspects of the two datasets. Outlined in this section shall be some key demographics of the Scottish population which will be vital in understanding the questions and observations examined later.

Population and age distribution

Scotland's population was estimated to be 5,347,300 in mid-2014 rising to 5,373,000 in mid-2015. The minimum voting age for Scottish residents for the purposes of Scottish elections and “local” referendums such as the 2014 independence referendum is 16 which gives a total potential voting pool for mid-2015, assuming 100% registration and turnout, of 4,467,100. The median age of the Scottish voting population (i.e. that aged 16 or above) is approximately 48.

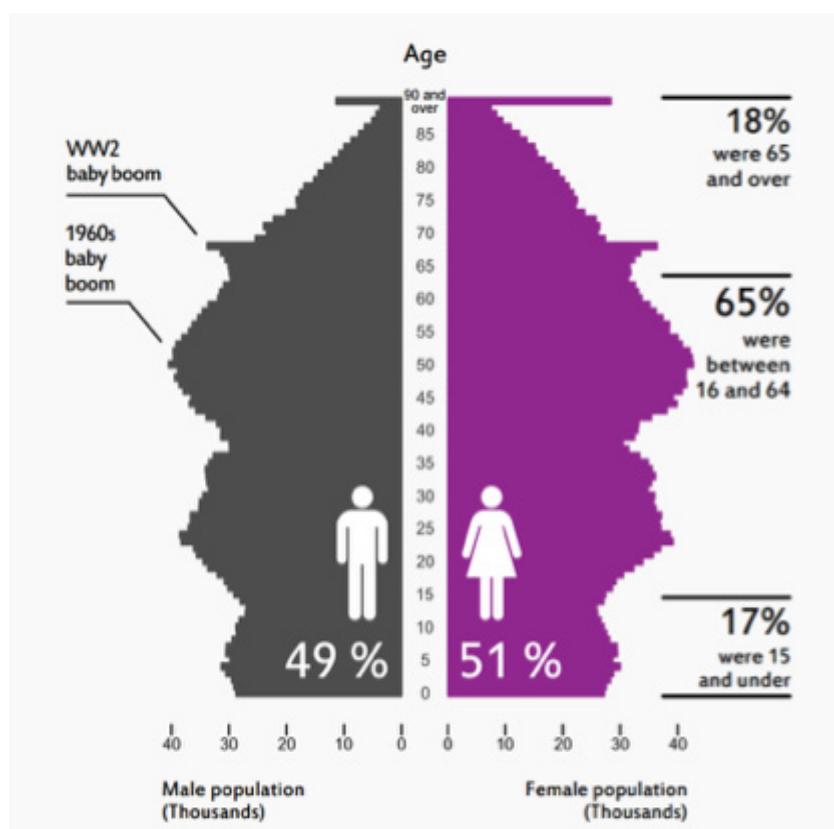
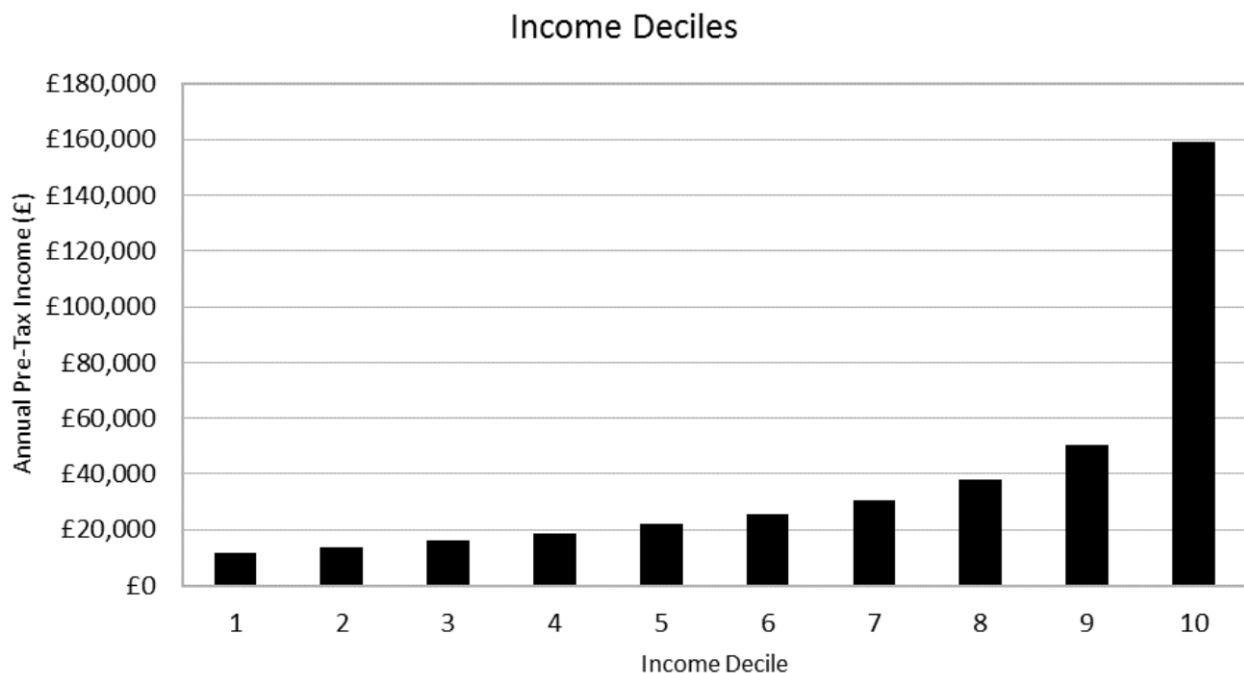


Image Source: National Records of Scotland¹

In terms of age distribution, Scotland, like many Western countries, exhibits a broadly stationary population distribution – where population is more or less distributed evenly until tapering off at older ages – and is beginning to enter a phase of constriction where declining birth rates and other factors reduce population distribution at younger ages relative to older ones. Barring external factors such as a policy of encouraging greater net immigration to Scotland (which may bring with it distinct political perspectives) or an increase in birth rates, this trend is likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

