



HOUSE OF LORDS

Library Note

Polling Data on the Scottish Independence Referendum

This Library Note—an update to a previous Note published on 23 June 2014—focuses on public opinion polling data in relation to the Scottish independence referendum. Following a brief introduction, section two of the Note summarises two data sets that allow for the examination of historical attitudes towards Scottish independence. Section three focuses on how to understand contemporary political polling data, whilst section four provides an overview of recent polls looking specifically at referendum voting intention. The final section examines two other aspects of the independence referendum covered by recent surveys: voter turnout and the key issues influencing voting intention.

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1. Introduction

As stipulated in the Scottish Independence Referendum Act 2013, a referendum on Scottish independence will take place on 18 September 2014, in which voters will be asked the following question: “Should Scotland be an independent country?”¹ Voting eligibility is based on the franchise at Scottish Parliament and local government elections, but extends to those aged 16 and over on the day of the referendum.² The beginning of the official ‘referendum period’ on 30 May 2014 marked the point at which the respective campaigns for and against independence, Yes Scotland and Better Together, had 16 weeks remaining to attempt to influence the outcome of the referendum.

A list of background reading relating to the referendum can be found in the House of Commons Library Standard Note, [Scotland: Referendum and Independence, A Select Bibliography](#).³ The House of Lords Library Note, [Referendum on Scottish Independence](#), also offers an overview of the possible implications of a ‘Yes’ vote.⁴

Given the historic nature of this referendum and the potential ramifications of Scotland voting in favour of independence, there is much interest in attempting to gauge the mood amongst the electorate and in projecting the outcome of the referendum itself. In view of this, this Library Note focuses on public opinion polling data in relation to the independence referendum. The Note is structured as follows: section two examines historical attitudes towards Scottish independence; section three focuses on how to understand contemporary political polling data; section four provides an overview of recent opinion polls focusing specifically on referendum voting intention; and finally, section five focuses on two other aspects of the referendum for which survey data exists: voter turnout and the key issues influencing voting intention.

2. Historical Context

Discussions around Scotland’s relationship with the rest of the UK and the means by which it should be governed are not confined to the current independence referendum, having been a subject of debate throughout recent history. Two data sets allow us to examine historical attitudes towards Scottish independence: the Scottish Social Attitudes (SSA) survey and a time series provided by Ipsos MORI.

2.1 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey

The SSA is a survey of people aged 18 and above residing in Scotland, conducted on an annual basis by the independent and not-for-profit organisation ScotCen Social Research (the Scottish arm of NatCen Social Research) since the advent of devolution in 1999.⁵ The following question focusing on constitutional preference has been included within the survey since its inception:

“Which of these statements comes closest to your view?”

¹ Scottish Independence Referendum Act 2013.

² In accordance with the requirements set out in the Scottish Independence Referendum (Franchise) Act 2013.

³ House of Commons Library, [Scotland: Referendum and Independence, A Select Bibliography](#), 4 February 2014, SN/PC/06698.

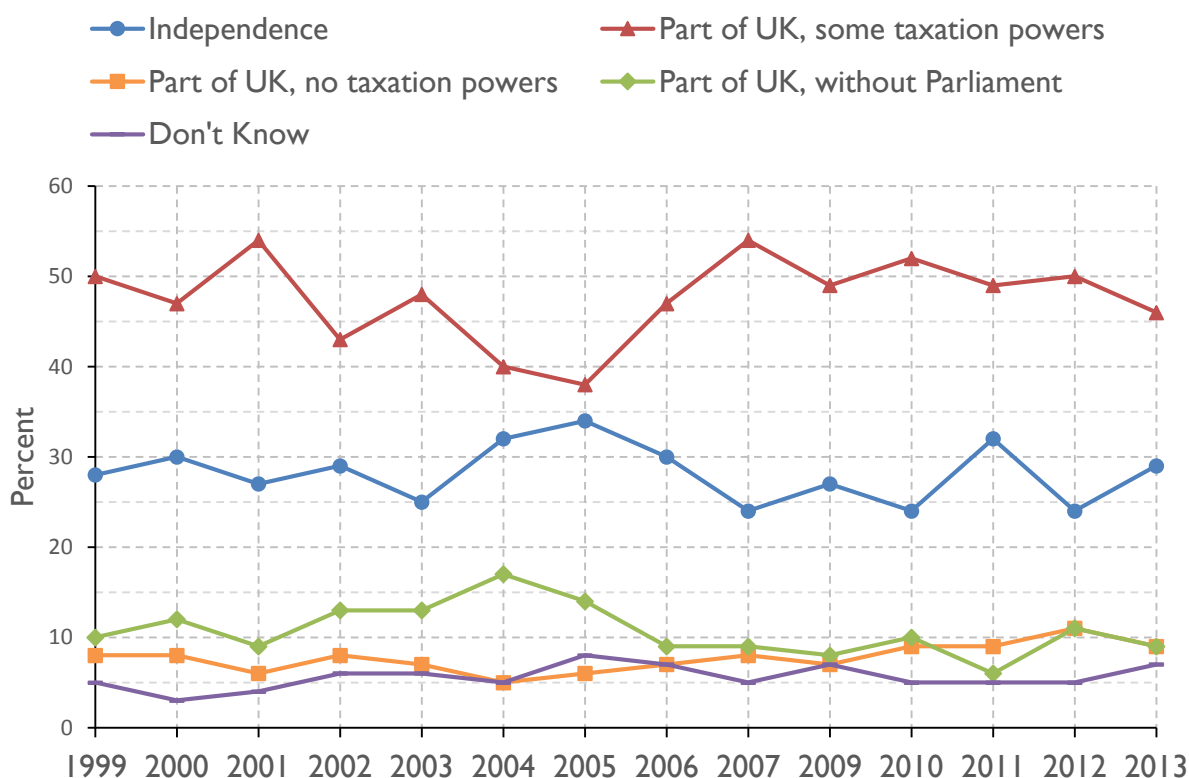
⁴ House of Lords Library, [Referendum on Scottish Independence](#), 19 June 2014, LLN 2014/020.

⁵ NatCen Social Research, [‘Scottish Social Attitudes’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

- 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.

The graph below, based on 2013 data from ScotCen Social Research, displays the level of public support for each of these options from 1999 onwards (data for 2014 is not yet available).⁶ It should be noted that the first two responses have been combined to show the overall level of support for independence from the UK. Although not stated explicitly in the survey, the third statement can be considered analogous to ‘devo max’, the fourth to the status quo (ie some devolved powers) and the fifth to the situation that existed prior to devolution in 1999.⁷

Figure 1: How Should Scotland be Governed?



The data suggests that public attitudes have remained relatively stable over the time period in question, with further devolution (specifically regarding taxation powers) proving the most popular response in every survey to date (at around 45 or 50 percent). In second place, support for full independence from the UK has consistently been around 30 percent. Meanwhile, only a small proportion of respondents (typically around 10 percent in each case)

⁶ ScotCen Social Research, What Scotland Thinks, ‘[How Should Scotland Be Governed?](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014.

⁷ Although there is no single definition of ‘devo max’, it is generally taken to mean the devolution of substantial fiscal powers, as well as all other powers with the exception of defence and foreign affairs.

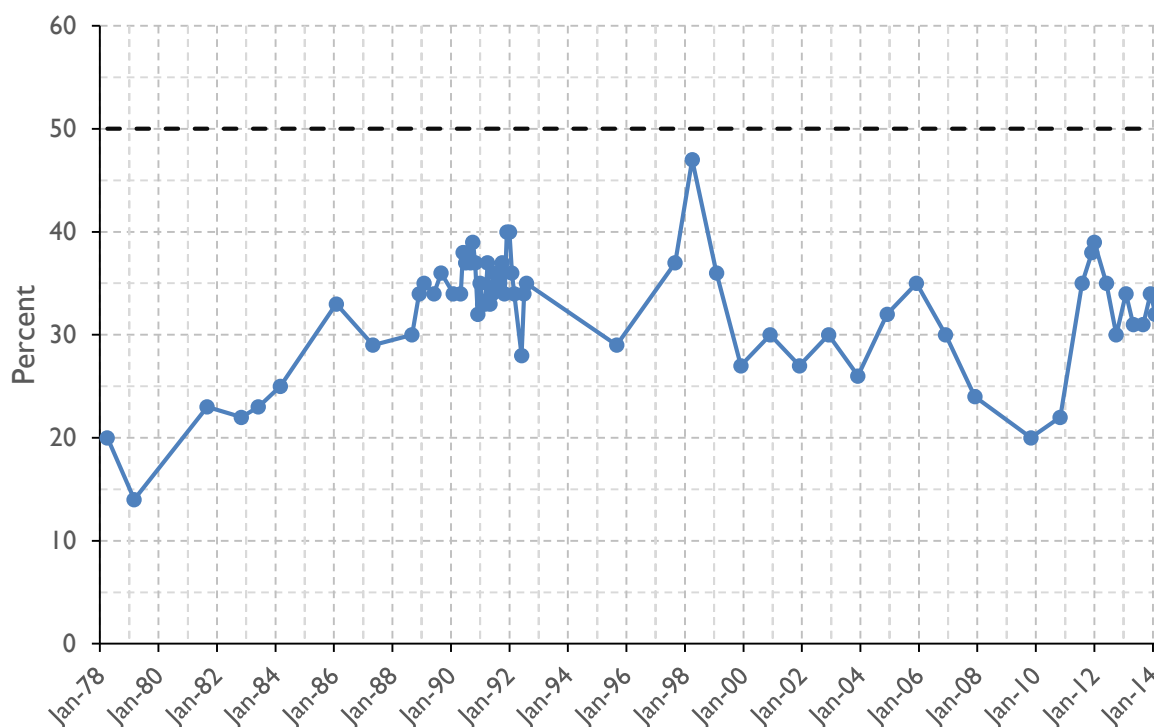
appear to favour the continuation of the status quo or the surrender of existing powers gained through the Scotland Act 1998.

Focusing momentarily on the present independence debate, it is worth noting that the wording of the above question and the range of possible responses permitted does not map neatly onto the binary (ie 'Yes' or 'No') choice that will be offered in the referendum. This has led Professor Charlie Jeffery of the University of Edinburgh to argue that the sizable section of the Scottish population whose constitutional preference is for the further devolution of powers (ie 'devo max') can be considered the key group—the 'median voter' in the language of political science—in terms of dictating the referendum outcome.⁸

2.2 Ipsos MORI Time Series

The market research company Ipsos MORI also boasts time series data on attitudes towards Scottish independence running back to 1978 (although figures for the years 1999 to 2007 inclusive are actually taken from the SSA survey).⁹ However, it should be noted that this data series—displayed in the graph below—has been produced by combining figures from a number of different surveys, each asking slightly different questions in relation to independence and employing varying methodologies. Accordingly, it should be seen as purely indicative, with little read into the precise timings of the relative peaks and troughs in support for independence. Nonetheless, it provides additional evidence in support of two points raised by the SSA data series: firstly, support for Scottish independence from the UK has (at least since the late 1980s) remained relatively stable over time; secondly, at no point has a majority of the public (as indicated by the dashed line) seemingly favoured independence.¹⁰

Figure 2: Support for Independence (1978 to present)



⁸ Economic and Social Research Council, The Future of UK and Scotland, '[The Politics of "Scotland's Economic Future Post 2014"](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

⁹ Ipsos MORI, '[35 Years of Scottish Attitudes Towards Independence](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

3. Understanding Polling Data

Before examining contemporary studies of public opinion relating to Scottish independence and the upcoming referendum in particular, there follows a detailed overview of polling data. This focuses on what opinion polls are, how political polls in particular are conducted and how to go about understanding them. The emphasis throughout is on professional polling organisations such as members of the British Polling Council (BPC), which was launched in 2004 with the objective of “ensur[ing] standards of disclosure which will give consumers of survey results that enter the public domain an adequate basis for judging the reliability and validity of the results”.¹¹ Further information on the BPC and how to source political polling data of various types is provided in the House of Lords Library Note, [Understanding and Sourcing Political Opinion Polls](#).¹²

An opinion poll is a survey of a particular sample of a population (typically around 1,000 people) which attempts to capture the prevalence of certain views within that population (please note that the word ‘population’ is used here to refer to a particular group of interest and not necessarily the populace of a specific country).¹³ Studying a subset of individuals in this manner is a common research approach given that surveying an entire population is both expensive and time consuming. As the name suggests, polls tend to measure ‘opinions’. In this way, they are different from the surveys introduced in the previous section (eg the SSA), which tend to measure ‘attitudes’. Although colloquially these words may be used interchangeably, there is in fact a fundamental difference. Professor Robert Worcester of the University of Kent provides a useful analogy here, describing the former as “the ripples on the surface of the public’s consciousness, shallow, and easily changed”; by contrast, attitudes are more enduring, and can be regarded as “the currents below the surface, deeper and stronger”.¹⁴ Accordingly, opinion polls tend to be conducted relatively frequently (ie weekly or monthly), whereas attitudinal surveys are generally repeated on an annual basis.