Income Distribution

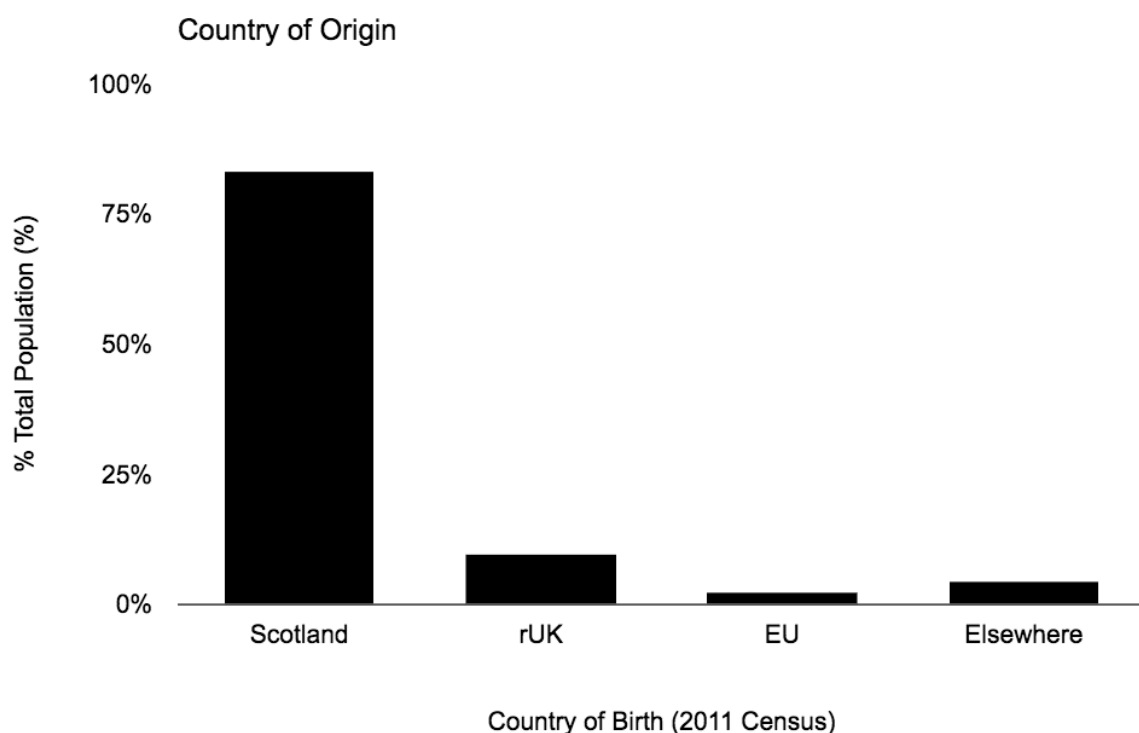
Few robust figures exist for the distribution of income throughout Scotland and those which exist for the UK³ provide Scotland only as a small, statistically less reliable sub-sample. If one assumes, as a first principle estimate, that Scotland's income distribution is broadly similar to that of the UK then a useful if illustrative chart may be drawn.



The median income by this measure is around £22,000 per annum although it should be noted that this figure includes only those people who earn an income therefore excludes those people who are not earning any income at all – estimated by the IFS to be around 22% of the population aged 16-64⁴. If these people are included in the calculations then the median income for the country drops to around £18,500 per annum. For reference, the basic rate income tax band is paid by most people from decile 2 upwards but the £43,000 higher rate income tax band isn't paid until above decile 8 (less than 15% of the overall population pay the higher rate). The £150,000 additional rate tax band is paid by less than 1% of the population.

Country of Origin

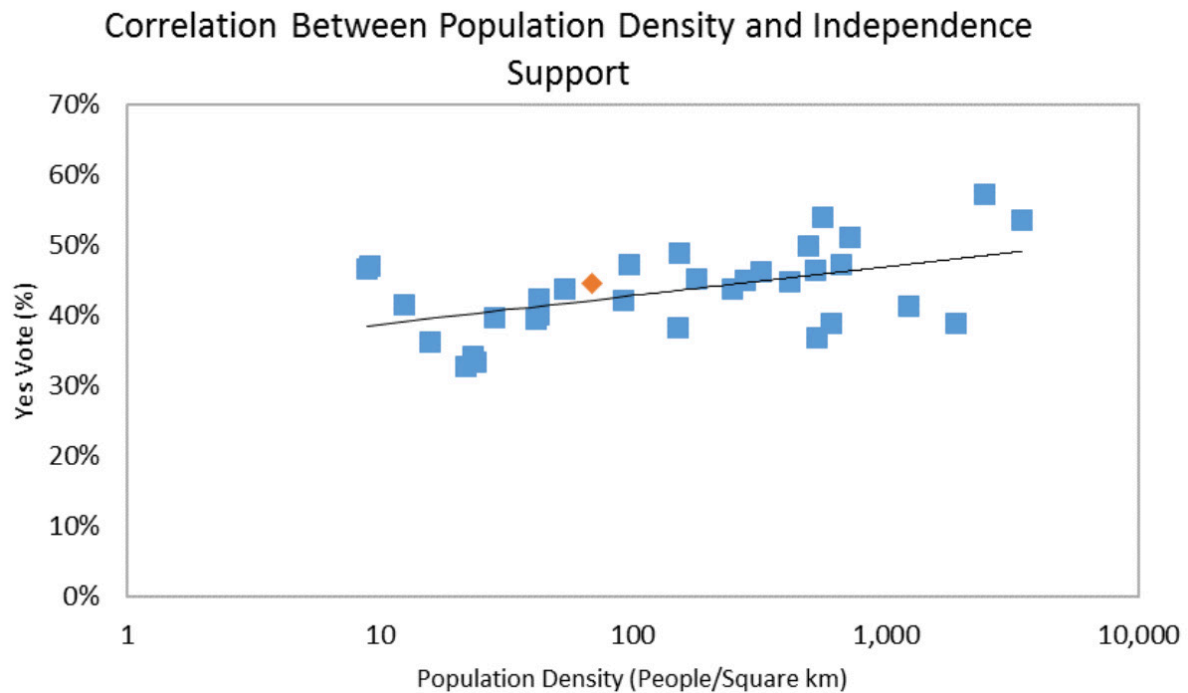
According to the 2011 census, of the 5,295,403 people registered as resident within Scotland, 4,411,884 (83.3%) were born in Scotland, 514,235 (9.7%) were born elsewhere in the UK, 134,910 (2.5%) were born elsewhere in the EU and 234,374 (4.4%) were born elsewhere in the world.



Who voted Yes? Independence support in 2014

The 2014 referendum saw the greatest level of engagement of any democratic event in Scotland's history with an eventual turnout of 84.6% split 55.3% No and 44.7% Yes. Of the 32 council areas only 4 – Dundee City, Glasgow City, North Lanarkshire and West Dunbartonshire – saw majorities for independence within their areas. Whilst the four largest and most densely populated cities in Scotland – Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow – were themselves split on independence there was a general correlation through Scotland with greater population density implying a trend towards greater support for independence.

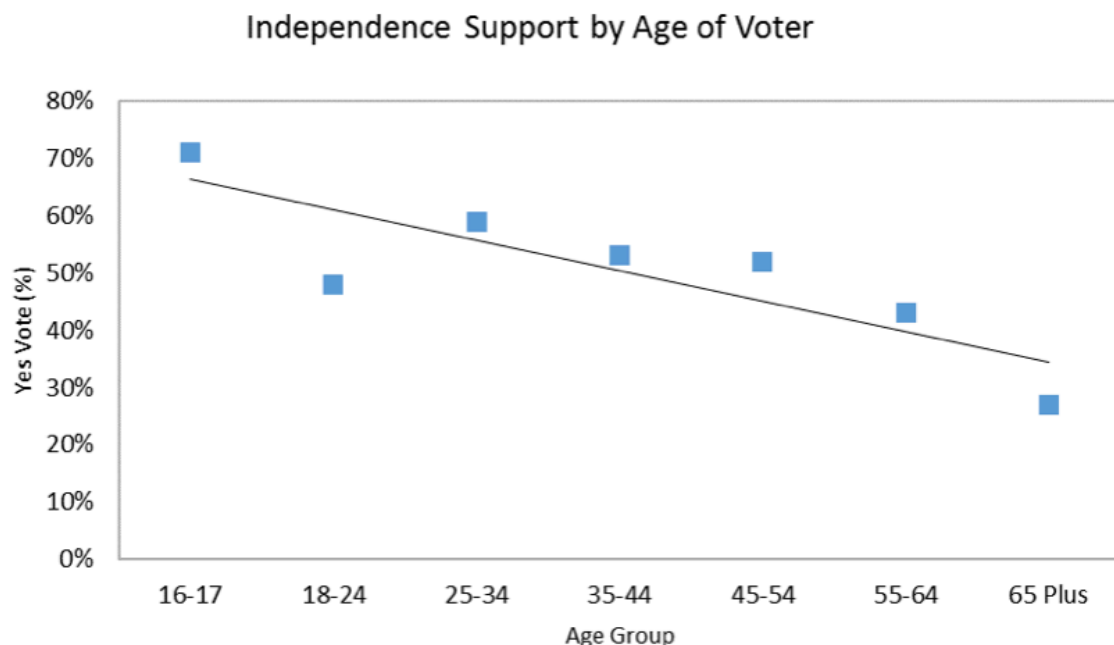
Population Density



This chart suggests a sense of an urban/rural divide in voting intention although the underlying reasons are not entirely clear. Whilst age is certainly a factor (as shall be discussed later) the cross-correlation is not an exact one. It is possible that political party affiliation and the differing abilities of parties to be able to reach different areas of the country plays a role.

Age

Perhaps the most discussed correlation with independence support has been the age of the voter. The well-known “exit poll” conducted by Lord Ashcroft⁵ is the largest and most proximate study of voting independence to the referendum itself. In this, the trend is stark.



As the age of the voter tended upwards then the support for independence drops with the 50% support level reached within the 35-44 year bracket.

This trend is supported directly by the correlation between the council area voting results and census data which shows clear trends as a function of the percentage of the area's population which fall within a particular age bracket. For example, if plotted as a function of the percentage of the council area's population aged 16-25, an upward sloping trend of independence support is found.

Whereas if the council areas are plotted as a function of % of their population aged over 65 and their independence vote the opposite trend is found.

Deeper analysis of this data finds that the age at which 50% of the population support independence is 41 years old which backs up the findings of the aforementioned Ashcroft polling.

One very significant finding in the Ashcroft polling is the impact of age on turnout. Whilst the independence referendum fairly successfully mobilised the newly enfranchised 16-17 year old vote, they were very much the outlier on a trend of decreasing voter engagement amongst younger residents compared to older voters. This, combined with the overall demographics of Scotland greatly suppressed the number of easily “won” Yes voters who actually turned out to vote on the day of the referendum.

If this trend continues going forward into a future independence campaign then special effort to “get out the vote” must be made amongst those groups most likely to support independence although it should be noted that the demographics of Scotland plays against the independence campaign. There are currently around 2.6 people aged over 65 for every 1 person aged between 16-24 which means that a campaign based solely on convincing those already largely convinced and then ensuring that they vote will still not be enough to cross the 50% threshold. Voters amongst people of all ages must be convinced if Scotland is to be an independent country.

Gender and Social Grade

Social grade is a classification system originally developed by the National Readership Survey⁶ although now widely used in other statistical measurement sectors including polling. The definitions of each grade and the approximate percentage of the population which falls into each grade is shown below.

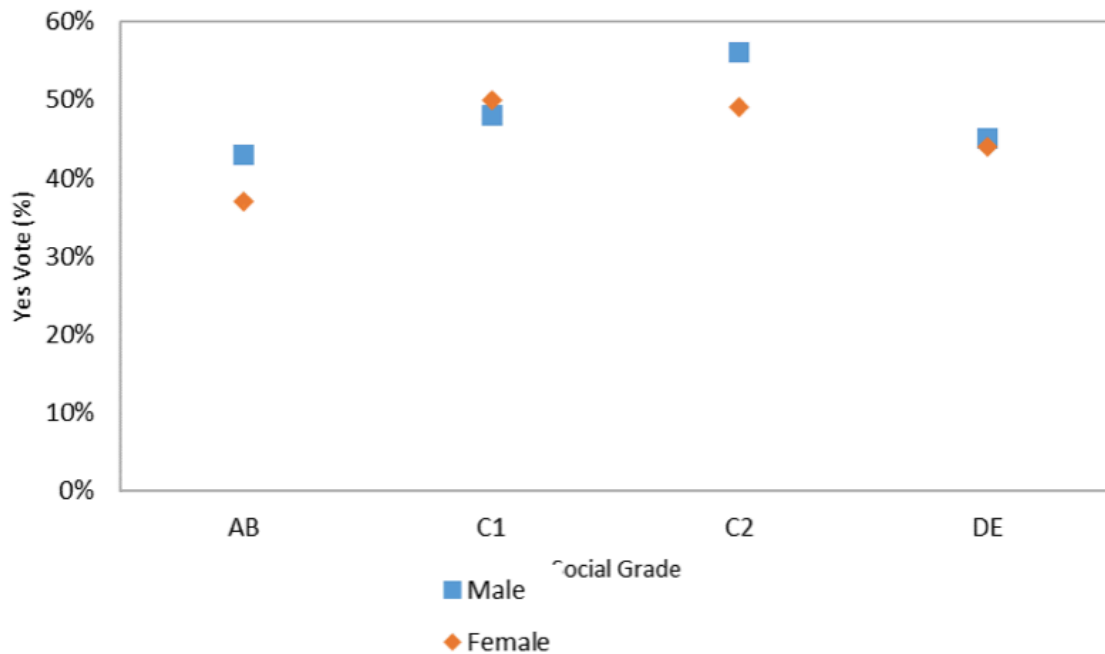
Social Grade	Votes	% of Population (2015)
A	Higher managerial, administrative and professional	4
B	Intermediate managerial, administrative and professional	23
C1	Supervisory, clerical and junior manager, administrative and professional	27
C2	Skilled manual workers	21
D	Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers	16
E	State pensioners, casual and lowest grade workers, unemployed with state benefits only	9

Whilst social grade correlations reasonably well with income it is not an exact substitute. However, very few polls ask questions about income directly and no major poll around the time of the independence referendum did so.

With this in mind, the 2014 Ashcroft poll provided a snapshot of independence support broken down by both social grade and gender.

Here, the trends were less strong than the correlation with age and is likely to be far more influenced by other effects but in the main males were more likely to support independence than females of a similar social grade and the C2DE group were more likely to support independence than the ABC1 group.

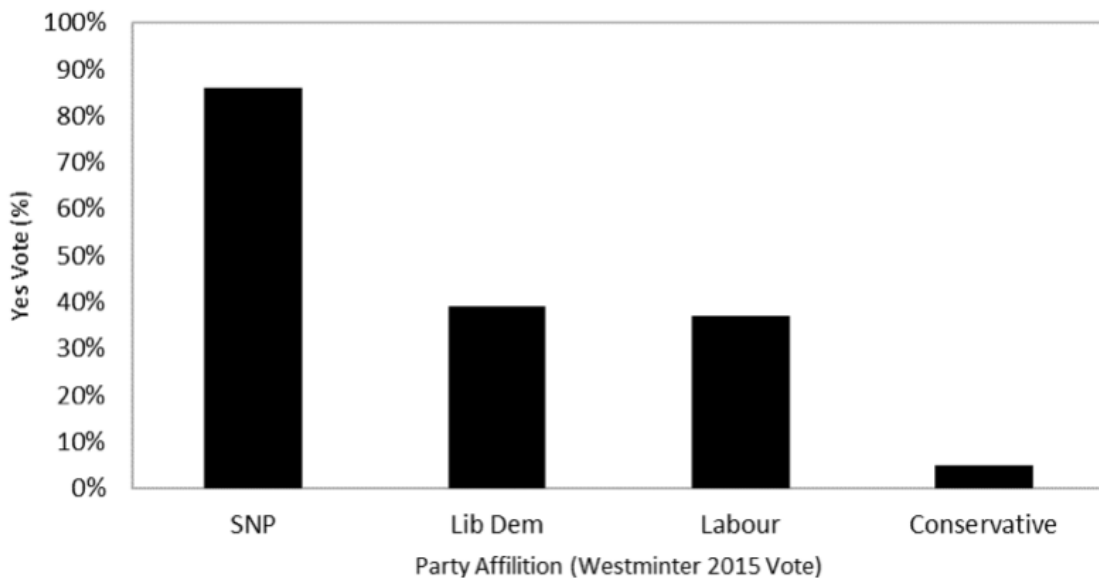
Social Grade and Gender



Party Affiliation

As the 2014 independence campaign ended up split very sharply along political party lines it is perhaps no surprise that party affiliation among voters became a strong correlator of independence preference with Ashcroft finding 85% support for independence amongst SNP voters contrasting with 5% support among Conservative voters.