At first sight, it can be difficult to understand how the opinions of such a small group can reasonably reflect those of an entire population—particularly when this includes upwards of 45 million people, as in the case of the UK electorate.¹⁵ However, in the same way that a chef need only taste a single spoonful of a well stirred bowl of soup in order to know if it is properly seasoned, the key is in ensuring that the sample is as representative as possible of the population as a whole.¹⁶ This is not to say that opinion polls are free from inaccuracy.

Indeed, as Nick Moon, Managing Director of the market research company GfK NOP, explains, surveys of this type are subject to error as a result of both the sampling process and the responses provided during the interviews themselves.¹⁷ In each case a further distinction can be made between ‘simple’ error, which is random in its operation (ie it is just as likely to cause a discrepancy in one direction as the other and is variable in its extent), and ‘systematic’ (or ‘correlated’) error, which operates in one direction only, often to the same extent. Whilst the former is largely self-cancelling, the latter is not: strictly speaking, it should therefore be referred to as bias rather than error. This results in four types of possible error (or bias), which together make up the ‘total survey error’:¹⁸

¹¹ British Polling Council, [‘Press Release by the BPC \(1 November 2004\)’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

¹² House of Lords Library, [Understanding and Sourcing Political Opinion Polls](#), 23 July 2014, LLN 2014/028.

¹³ British Polling Council, [‘A Journalist’s Guide to Opinion Polls’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

¹⁴ University of Kent, [‘Public Opinion: Friend of Foe?’](#), January 2013, p 11.

¹⁵ Office for National Statistics, [‘UK Electoral Statistics, 2013’](#), May 2014.

¹⁶ British Polling Council, [‘A Journalist’s Guide to Opinion Polls’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

¹⁷ Nick Moon, *Opinion Polls: History, Theory and Practice*, 1999, p 33.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

- Simple sampling error
- Systematic sampling error (or bias)
- Simple response error
- Systematic response error (or bias)

Each of these receives discussion, in turn, during the summary that follows, with the exception of simple response error. This form of error results from the chance tendency for respondents to accidentally give the ‘wrong’ answer, or for interviewers to incorrectly record the response provided. Such occurrences are inevitable, but relatively infrequent. Furthermore, given that all possible responses are equally likely to be erroneously selected, such error will tend to be self-cancelling over the course of an entire survey.¹⁹ For these reasons, it receives no further discussion in this Note.

3.1 Sample Size and Sampling Error

In any instance where a population is incompletely surveyed (ie where sampling is employed) there will be simple sampling error (often just referred to as ‘sampling error’), reflecting the effects of chance and uncertainty in the sampling process. Whilst it cannot be avoided, statistical theory does at least allow us to quantify this uncertainty, provided that the sample has been randomly selected.²⁰ Two related terms are of importance here—the ‘confidence interval’ and the ‘confidence level’:

- The confidence interval (also often referred to as the ‘margin of error’ in opinion polls) is the range of values within which the true value (ie the value that would have been obtained had the entire population been surveyed) is likely to lie. Most reputable polling organisations will publish such a figure (typically expressed as plus or minus a certain percentage) in the small print of their polls.
- The confidence level represents just how likely this is (ie the probability that the true value falls within the confidence interval). Again, this figure is sometimes quoted in the small print of polls (although a confidence level of 95 percent is generally taken as standard amongst polling organisations, in line with the convention of statistical significance in hypothesis testing).²¹

For instance, an opinion poll may have an associated margin of error of +/- 3 percent at a confidence level of 95 percent. What this means in practice is that 19 times out of 20 (or 95 percent of the time), the figure within the opinion poll is expected to be within 3 percent of the true value. If, therefore, the same poll showed that a particular party (Party A) had a 40 percent share of the overall vote, we could be 95 percent sure that the true level of support amongst the entire population was between 37 and 43 percent.²² It should be noted that this uncertainty applies to all headline figures. Thus if the same poll were showing a rival party (Party B) had a 45 percent share of the overall vote, we could not state with certainty (based on this one poll) that Party B was ahead, since the extremes of the respective margins of error for the two parties give figures of 43 (40+3) percent for Party A and 42 (45-3) percent for Party B. This subtlety is often overlooked in media reports of opinion poll results.

¹⁹ Nick Moon, *Opinion Polls: History, Theory and Practice*, 1999, p 34.

²⁰ British Polling Council, ‘[A Journalist’s Guide to Opinion Polls](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014.

²¹ The Scottish Government, ‘[Confidence Intervals](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014.

²² *ibid.*

Clearly, the wider the confidence interval (or margin of error) associated with a poll, the less sure one can be that the reported results accurately reflect the views of the entire population. For a given confidence level, there are two key factors that determine the size of the confidence interval—the sample size and the actual percentage values recorded in the poll. (Strictly speaking a third variable—the total population size—is potentially of importance. However, this can be ignored unless the sample size exceeds five percent of the total population, which is very rarely the case with opinion polls):²³

- **Sample size:** The larger the sample size, the more likely the poll data will accurately reflect the views of the wider population and the narrower the confidence interval.
- **Percentage value:** The more extreme the percentage value recorded in the poll (ie the closer it is to either 0 or 100 percent) the less likely it is due to chance and the narrower the confidence interval.

This is illustrated further in the table below, which displays computed confidence intervals at the 95 percent confidence level for a range of sample sizes and percentage values:²⁴

Confidence Interval (in percent) at 95 percent Confidence Level:

		Sample Size				
		100	250	500	750	1,000
Percentage Value Recorded in Poll	10 or 90	6	4	3	2	2
	20 or 80	9	5	4	3	3
	30 or 70	10	6	4	4	3
	40 or 60	10	7	5	4	3
	50	11	7	5	4	3

These figures show that the relationship between the confidence interval and the sample size is non-linear: as the latter increases, there are diminishing returns in terms of the narrowing of the confidence interval. This is one reason why polling organisations rarely employ sample sizes beyond the low thousands.²⁵ Similarly, there is a non-linear relationship between the confidence interval and the percentage value recorded in the poll: the closer one gets to the extremes in terms of the poll percentage value, the greater the rate at which the confidence interval narrows. Whilst multiple confidence intervals could be reported for a poll that includes a range of different percentage values, in practice pollsters only tend to report the worst case confidence interval (ie the 50 percent value) for a given sample size. Given that samples of around 1,000 individuals are typically employed, this is usually in the region of +/- 3 percent.

Two further points relating to sample size must be highlighted. Firstly, the confidence interval reported alongside an opinion poll applies only to the sample as a whole. This is important because in addition to the headline figures, some polling organisations will provide more detailed summaries of their results, often breaking down respondents by gender, age, social class or some other characteristic. Whilst offering additional insight into the spread of public opinion, these cross-breaks inevitably have smaller sample sizes. The confidence intervals

²³ The Scottish Government, '[Calculation of Confidence Intervals for Point Estimates and Change](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

²⁴ Roper Centre for Public Opinion Research, '[Fundamentals of Polling—Total Survey Error](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

²⁵ *ibid.*

associated with them are therefore wider—sometimes considerably so. Indeed, polling figures for cross-breaks with very small samples (of say less than 100 people) should be treated with real caution, since their associated margins of error can be more than +/- 10 percent.²⁶

Secondly, although larger samples are associated with narrower confidence intervals, one should not make a straightforward link between the sample size of a survey and the accuracy or quality of its findings. Phone-in polls and self-selecting surveys conducted over the internet, for example, will often involve many more participants than those undertaken by professional polling organisations (for example, members of the British Polling Council); however, these samples will almost certainly be biased (this is a form of systematic sampling bias known as ‘voluntary response bias’) and should therefore be treated with caution.²⁷ As mentioned previously, samples must be representative if they are to tell us anything meaningful about the views of the wider population.

3.2 Sampling Strategy and Bias

Reputable polling organisations go to great lengths to try and ensure their samples are indeed representative. The first way in which this is done is through the sampling strategy. Ideally, it would be possible to conduct entirely random samples, with each member of the population having an equal opportunity of being selected to take part in any one poll. For various reasons this is impractical for most polling organisations, so two alternative methods are generally used—‘quasi-random sampling’ and ‘quota sampling’.²⁸

Quasi-random sampling is as close to truly random sampling as time and cost allows most organisations, and is typically associated with phone polling (as distinct from phone-in polls). Pollsters take numbers from the phone directory and randomise the last digit in order that ex-directory individuals (who may have appreciably different views) are also surveyed.²⁹

If quasi-random sampling relies as far as possible on random chance to obtain a sample with the desired demographic proportions, then quota sampling takes the opposite approach (whilst this technically means that statistical theory and estimates of uncertainty cannot be applied to quota samples, a margin of error is still often reported alongside polls employing this approach and can be regarded as a rough guide as to their precision).³⁰ If it is known (for instance from Census data) that a representative sample will contain a specific number of people of a certain age group, or from a particular region, then individuals fitting these requirements can be approached. As such, quota sampling has traditionally been associated with face-to-face polling—although this approach is now rarely employed. However, competent online polling is often based on a similar premise. YouGov, for instance, has a panel of volunteers, the demographics of whom are recorded in a database. They can therefore invite those with the desired characteristics to take part on a poll by poll basis.³¹

Despite the emphasis placed on sampling strategy, however, samples will rarely produce an exact match of the demographic makeup of the wider population. Indeed, by its very nature, quasi-random sampling is subject to the whims of random chance. In addition, two further sources of systematic sampling bias can lead to a slight under- or over-representation of a

²⁶ YouGov, ‘[Understanding Margin of Error](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014.

²⁷ British Polling Council, ‘[A Journalist’s Guide to Opinion Polls](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014.

²⁸ UK Polling Report, ‘[Sampling](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014.

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ YouGov, ‘[Understanding Margin of Error](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014.

³¹ UK Polling Report, ‘[Sampling](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014.

particular group—‘non-contact bias’ (sometimes referred to as ‘coverage bias’) and ‘non-response bias’:³²

- Non-contact bias: A sampling strategy may inherently exclude certain portions of the population. For instance, phone polling will automatically prevent those without landlines from participating, whilst online surveys are only accessible to those with an internet connection. Additionally, certain types of individual are more likely to be present when contact is first made (for instance, those who are unemployed, retired or who work from home).
- Non-response bias: Certain types of individual may be more likely to reject calls from strangers or to refuse to take part in a phone survey. The same may also be true of online surveys, although as mentioned previously these often rely on a pool of volunteers; in these cases the rate of participant response may pose more of a challenge for polling organisations than outright refusal, therefore.³³

In an attempt to overcome these issues and improve the representativeness of their samples, polling organisations use a technique known as weighting.