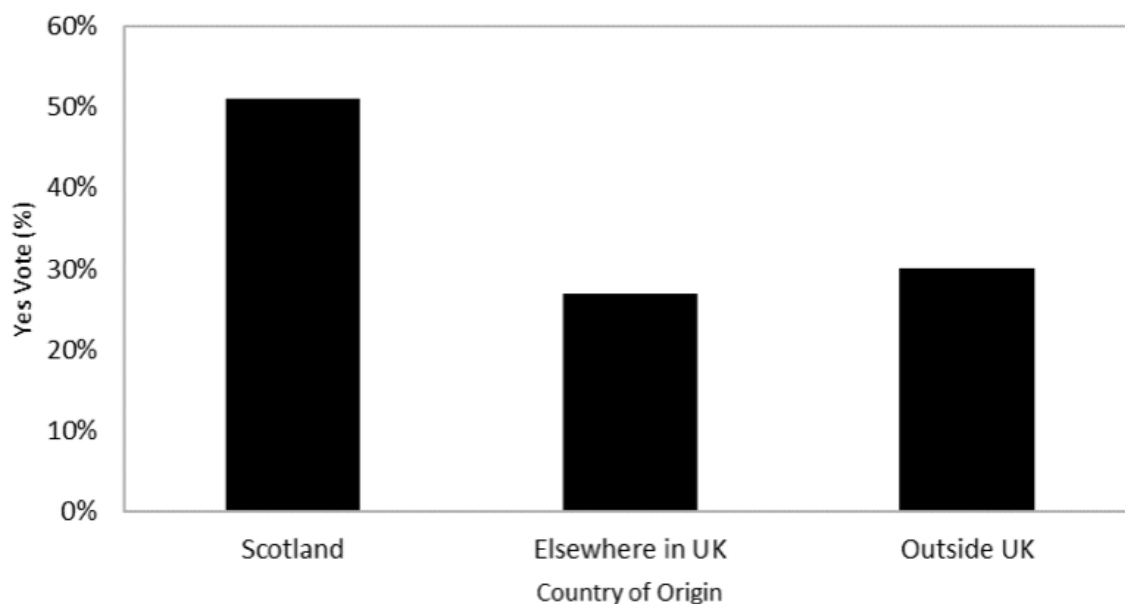
Party Affiliation



Country of Origin

As stated in section 1, whilst Scottish residents born in Scotland make up the majority of the population, significant minorities exist of residents and citizens born elsewhere. These voters often displayed a markedly different voting pattern depending on their point of origin. Voters from outside the UK were particularly affected by rhetoric surrounding either the fate of "immigrants" should border arrangements change or by disputes over Scotland's status within or outwith the EU as a result of independence.

Country of Origin



Unfortunately, a longitudinal study of the trends within these groups was not possible as few polling groups consistently broke down their polling by these categories and those which do often break the categories down into “Scotland”, “England” and “Other” which greatly reduces the ability to assess the impact of factors such as the EU referendum. Remarkably given the circumstances, not one major poll has yet been conducted specifically surveying Non-UK, EU citizens resident in Scotland since the EU referendum.

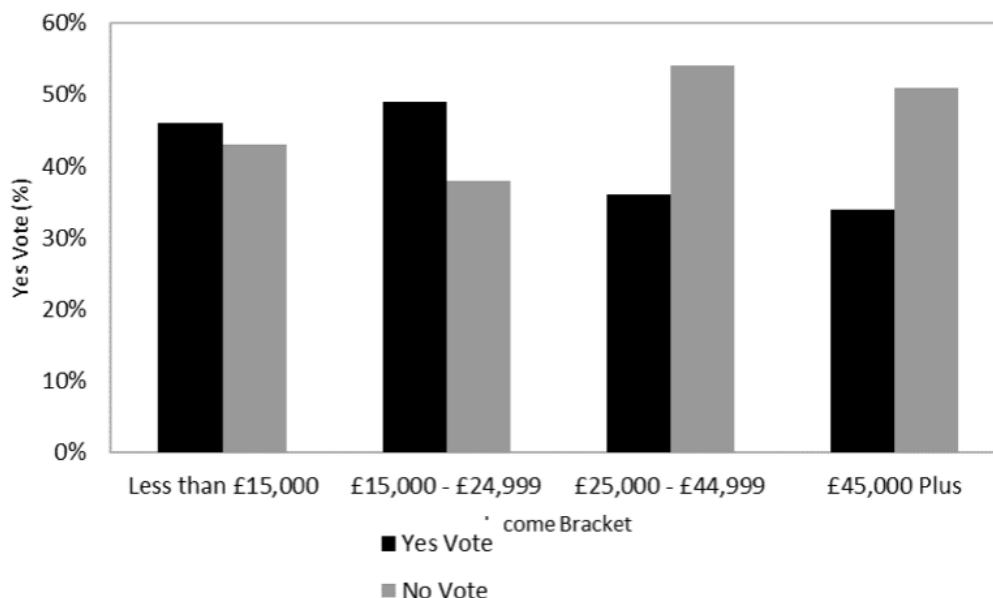
Income

Few if any major polls published studies of the correlation between independence support and personal income in the run up to or in the immediate wake of the 2014 referendum, as mentioned above social grade studies appear to be preferred but these can be an inexact match.

More recently, some groups – notably BMG – have those polled about their income bracket, allowing for this correlation.

This polling shows substantial Yes majorities amongst the lower 50% of earners and even more substantial majorities for No amongst the upper 50% of earners (and particularly amongst the upper 15%). If a decision is made to attempt to convince members of a particular income bracket then this decision must be weighed not only by their current predilection towards voting a particular way but also how many of them would be available to be convinced as well as what the likelihood is of that campaign depressing the vote in another income bracket or demographic.

Income Bracket

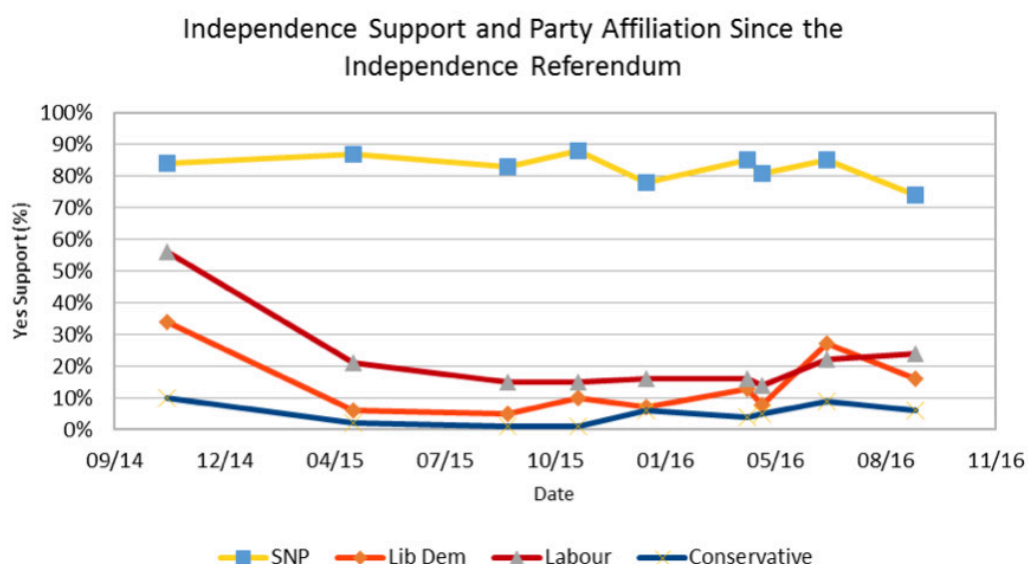


Trends post-2014: Support for independence since the referendum

In addition to the sources used above are the various polls which have been conducted since the 2014 referendum which, whilst consisting of much smaller samples and sometimes involving very small sub-samples do allow a tracking of prevailing trends and give some idea of the changing mood of the Scottish people. However it should be noted that polls taken by different polling organisations may involve different methodologies which limit cross comparisons and occasionally groups may change their methodologies within their own study time line which may affect longitudinal studies. This shall be noted in cases where it may affect particular examples and, as such, any conclusions drawn from them must be regarded as tentative. For this limited study data has been taken from Yougov⁷ and Panelbase⁸ polls since the independence referendum.

Party Affiliation

If the 2014 referendum was polarised along party affiliations, the shift in Scottish politics appears to have become outright divisive as parties compete even amongst their constitutional allies over how strongly they adhere to one line or another. The intense campaigning by the Conservatives, Lib Dems and Labour in particular in the run up to the 2016 Scottish elections served to strip away much of the independence support within their own parties (whether those pro-independence supporters were convinced otherwise or whether they changed party affiliation remains a question for another study).



Since the EU Referendum in June 2016 the trend of independence support amongst the voters of “Unionist” parties has seen a rise which appears to coincide with a rise in independence support amongst EU Remain voters as a whole (although polling data on this particular point is reasonably weak as only a few polls consistently asked about the EU referendum alongside the independence question). This rise in independence support has been coupled with a substantial drop in support for independence within SNP voters which has recently seen independence support within the party's voting base drop below 75% for the first time since 2014. (Note: Few polls consistently ask about independence support within the Greens and other smaller pro-independence parties and where they do, sub samples are often too small to draw firm conclusions).

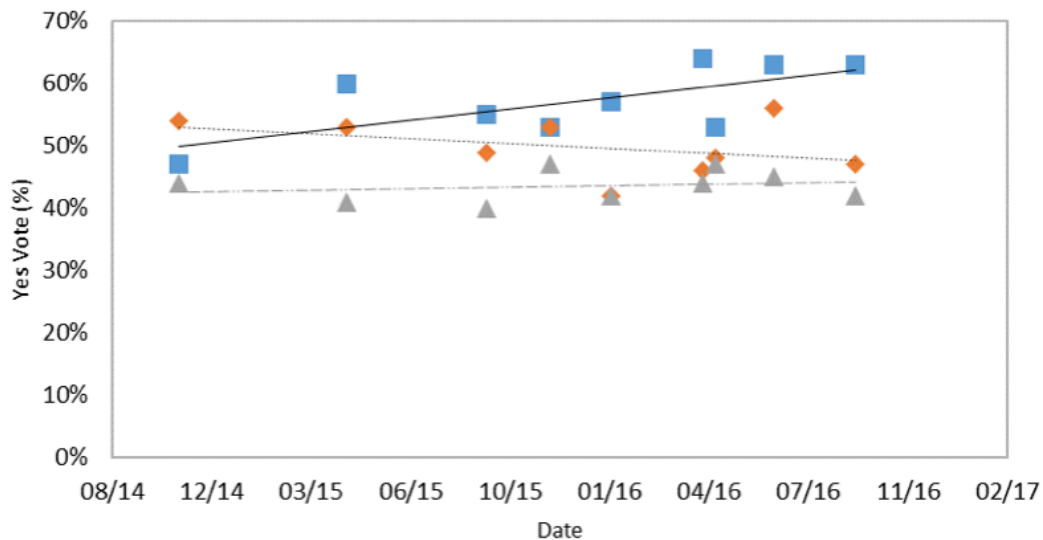
Age and Gender

Whilst YouGov has changed internal methodologies regarding age (particularly by changing age brackets measured) which limits the usefulness of the longitudinal studies, Panelbase has been more consistent and has helpfully broken age down by gender as well.

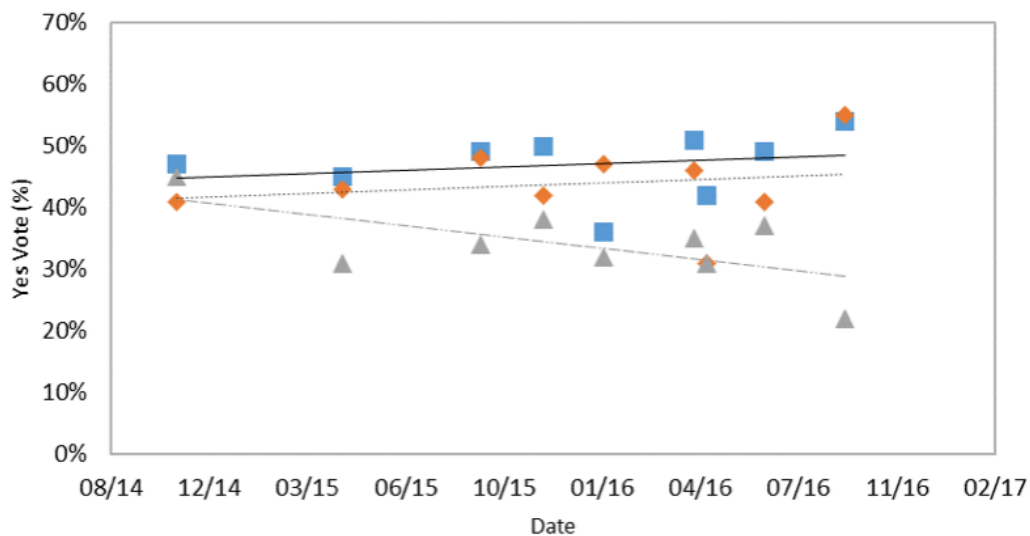
Amongst male voters since the 2014 referendum there have been two consistent trends whereby the younger 16-34 age band has seen independence support rise strongly from just under 50% in the immediate aftermath of the referendum to

above 60% in more recent polls. Much of this rise has come in the wake of the EU referendum and closely matches the trends seen within the EU Remain voting group. The contrary trend is seen within the male 35-54 age group although this is marked more by a steady decline since the referendum rather than a particular “Brexit” shock. The 55 Plus group remains largely unchanged with the trend suggesting not more than a 1% rise in independence support within this group.