3.3 Weighting

Weighting is a method for adjusting responses to account for the fact that certain groups may be under- or over-represented in a particular sample.³⁴ For instance, we know from larger surveys of the population (for example the Census) that 52 percent of UK adults are female. If only 50 percent of a particular sample are women, therefore, they are clearly being under-represented. In such a scenario, pollsters would apply a weighting of 1.04 (calculated by dividing 52 by 50) to every female respondent. Accordingly, male respondents would be weighted down as they are over-represented in the sample.³⁵

Weighting of this type is common for categories such as gender, age, region and social class (or socio-economic group). Other features such as level of education, housing tenure, work status, level of car ownership and frequency of foreign holidays may also be accounted for in some instances. Because demographic data of this type is widely available for the whole population (and thus it is clear what a truly representative sample looks like), there is consistency—and thus little controversy—in the way this practice is applied by polling organisations. One slight caveat to this concerns cross-breaks, as some polls are only weighted to be representative at the national level. For example, whilst a weighted sample may contain a representative number of people from the North East, it could be that a disproportionate number of those surveyed in the region were male: the cross-breaks for region and gender will therefore not be representative of the population as a whole.³⁶

In addition to this demographic weighting, and more controversially, many polling companies will also apply some form of political weighting to their samples in an attempt to ensure they are politically representative.³⁷ This is because non-contact and non-response bias can also

³² ‘Non-response bias’ is regarded as a form of sampling error rather than a form of response error.

³³ Roper Centre for Public Opinion Research, ‘[Fundamentals of Polling—Total Survey Error](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014.

³⁴ UK Polling Report, ‘[Weighting](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014.

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ *ibid.*

introduce attitudinal bias into a sample. For instance, individuals who are more willing to give up half an hour of their time in order to take part in a phone survey may have an appreciably different outlook on life to those who decline to do so.

As mentioned previously, certain forms of systematic response bias, such as when the survey answers given by a respondent do not reflect their true beliefs, may also skew the raw poll data.³⁸ Response bias may be the result of wilful deception on behalf of the respondent, but is more likely to be due to a form of social-desirability bias (ie the respondent not wishing to reveal an opinion that is considered unpopular at the time in question). The latter is thought to partially account for the failure of polling organisations to accurately forecast the outcome of the 1992 UK general election, when polls in the run-up to the election consistently underestimated the level of Conservative support—a phenomenon labelled the ‘shy Tory factor’.³⁹ Such bias may be influenced by the mode of questioning: the less personal nature of online polling may increase the extent to which people feel able to divulge their true feelings, for example.⁴⁰

Casualties of social-desirability bias will often answer ‘Don’t Know’ if permitted.⁴¹ This leads on to a wider question about how best to deal with those who are undecided on a polling issue, which a genuine minority often will be in the run up to an election. Some organisations will ask a ‘squeeze question’ (along the lines of “Which party are you most inclined to support?”) in an attempt to coax such participants into articulating a firm voting intention. Whilst this risks pressuring individuals into expressing a non-opinion, these participants are generally given equal weight as those who provide a definitive response from the outset. Alternatively, where an equivalent election has previously taken place (for instance with general elections in the UK), some pollsters reassign a proportion of those answering ‘Don’t Know’ based on their past voting behaviour, on the assumption that they will ultimately vote in the same way as at the last election (in practice this is done by reallocating all those who are undecided, but then weighting them down—typically by a half). A third approach adopted by some companies is to ignore the ‘Don’t Knows’ altogether and include only those respondents who express a clear preference within the published figures.⁴²

None of these methods is necessarily preferable, but the absence of any standard practice across the polling industry is something of a problem given that it can be the cause of substantial variation amongst published results. For example, the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology’s Note [Getting Opinion Polls ‘Right’](#) demonstrates how Labour’s lead in one 1996 pre-election poll could be regarded as anything from 20 to 30 percent depending on how the ‘Don’t Knows’ were treated.⁴³ Weighting by past voting behaviour is also complicated by the well-established fact that a significant minority of individuals misreport (whether knowingly or not) their voting history.⁴⁴ Different companies adjust their weightings in different ways in an attempt to account for this—one further reason why opinion polls on the same subject can give contrasting results.

3.4 Other Sources of Variation

³⁸ UK Polling Report, [‘Dealing With Don’t Knows’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ British Polling Council, [‘A Journalist’s Guide to Opinion Polls’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

⁴¹ UK Polling Report, [‘Dealing With Don’t Knows’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, [Getting Opinion Polls ‘Right’](#), March 1997, PN 96.

⁴⁴ UK Polling Report, [‘Weighting’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

In addition to the whims of random chance, and the sampling strategy and weighting methodologies employed, two other factors can help to account for observed variation between polls conducted by different companies on the same topic. The first is the timing of the poll. Although two polls may be published simultaneously, the underlying fieldwork may have been conducted weeks or even months apart. If public opinion regarding the subject in question is particularly fluid and responsive to current events, then it may be that both polls are relatively accurate and that opinions simply shifted during the intervening period.⁴⁵

An additional factor (and another potential form of systematic response bias) that can lead to pollsters reporting variable figures is the questionnaire design—including the question wording, format and ordering. It is well established that differences in question wording can have a significant impact upon poll results. For instance, a comparison of two Canadian polls conducted in 2000 showed that support for increased public spending varied from around a third to a half of the population depending on whether this was couched as “new spending on social programmes” or “putting money back into healthcare and education”.⁴⁶ Even subtler differences in wording can also have an appreciable impact: making specific reference to one’s local constituency (through the inclusion of an additional phrase such as “in your area”) within voting intention questions for UK elections often increases Liberal Democrat support, for example, as people take greater account of tactical voting or the performance of their own MP.⁴⁷ This impact is heightened when the polling topic is one on which few people have strong views.

Whether or not participants are prompted with a list of potential responses (ie whether a question is closed- or open-ended) can also be influential—as can which options appear on this list. For instance, some UK polling companies prompt only for the three major political parties (additionally referring to the existence of ‘other parties’), whilst others specifically mention smaller parties such as UKIP or the Green Party. Prompting for these minor parties tends to result in them polling significantly greater support than is otherwise the case—to the extent that their share of the vote is often overestimated when compared with actual election results.⁴⁸

In practice, polling companies tend to ask respondents several (usually related) questions within a single survey. The order in which these questions are asked can also be of significance, therefore. For instance, a participant may provide a different response depending on whether they are posed a particular question at the start of a survey (ie ‘cold’) or following a series of related questions (ie ‘warm’), once they have had a chance to think about the subject in greater depth.⁴⁹ As with the specific wording of a question, this is especially true if it is an issue about which the individual did not have particularly strong feelings at the outset.

Whilst little can be done in the way of weighting results, some pollsters attempt to reduce the possibility for systematic response bias owing to questionnaire design by asking two or more versions of the same question (sometimes referred to as ‘split-sampling’), or by varying the order in which questions are asked.⁵⁰ However, no consistent methodology is applied across the industry.

⁴⁵ British Polling Council, ‘[A Journalist’s Guide to Opinion Polls](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014.

⁴⁶ Queen’s University, ‘[Understanding Polling Data](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014, p 134.

⁴⁷ UK Polling Report, ‘[Question Wording](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ British Polling Council, ‘[A Journalist’s Guide to Opinion Polls](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014.

⁵⁰ Queen’s University, ‘[Understanding Polling Data](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014, p 133, 136.

3.5 Accuracy of Opinion Polls

Like all surveys of a proportion of a population, opinion polls are subject to unavoidable sampling error. Statistical theory allows this uncertainty to be quantified and this figure is published alongside the headline figures in most reputable polls. However, the above summary highlights that there are a number of potential forms of bias that can also influence the accuracy of opinion polls. Although pollsters attempt to mitigate this threat through the use of methodological procedures such as weighting, the upshot is that in most cases the true margin of error (ie the total survey error) associated with an opinion poll is significantly greater than that which is reported. Exactly how much greater is difficult to say, however, since the impact of these other sources of error (or bias) cannot be quantified. In light of this, one might be forgiven for questioning how much faith to place in polling data.

The obvious test of voting intention polling figures is to compare them against the election results with which they are associated. In the case of UK general elections, the recent record of classically conducted vote intention polls is described as “variable and mixed” by Martin Boon, Director of polling company ICM.⁵¹ Mr Boon suggests that pollsters failed to accurately forecast the outcome of the 1992 election, and describes their performance at the 1997 and 2001 elections as “mediocre”.⁵² In all three cases the polls appreciably overestimated Labour support and underestimated Conservative support, suggesting the presence of systematic bias.⁵³ However, polling figures compared much more favourably with the final election outcome in 2005: analysis conducted by the British Polling Council of its member organisations demonstrates that the average error (ie the average of the percentage differences between the final poll estimates for Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Other support, and the final election results) for all companies was no greater than 1.5 percent.⁵⁴ This is well within the 3 percent margin of error typically attached to political polls as a result of unavoidable sampling error. Whilst this progress can in part be attributed to collective methodological refinements (polls were not regularly adjusted by past vote until after the 1992 election, for instance),⁵⁵ detailed analysis of the 2005 polls revealed that behind the closely aligned headline voting intention figures, there were marked differences between the polling companies in how these were derived. This led Andrew Cooper, the Founder of Populus, to conclude that the companies in question could not “all be right in the methodological assumptions and the weightings and adjustments used”.⁵⁶ It was difficult for pollsters to effectively respond to this finding, however, since they all deviated from the election result by less than the maximum theoretical margin of error: this made it hard to establish how much of the observed discrepancy was the result of flawed methodology and how much was due to sampling error.⁵⁷

Whilst on the face of it pollsters also fared reasonably well at the 2010 general election—the average error for all BPC members was no greater than 2.25 percent (with the exception of two companies that produced an average error of 3.25 percent),⁵⁸ further analysis revealed that they all overestimated the Liberal Democrat share of the vote for the first time in recent

⁵¹ Martin Boon, [‘Predicting Elections. A ‘Wisdom of Crowds’ Approach’](#), *International Journal of Market Research*, 20 March 2012, vol 54 issue 4, p 466.

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ Market Research Society, [‘General Election 2010: Did the Opinion Polls Flatter to Deceive?’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

⁵⁴ British Polling Council, [‘Accuracy of the Final 2005 Polls’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

⁵⁵ Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, [‘Getting Opinion Polls ‘Right’](#), March 1997, PN 96.

⁵⁶ British Polling Council, [‘Poll Methodology, Weighting and Adjustment Systems’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁸ British Polling Council, [‘Accuracy of the Final 2010 Polls’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

history, highlighting a new form of systematic bias.⁵⁹ Various analyses have been conducted in an attempt to explain this finding. For instance, Martin Boon and John Curtice, Professor of Politics at the University of Strathclyde, suggest that the ‘shy-Tory factor’ may have played an important role—although it appears to have been the Labour party that was considered unfashionable on this occasion, with post-election analysis by ICM indicating that those voters who failed to declare a firm intention in its final pre-election poll ultimately opted for Labour over the Liberal Democrats by a factor of nearly two-to-one.⁶⁰ However, following an examination of polls conducted by several companies from across the course of the 2010 campaign, Mark Pickup, Professor of Political Science at Simon Fraser University, and colleagues are slightly more cautious in their support for such a theory, suggesting that it is difficult to verify on the basis of data from a single election.⁶¹ This highlights the ongoing challenge pollsters face between attempting to learn from and respond to the most recent election result—which is linked to an ever-changing political landscape, and being appreciative of polling developments over the longer term.

There is, however, a wider question to be considered when discussing the accuracy of opinion polls: what exactly are they for? More precisely, should they be seen as snapshots of public opinion, or as predictions of an election outcome? Andrew Cooper provides a succinct summary of this dilemma:

If polls are simply a snapshot of voter opinions taken at the latest moment which newspaper deadlines allow (effectively nearly 48 hours before the election ends), is it reasonable to measure them—and judge their methods—against the actual result? We know that many voters decide at the last moment how to vote and many others change their minds between parties over the last couple of days; ‘final’ campaign polls are bound to miss these movements and there is nothing that can be done methodologically to allow for them. The alternative is for polling companies to produce final projections that are more than just the final voting intention figures derived from polling methodology. But if that is the right approach at election times—ie the approach likely to produce ‘poll’ numbers closest to actual results—why isn’t it the right approach at all other times? These are questions that the polling industry must continue to ponder.⁶²

4. Polls on Referendum Voting Intention

Since the Edinburgh Agreement was signed in October 2012, at which point it was confirmed there would be an impending referendum, numerous opinion polls have been conducted on the subject of Scottish independence.⁶³ Whilst many of these have focused on the principal issue of support for or against independence (in line with the question that will be put to the electorate in the referendum itself), a wide range of related questions have also been asked of the public.