Independence Support by Age - Males Only



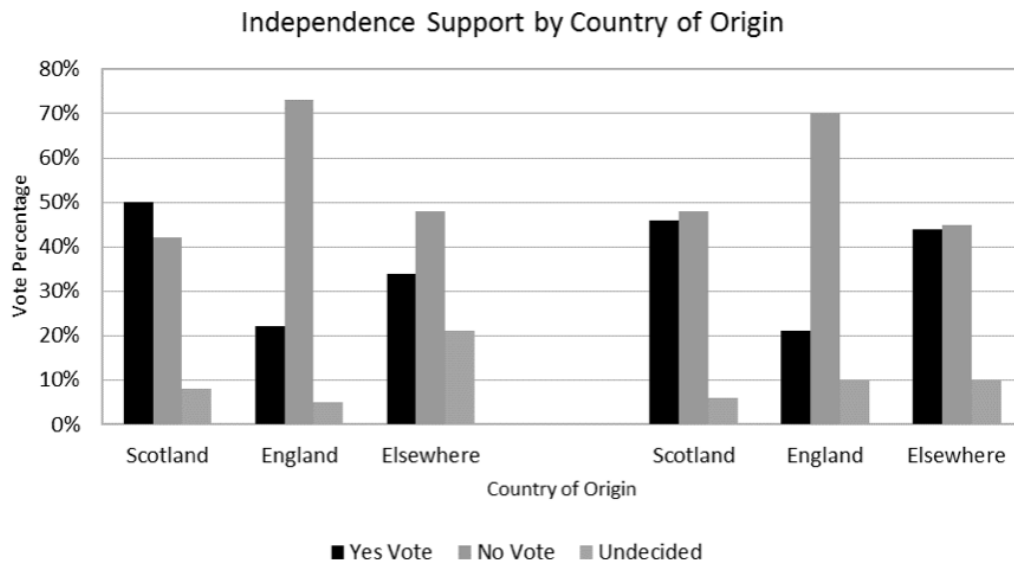
Independence Support by Age - Females Only



A very different picture appears within the Female polling sample. Where both the 16-34 age group and the 35-54 age group have seen a steady rise in support for independence from around 45% to 55% support (with a notable negative “bounce”, since recovered, around the EU referendum), the 55 Plus age group has dropped markedly from 44% to just 22% in recent polls. The idea of the UK leaving the EU appears to have affected this group profoundly as their leaving the Yes group has not resulted in a rise in the undecided vote. Instead, there has been a movement straight to No. The underlying reasons for this movement should be investigated immediately.

Country of Origin

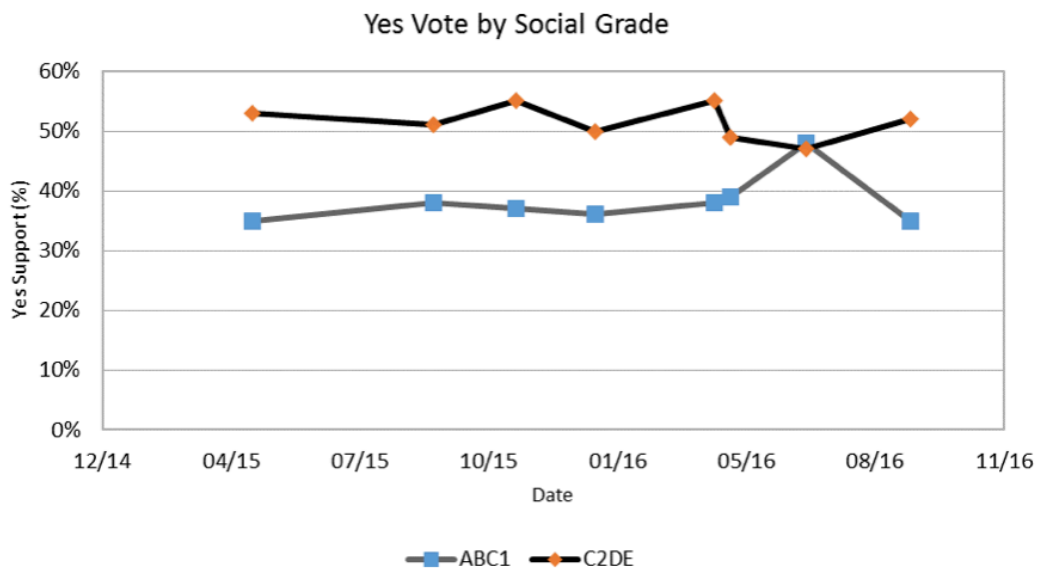
As stated in section 3, few studies have been conducted looking specifically at the voting intention of non-UK, EU citizens or Scottish residents from outside the UK. The studies which do exist separate their samples into voters born in Scotland, England or Elsewhere. Nonetheless, some movement in the Elsewhere group has been noted since 2014 and particularly since the EU referendum. Whilst the No vote amongst voters from Elsewhere has not significantly changed, the Undecided group appears to have substantially moved towards Yes.



Once again, given the circumstances of the EU referendum and the possibility of a second referendum being substantially based on Scotland forming a differential foreign policy from that of the rest of the UK then further studies amongst those groups which may be most affected by these events should be conducted.

Social Grade

If the social grade was not a particularly strong issue at the time of the independence referendum, then it has become one now.



The C2DE group has seen a steady and consistent erosion of Yes support since the date of the referendum and whilst the most recent polls have shown a little recovery it is a movement well within the underlying trend and margin of error. This will become a serious cause for concern if it continues as it speaks of the independence movement failing to hold on to the voters it managed to newly engage in the previous campaign. The effect of the EU referendum has had its impact as well as C2DE have been shown to be the group most in favour of leaving the EU and therefore are the most likely to be disincentivised by a future independence campaign strongly linked to EU membership.

ABC1 however has shown a small, steady rise in Yes support and witnessed a notable positive “Brexit bounce” which was noted in the media at the time and was the likely cause of Yes majorities seen in the independence polls in the immediate aftermath of the EU referendum. This must be cautioned by the observation that this bounce appears to have vanished entirely since then. How this group reacts either to a campaign based on EU membership or on a campaign aimed more at shoring up support amongst Leave voters will also need to be monitored.

Who to Convince

If an independence referendum were conducted today with an 80% overall turnout, a 45%/55% Yes/No split and the overall demographics laid out in the recent polls then the results would look approximately as the table below.

Hypothetical Second Independence Referendum	
Category	Votes
Total Voter Population	4,467,100
Votes Cast (85% Turnout)	3,797,035
Yes Votes (45%)	1,708,666
No Votes (55%)	2,088,369
Vote Gap	379,703
Votes Uncast	569,555

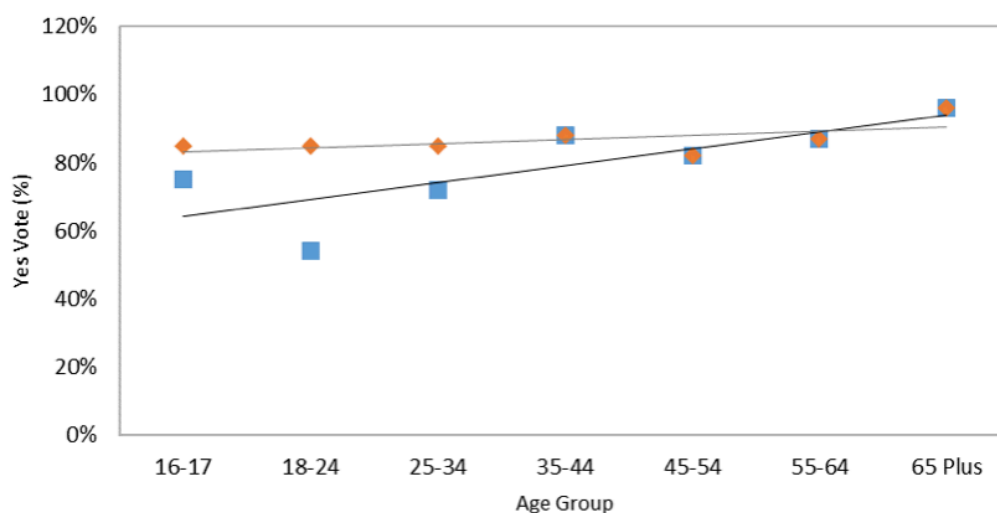
In this scenario there is a vote gap between Yes and No of a little under 380,000 and a number of potential votes not cast of a little under 570,000. Calculating the number of votes required to reach any particular result (say, 60% Yes) is somewhat complicated as adding an uncast vote (i.e. convincing someone already convinced to turn out and vote) will decrease the vote gap by one vote whereas convincing someone who was convinced to vote No to instead vote Yes will reduce the gap by two votes (The Yes vote increases by one but the No vote also decreases by one).