Much of this polling data is available online. What Scotland Thinks, a website run by ScotCen Social Research, offers a collection of poll and survey data on public attitudes to Scottish

⁵⁹ Market Research Society, ‘[General Election 2010: Did the Opinion Polls Flatter to Deceive?](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹ Mark Pickup et al, ‘Why Did the Polls Overestimate Liberal Democrat Support? Sources of Polling Error in the 2010 British General Election’, *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, May 2011, vol 21 issue 2, pp 200-1.

⁶² British Polling Council, ‘[Poll Methodology, Weighting and Adjustment Systems](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014.

⁶³ Scottish Government, ‘[Agreement Between the United Kingdom Government and the Scottish Government on A Referendum on Independence for Scotland](#)’, 15 October 2012.

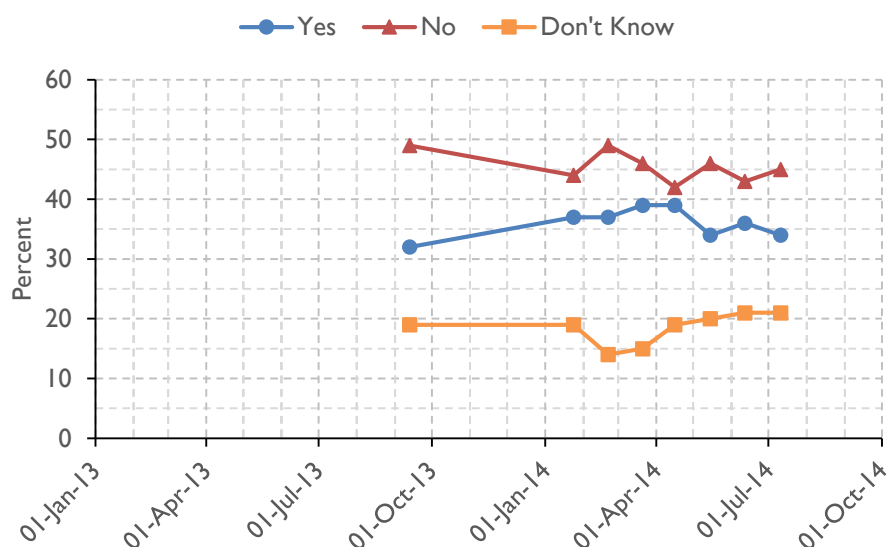
independence.⁶⁴ Impartial commentary and analysis is also provided by Professor John Curtice. The UK Polling Report website run by Anthony Wells, an Associate Director of YouGov, also collates a range of polling data and provides regular analysis, including in relation to Scottish independence.⁶⁵ In addition, many polling companies have dedicated pages devoted to the referendum and the associated opinion polls they have conducted. The Economic and Social Research Council's Future of the UK and Scotland project website also features analysis from a range of academic experts on referendum polling and survey data.⁶⁶

4.1 Individual Pollsters

Over the past year or two, six member companies of the British Polling Council have consistently polled the Scottish public on its referendum voting intentions. For the sake of consistency, the following summary focuses only on those polls conducted since the Electoral Commission published its assessment of the referendum question on 30 January 2013, after which the wording was changed from “Do you agree that Scotland should be an independent country?” to the more neutral “Should Scotland be an independent country?”.⁶⁷ (And following which the latter wording was adopted consistently by polling companies). At the date of publication this includes a total of 62 polls, split between the six companies as follows: ICM (8); Ipsos MORI (6); Panelbase (14); Survation (8); TNS-BMRB (15); and YouGov (11).

The results of these polls are displayed in the following six graphs, which track the changing level of support for and against independence (and those who are undecided) recorded by each of these companies over the time period in question. All polls are based on surveys of approximately 1,000 people and thus have an associated margin of error of around +/- 3 percent. Further information on each poll, including the underlying figures, commissioning organisation, survey methodology and age profile of respondents, is provided in the Appendix.

Figure 3: ICM



⁶⁴ [What Scotland Thinks](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

⁶⁵ UK Polling Report, '[Scottish Independence Referendum](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

⁶⁶ [ESRC Future of UK and Scotland](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

⁶⁷ The Electoral Commission, '[Electoral Commission Publishes Its Assessment of Scottish Independence Referendum Question and Its Advice on Campaign Spending Limits](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

Figure 4: Ipsos MORI

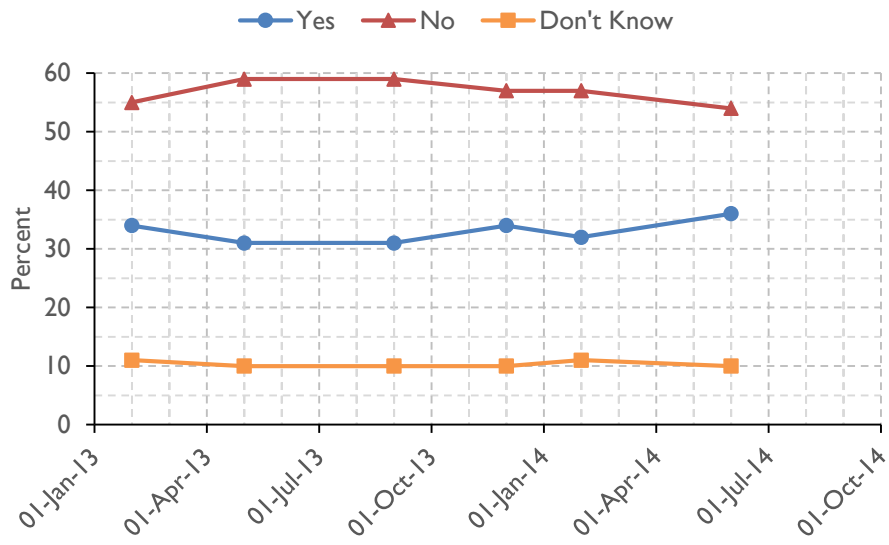


Figure 5: Panelbase

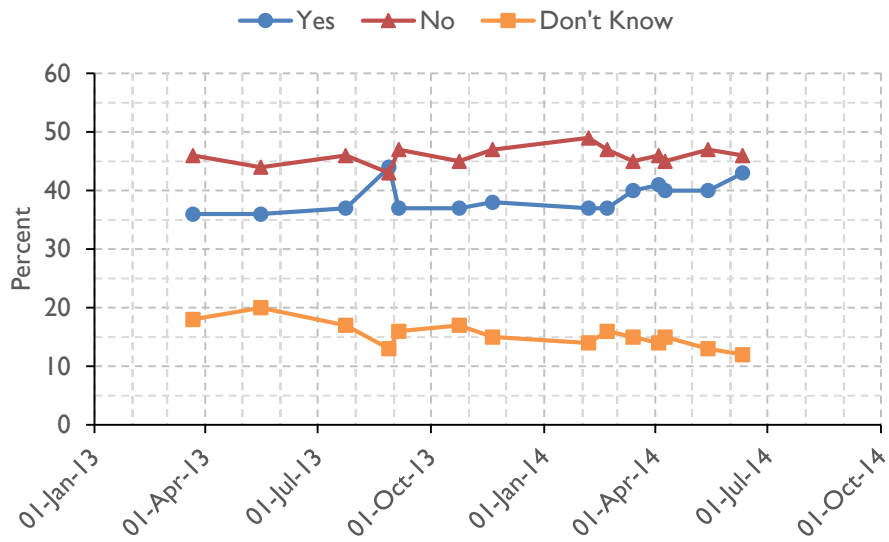


Figure 6: Survation

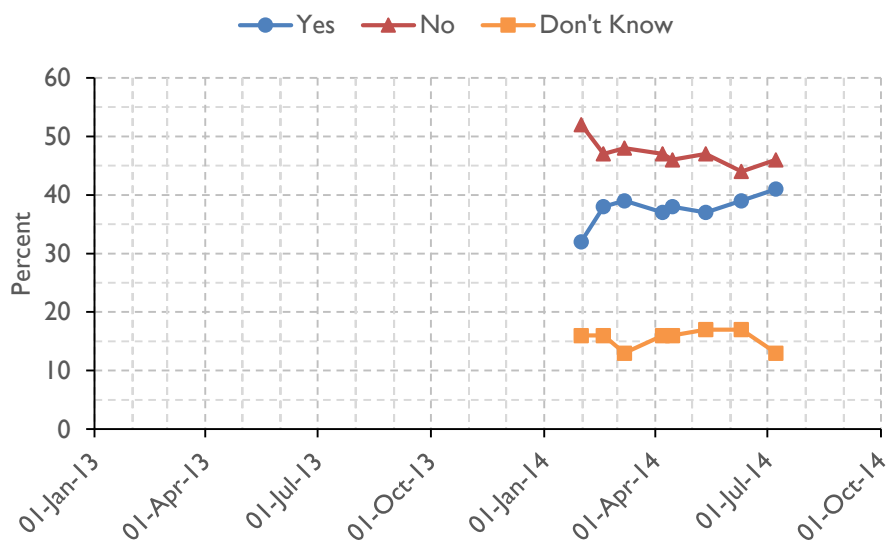
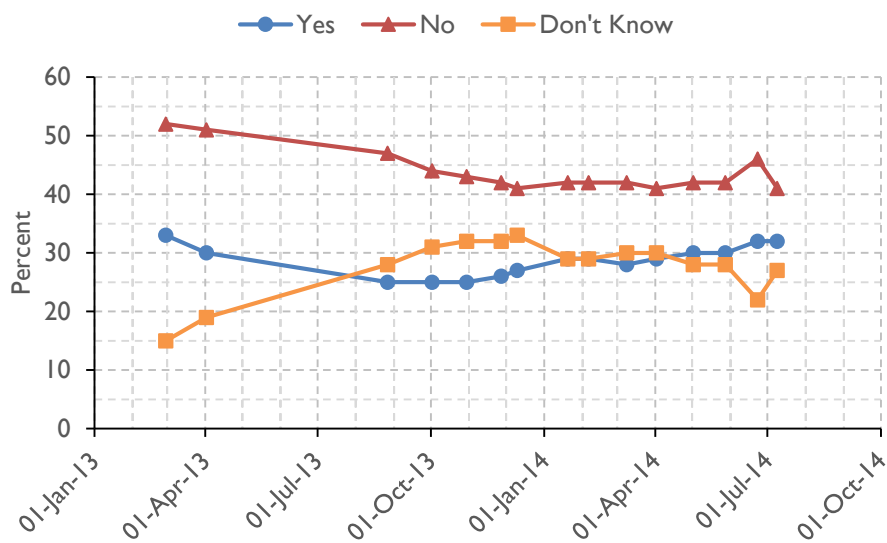
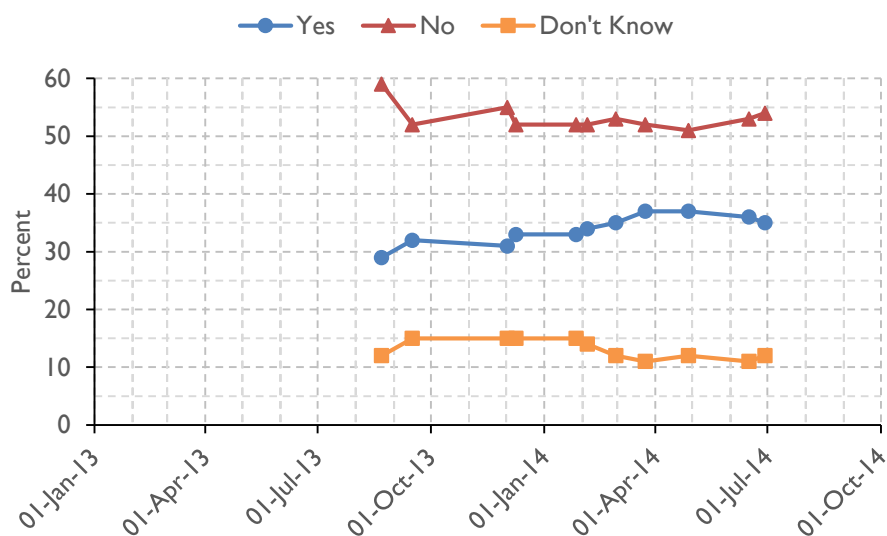


Figure 7: TNS-BMRB**Figure 8: YouGov**

It is immediately apparent from these graphs that the polls conducted by all six companies have consistently placed the 'No' vote ahead. Indeed, only one of the 62 polls has shown a majority for 'Yes' (and this was only by a single percent). (Anthony Wells of UK Polling Report also outlines the fact that this poll was commissioned by the Scottish National Party and the question on voting intention followed a series of other questions around independence, which may have had a skewing effect).⁶⁸

However, the margin of the 'No' lead varies significantly between the six companies. This picture is partly complicated by differences in the number of people responding 'Don't Know' with regards to their voting intention (TNS-BMRB consistently report nearly a third of people responding in this manner, for example, whilst Ipsos MORI are yet to poll a figure above 11 percent). Removing these responses from the sample allows for an easier comparison between the six companies. It also allows for an estimate of the actual election outcome, given that 'Don't Know' will not be an option at the ballot box in September. (Given the lack of a recent precedent in terms of an election of this nature, it is not feasible to reassign those

⁶⁸ UK Polling Report, '[Scottish Independence Referendum](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

answering ‘Don’t Know’ based on past voting behaviour. These individuals are therefore disregarded entirely and the corresponding figures for ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ rounded up proportionally).

The following graphs display the poll results for each of the six companies once the ‘Don’t Knows’ have been removed. The underlying figures are again provided in the Appendix.

Figure 9: ICM

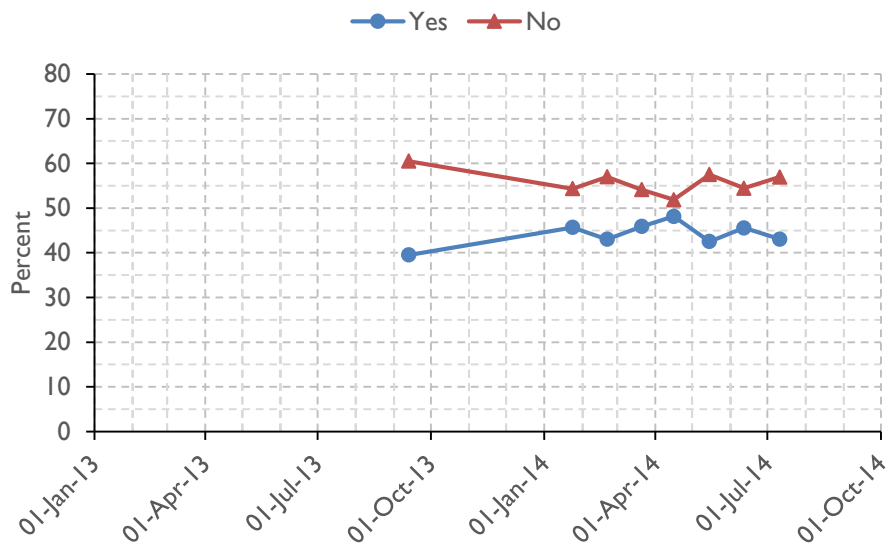


Figure 10: Ipsos MORI

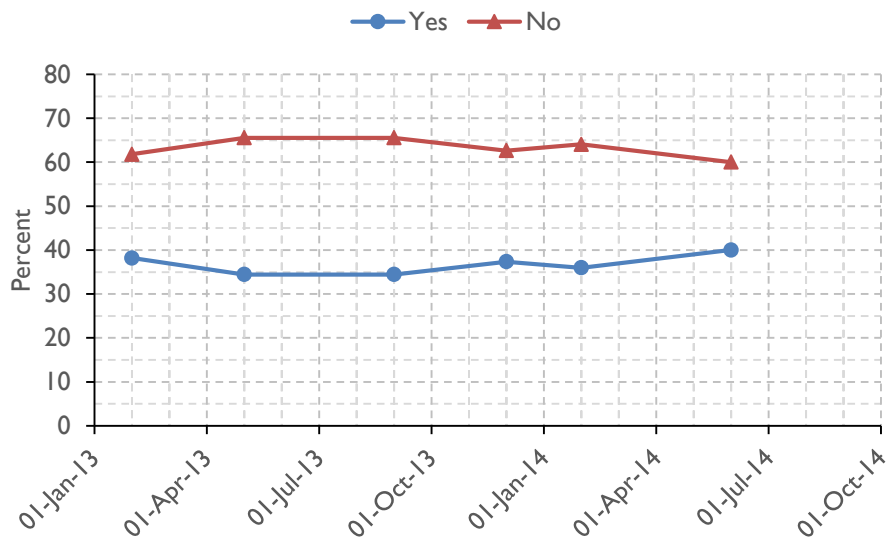


Figure 11: Panelbase

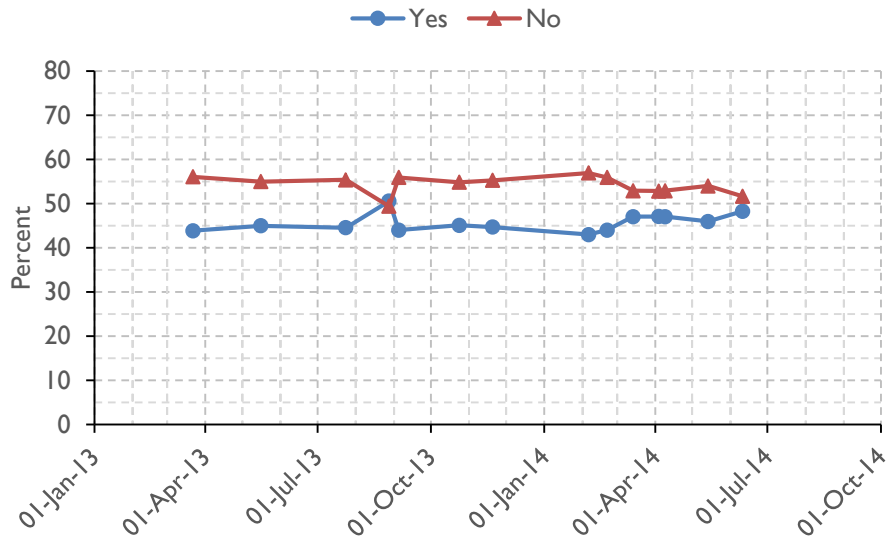


Figure 12: Survation

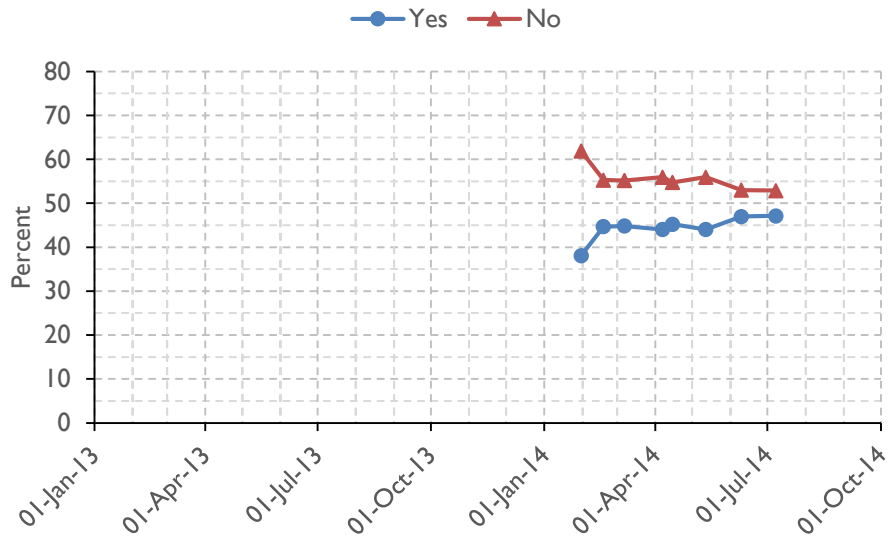


Figure 13: TNS-BMRB

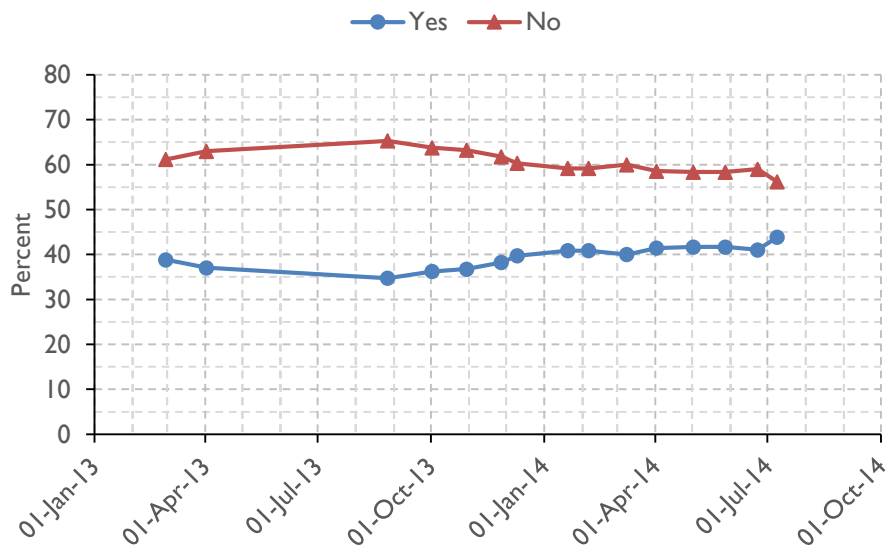
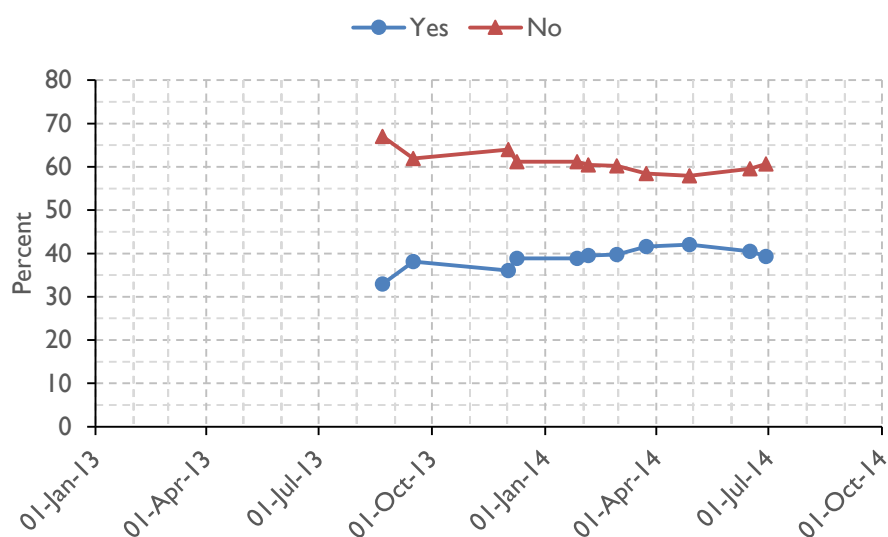


Figure 14: YouGov

Taking each company in turn, the ICM polls have been slightly more erratic than those of other pollsters, with the ‘Yes’ vote fluctuating between 40 (in September 2013) and 48 percent (in April 2014). This is perhaps in part because they have experimented more with their methodology: as Anthony Wells of UK Polling Report explains, this makes it “difficult to differentiate trend from volatility or method change”.⁶⁹ By contrast, Ipsos MORI has shown steadier, but somewhat lower, support for independence, with ‘Yes’ consistently polling between 34 and 38 percent, before rising slightly to 40 percent in the most recent poll (June 2014).