In this section, some attempt shall be made to explore a few scenarios of adjusting the prospective Yes vote within some of the demographic categories outlined in this report which may help the independence campaign close and reverse that gap. It should be further noted that individual voters may well fall into multiple categories (for example, a 23 year old, female, C2 grade, EU migrant) so that simple addition of all of the scenarios below may not result in a closure of the gap. Indeed, it may be that a strategy which attracts a voter due to them belonging to one category may well discourage them due to them belonging to another. That said, few scenarios explored here are mutually exclusive. A multi-strategy campaign is more than possible.

"Get Out the Vote"

In Section 3.2 it was shown that voter age strongly affects both independence support and turnout. Those younger voters most likely to be attracted to independence are also the least likely to vote. One scenario could therefore involve a substantial "Get Out the Vote" campaign which focused on the 16-34 age group and increased the turnout of each age group up to the national 85% average.

Correlation Between Age of Voter and Turnout

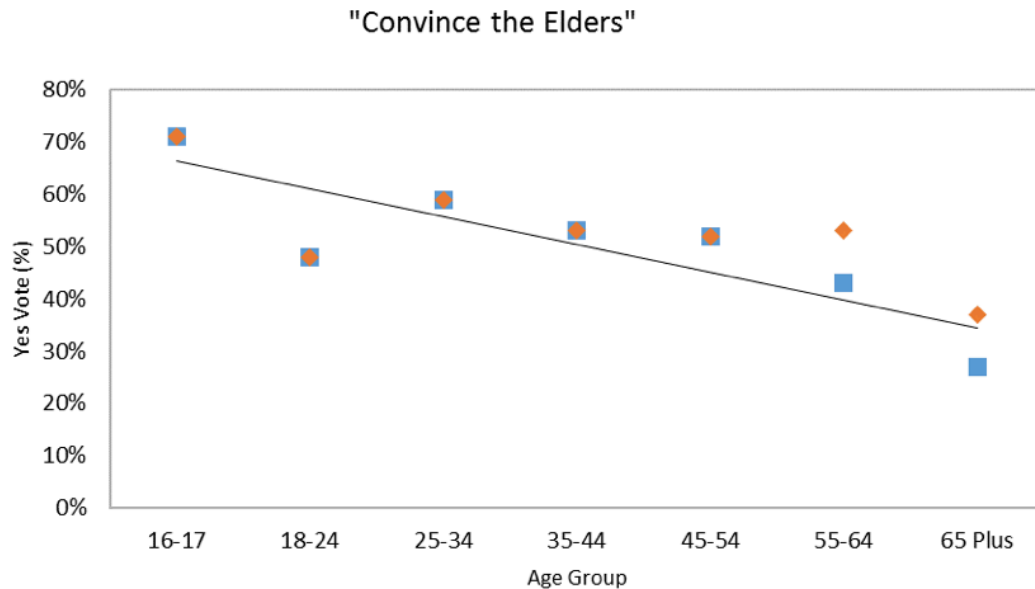


This strategy would see an additional 137,000 Yes voters turn out but if the GOTV campaign was targeted at all voters it would also result in an additional 122,000 No voters so that the overall result would not significantly change. If the GOTV

campaign was more focused and somehow only turned out additional Yes voters aged under 35 then the gap would reduce by about a third.

"Convince the Elders"

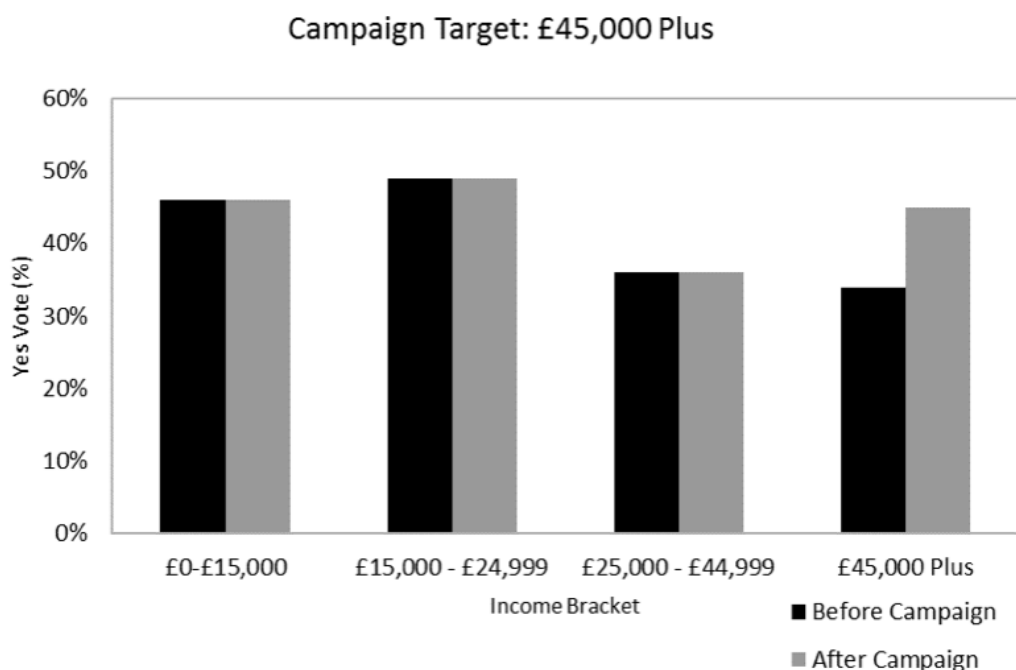
On the opposite end of the age range, the Yes campaign could look at those who are more certain to turn out but less likely to support independence. A campaign designed to swing the vote among the over 55 population may leverage the demographic patterns within Scotland at present.



In this scenario, the voting preference amongst those aged 55 and over is increased by 10 points (such that the 55-64 group approaches the overall average). This would result in over 154,000 fewer No votes and an equivalent rise in the number of Yes votes. This would almost eliminate the voting gap and bring the hypothetical result to within 70,000 votes of the independence campaign winning. Clearly there would be dividends to be won in a campaign based on convincing those who voted for No and for reassuring those older "soft-No's" who didn't necessarily believe in the No message but were sufficiently unconvinced by the Yes campaign or were sufficiently concerned about questions over currency, savings, pensions and the NHS to vote No defensively.

"Convince the Better Off"

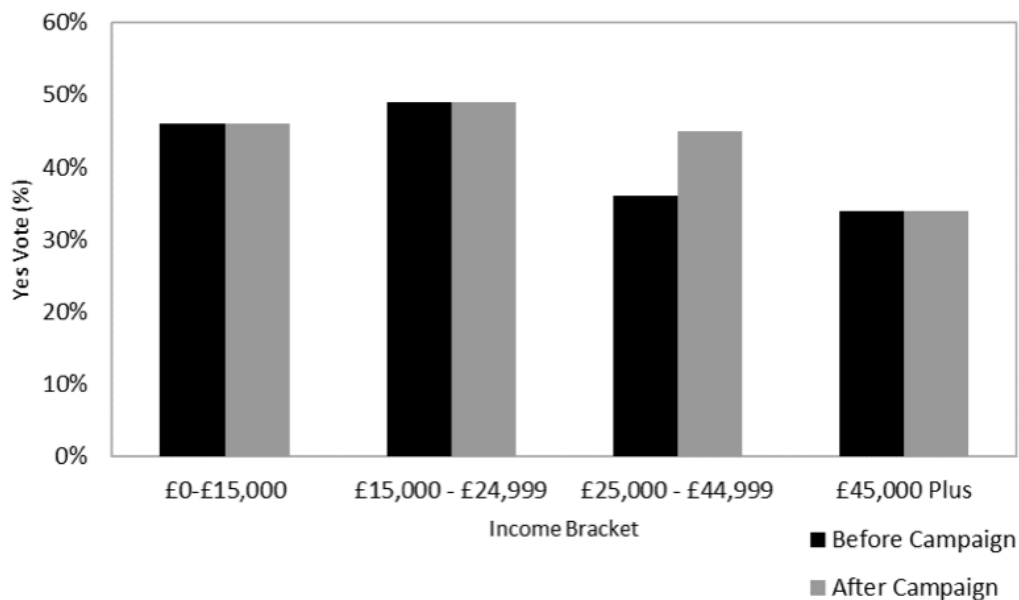
One possible campaign could be to attempt to convince those on higher incomes to support independence. If a campaign centred on promises deemed attractive to those paying the higher income tax rate and above were employed then it could be imagined that it moved their projected voting preference from the current 34% up to the current average of 45%



However, as stated, only approximately 15% of the total working population fall into this income bracket so that the Vote Gap would reduce by less than 120,000. A campaign based on convincing only those 1% of residents who pay the additional rate tax would have a negligible effect on the results.

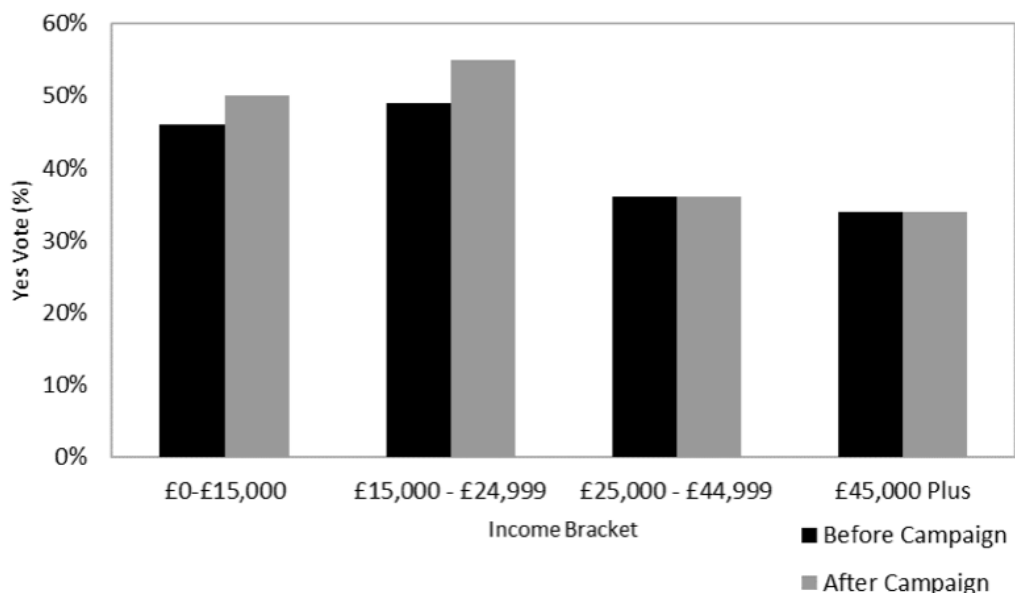
A campaign aimed instead at raising the Yes vote among the £25,000 to £44,999 bracket would impact around 27% of the working population. A swing which increased the Yes vote from 36% to 45% would result in around 92,300 votes moving from No to Yes and therefore a closing of the vote gap by around 182,600.

Campaign Target: £25,000 - £45,000



Finally, a campaign which specifically targeted those on lower than the median income would be one which targeted, by definition, half of all voters.

Campaign Target: £0-£25,000



If this campaign swung just 5% of the £0-15,000 and £15,000-£24,999 brackets from No to Yes and if it attracted an equivalent number of non-voters to vote for Yes then the result would be a gap swing of around 400,000 votes which would be enough to swing the overall result from No to Yes.

Clearly, whilst no inclusive campaign should ever entirely write off any particular segment of voters, a campaign which targeted voters based on income would have to deal with the comparatively high level of income inequality experienced in Scotland. A campaign based on capturing the votes of high earners can only ever target a limited pool of voters (many of whom are strongly disinclined towards independence in the first instance). It may be that a campaign based either on

improving the incomes of those who have the least or a campaign not so focused on income in the first place may result in one better able to convince more voters and therefore better able to achieve its goal of independence.

"Recapture those Lost"

From the longitudinal polling data, it looks as if the two groups most likely to have changed their minds from Yes to No since the 2014 referendum and particularly since the EU referendum are C2DE voters and female voters aged over 55. Were the former groups to be recovered such that their vote preferences returned from the 50% it is currently polling at to closer to the 55% polled during the 2014 referendum then this would reduce the gap by nearly 220,000 votes. If the "lost" female over 55% vote were to be recovered then the gap would swing by over 350,000 votes. This one change alone would cause the referendum to swing to a statistical dead heat with Yes requiring only another 30,000 votes to win the referendum. This particular realisation should highlight the concern raised by the dramatic recent shift within this demographic and lend urgency to efforts to find the causes of it.

Conclusions

This study of the trends since 2014 show that the campaign which convinced 45% of the Scottish population to vote for independence then may not be suitable for a second campaign taking place under "materially changed" circumstances. In particular, the very substantial drop in independence support amongst SNP supporters countered by the rise in support amongst the voting base of the other parties speaks to the conclusion that an independence campaign based on the political policies of any one party would be highly unlikely to succeed. Instead, a more inclusive and less prescriptive campaign which opens the possibility for a new political path for any party to debate may be more attractive.

The longitudinal trend in gender and social grades must also be looked at in extreme detail. Whilst the EU referendum is highly likely to be the catalyst for the second independence referendum it may be that a campaign based solely on this issue would be difficult to navigate and subject to ever shifting externalities as the UK-EU negotiations develop and progress.

It appears that no single campaign strategy will be sufficient to win the next referendum should we enter it in a position similar to that where we are today, but this report has served to highlight several areas in which votes may be won or recovered. It will be up to the ongoing campaign to tailor their messages as they see fit to best impact the overall debate but it is clear that a multi-strategy, multi-party campaign is vital so that various segments can target their particular strengths without feeling too hindered by the diversity of the campaign and without trying to corral said campaign into their own particular vision. As a final point, it would do well to be remembered that independence should not be viewed as an end in and of itself but as a means to greater ends. The fundamental question on any particular topic should never be "Can or should Scotland do or do not do X?" but instead should always be "Should Scotland have the power to ask itself that question?"

ENDS

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² Scottish Parliament Information Centre, “Scottish Independence Referendum 2014: Results”, September, (2014)

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⁴ UK Office of National Statistics, “LFS: Economic Inactivity Rate: Scotland”, September (2016)

⁵ B Ashcroft, “How Scotland Voted, and Why”, September, (2014)

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⁷ Yougov polls 2014-2016, various sources.

⁸ Panelbase polls 2014 -2016, various sources.

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