The figures for the next three companies (Panelbase, Survation and TNS-BMRB) show a slightly different trend, with a gradual increase in support for independence from late 2013 or early 2014 onwards. TNS-BMRB has the ‘Yes’ share of the vote increasing from around 38 percent in late 2013, to 41 or 42 percent in the past couple of months (and even up to 44 percent in the most recent poll). Meanwhile, Panelbase and (since their relatively late arrival on the scene) Survation display consistently higher support for ‘Yes’, from around 44 or 45 percent throughout much of 2013, to 46 or 47 percent in recent months. Until recently YouGov displayed a similar slow but steady increase in support for independence, with figures remarkably similar to those of TNS-BMRB. However, its two most recent polls have ‘Yes’ falling back slightly, to around 39 or 40 percent.

The polls produced by these six companies are thus not in total agreement, but appear to suggest that, following a period of stability, there may have been a gradual tightening of the referendum race over the past six to nine months. However, there is still some uncertainty surrounding the absolute share of the vote attributed to ‘Yes’, with three pollsters (Ipsos MORI, TNS-BMRB (its most recent poll aside) and YouGov) placing it at around 40 percent once ‘Don’t Knows’ are excluded, and three others (Panelbase, Survation and ICM) at more like 45 percent. As Professor John Curtice of What Scotland Thinks explains, “we [therefore] remain unsure whether ‘No’ still enjoy a relatively comfortable lead or whether the ‘Yes’ side are at least within sight of the winning post”.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ UK Polling Report, ‘[Latest Scottish Polls, 18 May 2014](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014.

⁷⁰ What Scotland Thinks, ‘[Ipsos MORI Come Into Line](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014.

Whilst this discrepancy is likely in part due to underlying methodology, this does not wholly explain the situation since there is not a clear methodological divide between the two camps. This highlights the fact that predicting the outcome of the independence referendum is proving something of a challenge for pollsters. There are a number of reasons for this—not least the unique nature of the referendum, which means that, unlike in a general election, for example, there are no directly comparable previous results to which to peg the data.⁷¹ This creates additional uncertainties around how to weight the results. As Martin Boon of ICM has discussed, there is also a fear amongst pollsters that some kind of social-desirability bias may be at play: if people perceive it is patriotic to vote ‘Yes’, those who wish to see Scotland remain part of the UK may be reluctant to admit this.⁷²

One way in which pollsters attempt to reduce such uncertainty is by averaging a series of polls to produce what is often referred to as a ‘poll of polls’.

4.2 Poll of Polls

Producing a polling average is useful for providing a snapshot of public opinion at the time in question and for projecting what the result would be if an election were held tomorrow. However, averaging opinion polls produced by different companies (and therefore using different methodologies) is an inexact science, with no agreed means of doing so. One persistent dilemma is whether to average the most recent polls produced by each company (which might necessitate including some out of date polls) or the equivalent number of polls by date (which may result in the inclusion of several polls by one company, or from a selection of companies that tend to produce noticeably high or low levels of support for a particular party or specific voting intention).⁷³ It should also be noted that an average poll will not necessarily produce more precise results than individual pollsters, since one may inadvertently combine accurate figures with those that are less so. However, we do not know prior to an election which pollsters are providing the most accurate picture, so in this sense an average poll allows for a greater degree of confidence.⁷⁴

At least two organisations—the *Financial Times*⁷⁵ and What Scotland Thinks⁷⁶—are publishing an ongoing poll of polls in relation to the independence referendum. Whilst each employs a slightly different methodology, both prioritise date over polling company. The *Financial Times* includes ‘Don’t Knows’, with the trend line based on a rolling averaging of the most recent seven polls, but excluding the maximum and minimum values (in terms of support for independence). Meanwhile, What Scotland Thinks excludes ‘Don’t Knows’, with the trend line based on a rolling average of the six most recent polls. It should be noted that both include within their analysis a small number of additional polls beyond those referred to in this Library Note, including two conducted by Angus Reid, two by Lord Ashcroft Polls and three by Progressive Scottish Opinion (the latter two of which are not members of the British Polling Council).

The two graphs below are based on the latter methodology, showing a rolling average of the six most recent polls (from the aforementioned six companies), with and without ‘Don’t Knows’ included.

⁷¹ *Scotsman*, ‘[Martin Boon: A Pollster Entering Unchartered Waters](#)’, 20 April 2014.

⁷² *ibid.*

⁷³ What Scotland Thinks, ‘[Introduction to the What Scotland Thinks ‘Poll of Polls’](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014.

⁷⁴ UK Polling Report, ‘[The UK Polling Report Polling Average](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014.

⁷⁵ *Financial Times*, ‘[Scottish Independence Poll Tracker](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014.

⁷⁶ What Scotland Thinks, ‘[Poll of Polls: 12 June](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014.

Figure 15: Poll of Polls (With Don't Knows)

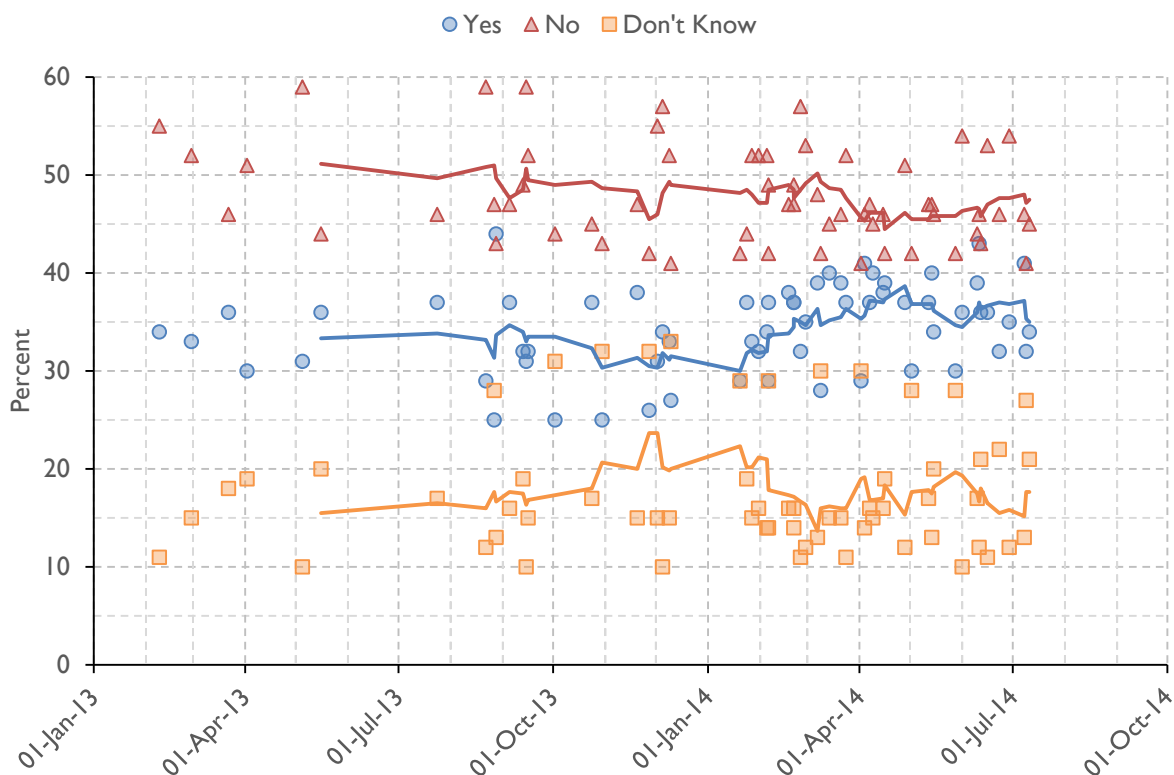
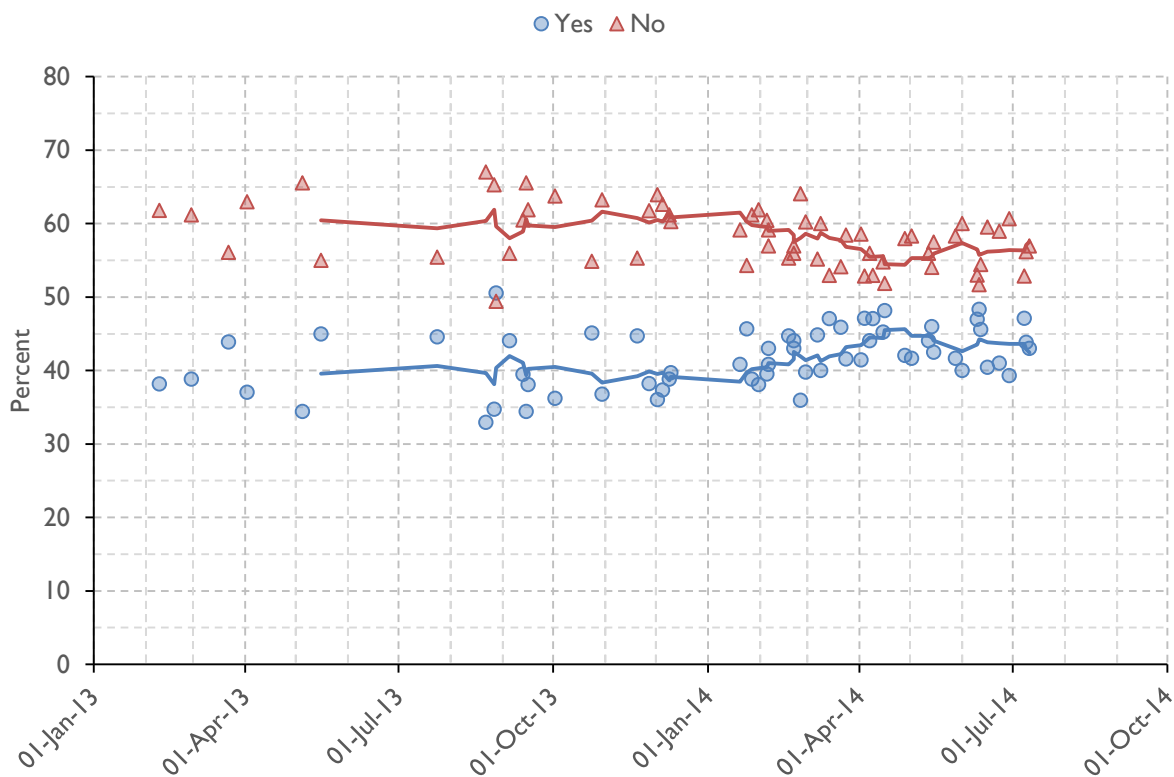


Figure 16: Poll of Polls (Without Don't Knows)



These two graphs add further weight to the suggestion that, following a period of stability, there has been a gradual narrowing in the polls since around the turn of the year, with average support for 'Yes' increasing from about 40 percent throughout much of 2013 to nearer 45 percent in recent months, once 'Don't Knows' are excluded. However, it appears this rise in

support for independence may well have stalled over the past month or two. As things stand, the average of the six most recent polls has support for ‘Yes’ at around 43 percent and ‘No’ at 57 percent.

4.3 Cross-breaks

Drilling down into the headline figures outlined above, the cross-breaks within referendum opinion polls offer some interesting insights into voting intention by demographic groupings such as gender, age and social class. The gender split is the most noteworthy of all, with men consistently showing higher levels of support for independence than women. Indeed, an analysis of 19 recent opinion polls by ScotCen Social Research shows that, on average, 48 percent of men support independence compared to 37 percent of women.⁷⁷

There is also something of an age gap, with older voters (those aged 55 and above or 65 and above depending on the polling company) consistently showing lower levels of support for independence in recent polls.⁷⁸ However, although the annual Scottish Social Attitudes survey has regularly shown higher levels of support for independence amongst younger people (ie those aged 18 to 24) over the past decade, recent referendum polls have not exhibited such a clear pattern.⁷⁹ Taking Ipsos MORI as an example, in only three of the six polls they have conducted since the end of January 2013 has the youngest cross-break polled the greatest level of ‘Yes’ support (with one poll actually attributing the lowest level of support for independence to this group).⁸⁰ There is also a perceptible class difference in terms of voting intention, with those in middle class occupations typically less supportive of independence than are those in more working class ones.⁸¹ Similarly, Ipsos MORI data has regularly shown around 15 percent higher support for the ‘Yes’ campaign amongst those living in the most deprived areas of the country than those in the least deprived parts.⁸²

Most pollsters also publish cross-breaks by Scottish region. It is difficult to read too much into these figures, however, since the sample sizes for some of the less populated regions are very small (often less than 100 people) and hence there are large margins of error attached to them. If we expand our focus slightly, geography may be of greater significance: in the few polls to have examined the issue, those born in Scotland seemingly show greater levels of support for independence than do those born elsewhere in the UK or even further afield. A recent Panelbase poll showed majority support for independence amongst people born in Scotland (with 44 percent of those polled in favour and 42 percent against), but suggested that only a quarter (25 percent) of those born outside of the country intend to vote ‘Yes’ (and 65 percent ‘No’).⁸³

⁷⁷ What Scotland Thinks, [‘Why Women May Hold the Key to September 18’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

⁷⁸ ScotCen Social Research, [‘Who Supports and Opposes Independence—And Why?’](#), 15 May 2013, p 2.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ Ipsos MORI, [‘Scottish Public Opinion Monitor, June 2014’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

⁸¹ ScotCen Social Research, [‘Who Supports and Opposes Independence—And Why?’](#), 15 May 2013, pp 2–3.

⁸² Ipsos MORI, [‘Scottish Public Opinion Monitor, June 2014’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

⁸³ Panelbase, [‘Scottish Sunday Times—Wave 11’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

5. Other Surveys Relating to the Independence Referendum

Opinion polls and other surveys relating to the referendum have not been restricted to the referendum question itself (ie support for or against independence). For instance, members of the Scottish public have also been surveyed on the extent to which they are certain to vote in the referendum election, as well as the key issues that are informing the choice they intend to make at the ballot box.

5.1 Certainty to Vote

All six companies examined in this Library Note have polled on certainty to vote. Although slightly different methodologies are employed, there is broad agreement amongst the six that voter turnout for the referendum election will be relatively high in comparison to recent general and European elections.⁸⁴ Indeed, the number of respondents indicating that they are certain to vote has regularly been above 70 percent in recent months, with some polls even suggesting a turnout above 80 percent⁸⁵ (by comparison, turnout at the 2010 general election was around 64 percent in Scotland).⁸⁶ As with other recent elections, there is something of an age gradient underlying this figure, with older voters displaying the highest certainty to vote and younger individuals the lowest.⁸⁷

This is not the only variation in voting certainty that is interesting pollsters. Evidence from the 2013 Scottish Social Attitudes survey suggests that, amongst those who are sure of their position on independence, slightly more ‘Yes’ supporters (90 percent) than ‘No’ supporters (86 percent) say there is better than a 5 in 10 chance that they will actually vote in the referendum.⁸⁸ The distinction is even bigger amongst those who are less sure of their views, but who say they are leaning towards voting one way or the other: 91 percent of less committed ‘Yes’ supporters say they are likely to cast a vote, compared with only 73 percent of their ‘No’ counterparts. What are the implications of this finding? Dr Jan Eichhorn of the University of Edinburgh suggests the following:

[I]t seems that ‘No’ supporters, and in particular those less committed to the message of the Better Together campaign, are somewhat less motivated to turn out and vote on 18 September. If the differences in voters’ reported likelihood of voting in the SSA survey were to be fully reflected in practice, this would be enough to boost the ‘Yes’ vote by two percentage points—not a huge difference, but potentially important if the race were to become even tighter.⁸⁹

There is a small caveat to add here, in that these figures are derived from research conducted in the summer and autumn of 2013. One cannot be certain, therefore, that these trends still hold as we approach the referendum election itself.⁹⁰

⁸⁴ ICM, Ipsos MORI and Panelbase tend to use a scale of 1–10 (1 being certain not to vote and 10 being certain to vote), Survation and YouGov a scale of 0–10, and TNS-BMRB a six-level scale from ‘certain’ to ‘not certain’.

⁸⁵ ESRC Future of UK and Scotland, [‘Who Will Turn Up and Who Will Stay at Home? The Potential Impact of Differences in Turnout’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

⁸⁶ BBC, [‘Election 2010, Scotland Results’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

⁸⁷ Ipsos MORI, [‘Scottish Public Opinion Monitor, June 2014’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

⁸⁸ ESRC Future of UK and Scotland, [‘Who Will Turn Up and Who Will Stay at Home? The Potential Impact of Differences in Turnout’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

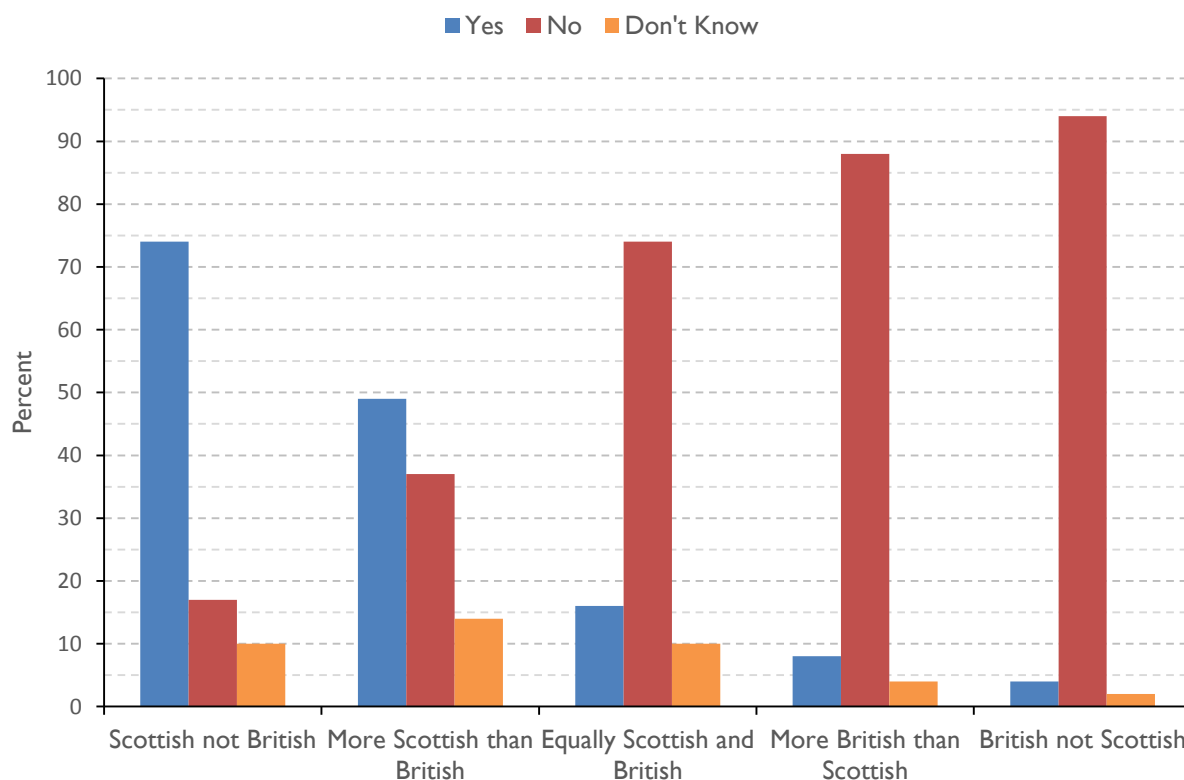
⁸⁹ *ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Guardian*, [‘Scottish Referendum Could Be Decided by Greater Desire From Yes Voters—Study’](#), 1 May 2014.

5.2 Key Issues Influencing Voting Intention

Other surveys have focused on the key issues that are influencing the way in which individuals intend to vote in the referendum. One issue of potential importance is sense of national identity (ie whether people feel Scottish or British). In addition to voting intention, Ipsos MORI has regularly questioned individuals on this matter with the aid of a five-point scale, ranging from ‘Scottish not British’ to ‘British not Scottish’. The results from their most recent poll conducted at the start of June 2014 are shown in the graph below.⁹¹

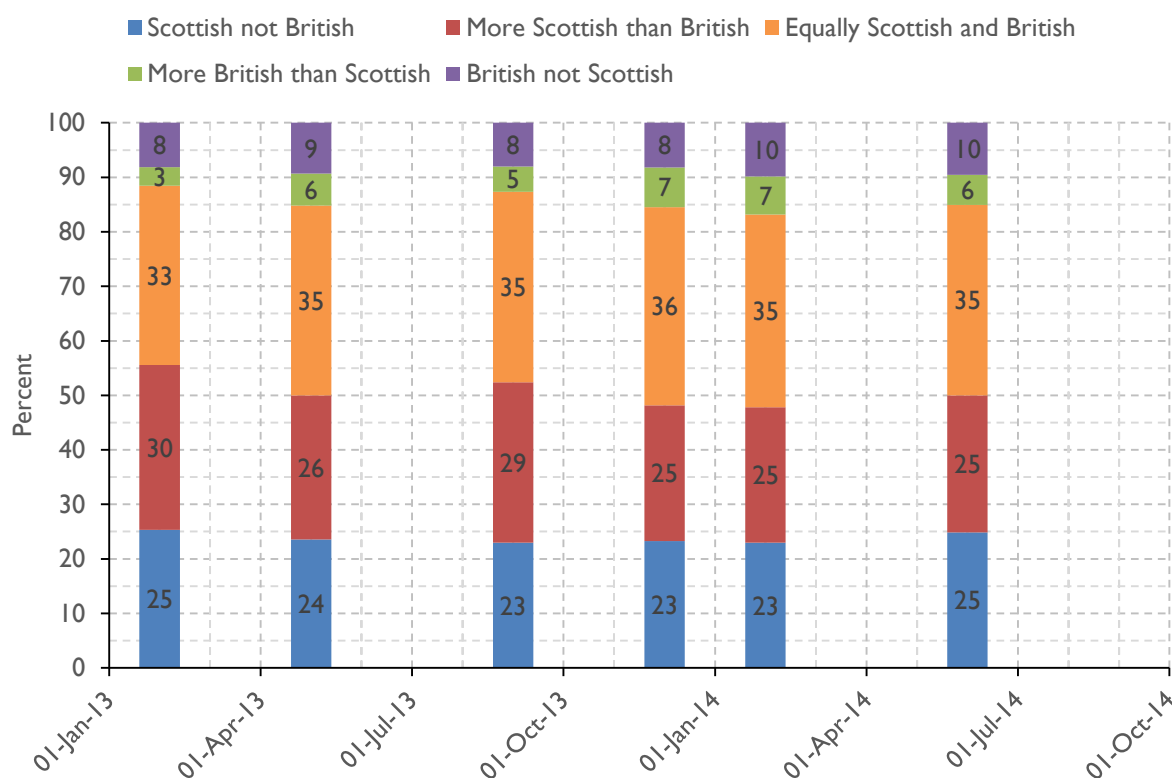
Figure 17: Voting Intention and National Identity



The graph shows a considerable level of support for independence amongst those who identify as solely Scottish. Meanwhile, those who see themselves as more Scottish than British are more evenly split in terms of their voting intention come September, with support for ‘Yes’ slightly ahead. However, respondents identifying with all three of the remaining options (Equally Scottish and British, More British than Scottish and British not Scottish) display an almost unanimous rejection of independence, with ‘No’ leading by over 80 percent amongst those who recognise themselves as mostly or entirely British. Sense of identity is seemingly an important factor in determining which way individuals will vote, therefore.

What the above graph does not show, however, is the number of individuals who identify with each of these five options. This information is displayed in the graph below, which shows the proportion of those aligning with each of these five statements over time, once the minority of individuals opting for ‘none of the above’ have been excluded.

⁹¹ Ipsos MORI, [‘Scottish Public Attitudes and Opinion Monitor—Wave 19’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

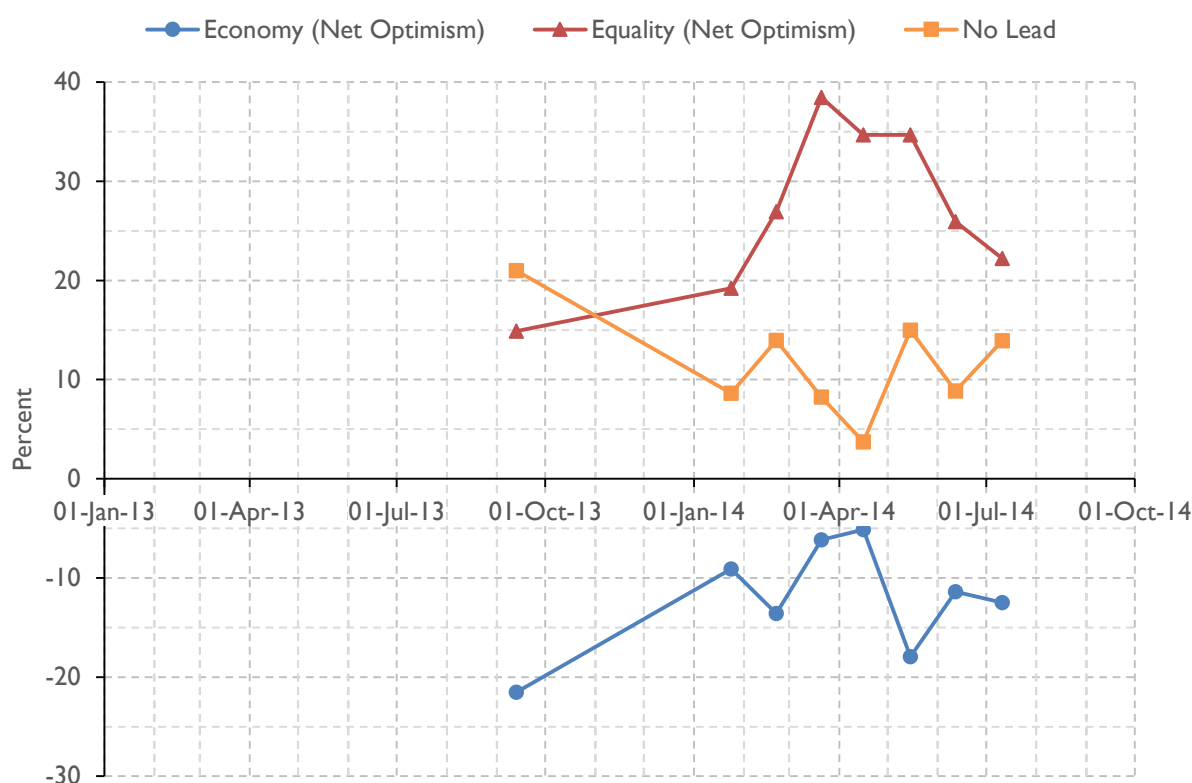
Figure 18: National Identity (by percentage)

The graph shows that far more people feel strongly Scottish than strongly British. Clearly, therefore, people's views are not just a reflection of their identity. Otherwise, as Professor John Curtice explains, "the 'Yes' side would be well ahead in the polls".⁹² Further evidence for this is provided by the fact that the proportion of people identifying with each of the five options has changed little over the course of the referendum campaign. This is not entirely surprising given that people do not change their sense of identity very easily, but suggests that other factors may be behind the observed narrowing of the polls in recent months.⁹³

The perceived practical consequences of independence may also be shaping people's views. Two such issues that have been the focus of much recent attention in the referendum campaign are the implications of independence for Scotland's economic prosperity and the level of equality within society. Accordingly, alongside the question of voting intention, ICM have consistently asked respondents whether they think independence would be good or bad for Scotland's economy and whether it would result in more or less equality. The graph below, which displays the net level of optimism on each of these two issues (ie the sum of those who feel independence would produce a more prosperous or egalitarian society, minus those who take the opposite view, whilst excluding those who say there would be no difference or who are unsure), summarises the resultant findings. The change in support for independence is also shown in the form of the 'No' lead (ie the sum of those who intend to vote 'No' less those who intend to vote 'Yes', once 'Don't Knows' are excluded).

⁹² BBC, '[Scottish Independence: What Have the Polls Been Saying?](#)', 18 September 2013.

⁹³ *ibid.*

Figure 19: Economy vs Equality

Whilst there has been a net level of pessimism regarding the economic consequences of independence throughout the referendum campaign, it appears this has lessened slightly in recent months—at the same time as the opinion polls have tightened. Indeed, although the size of the ‘No’ lead in the ICM polls is comparatively erratic (as mentioned previously), it is seemingly strongly correlated with the electorate’s level of optimism about the effect of independence on the Scottish economy. That is, when optimism about the economic consequences of independence has increased, support for the ‘Yes’ campaign has also risen (and vice versa). However, the same cannot be said in terms of equality. Indeed, the number of people believing independence would result in a more egalitarian society rose in the first few months of 2014, but has since reduced: a trend not seemingly correlated with the level of ‘Yes’ support. It would appear, therefore, that people are influenced by the economic arguments of independence to a far greater extent than those relating to social justice.⁹⁴

Indeed, several other data sources paint a similar picture regarding the importance of the economic debate for the outcome of the referendum—particularly in terms of personal finances. For instance, ICM’s September 2013 poll also asked individuals how they thought they would vote if they were convinced they would be either £500 better or worse off under independence: 47 percent of individuals claimed they would support Scotland becoming independent in the former situation (and 37 percent oppose), whilst only 18 percent said they would do so in the latter (and 66 percent oppose).⁹⁵

Finally, could doubts around the further devolution of powers to Scotland in the event of a ‘No’ vote influence the referendum result? This question seems particularly pertinent given the

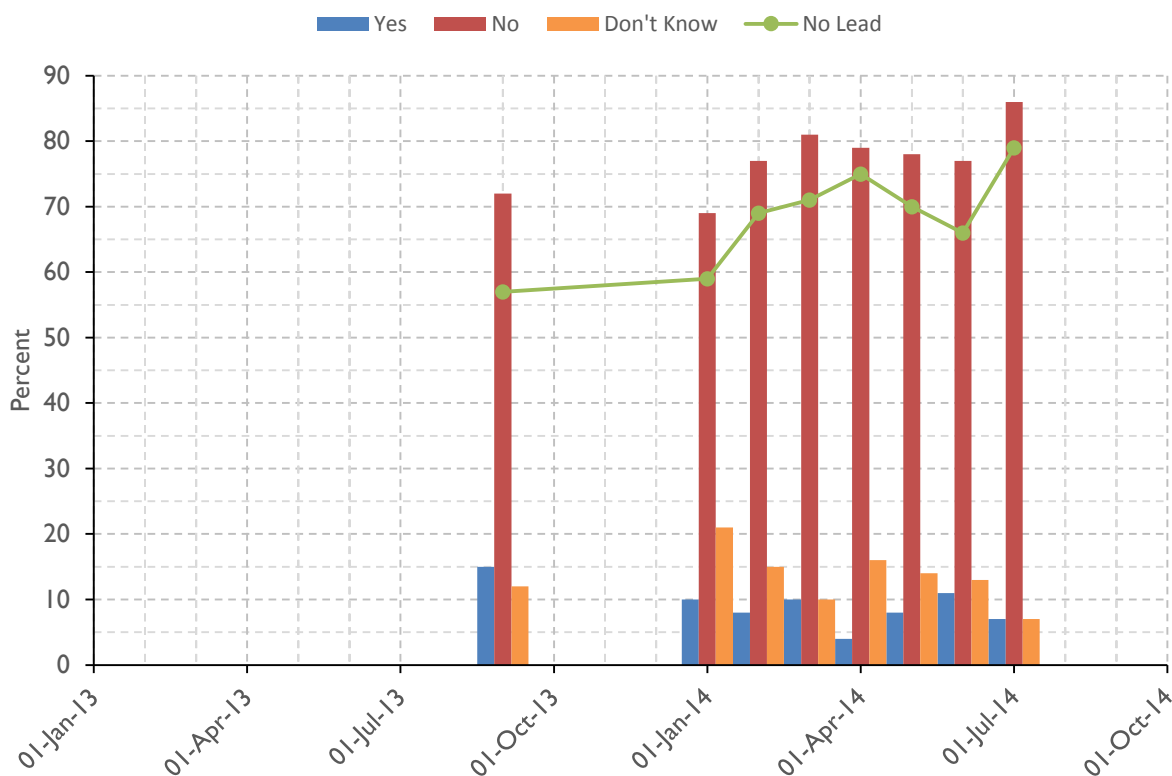
⁹⁴ What Scotland Thinks, ‘[March ICM Poll Uncovers Worrying Underlying Trends for No](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014.

⁹⁵ ICM, ‘[Scotland Independence Poll](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014.

continually high level of support for ‘devo max’ revealed by the Scottish Social Attitudes survey question on constitutional preference (as outlined in section two).

ICM polling data allows us to examine this issue. In addition to asking people what constitutional outcome they would like to see in the event of a ‘No’ vote, the last five ICM polls have also asked voters what they think will actually happen. Whilst a steady majority of respondents (around 60 to 65 percent) would like to see further devolution in this scenario, there is some scepticism that this will actually materialise. Indeed, little more than a third of respondents (the figure has varied between 33 and 40 percent in the five polls to date) appear to believe this would occur. The figure does not change dramatically (between 41 and 47 percent) if we focus only on those who actually favour further devolution in the event of a ‘No’ vote. Might this scepticism regarding devolution result in some less committed ‘No’ voters switching allegiance in the run up to the referendum? The following graph based on data from all eight ICM polls and outlining how existing ‘No’ voters in favour of further devolution would vote were they to become convinced that their preferred constitutional outcome was no longer a possibility, suggests not.

Figure 20: Voting Intention and Devolution



Indeed, if anything it seems that over the course of the referendum campaign an increasing share of ‘No’ voters have concluded that, if faced with this hypothetical scenario, they would still vote against independence. Meanwhile, the number who would change their allegiance to the ‘Yes’ campaign has remained relatively stable. The result is that the ‘No’ lead on this particular polling issue has risen from below 60 percent at the start of 2014 to over 70 percent in the past couple of months. Whilst this suggests the ‘No’ campaign has not been unduly damaged by scepticism surrounding promises of further devolution, there might still be cause for concern for supporters of Better Together. Professor John Curtice of the University of Strathclyde warns: “the 10 percent who say they would vote ‘Yes’ and the additional 10

percent who say they do not know what they would do could still be more than the 'No' side could afford to lose should the referendum race get much tighter".⁹⁶

This is a reminder that, in spite of what polling and survey data can tell us, there are many uncertainties surrounding the outcome of the independence referendum. Ultimately, pollsters and campaigners alike will have to wait until 18 September to see how the Scottish public will vote.

⁹⁶ What Scotland Thinks, '[March ICM Poll Uncovers Worrying Underlying Trends for No](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

6. Appendix: List of Polls on Referendum Voting Intention

Date	With DKs				Without DKs			Company	Commissioned By	Method	Sample Size	Age Profile	Margin of Error
	Yes	No	DK	Yes Lead	Yes	No	Yes Lead						
09-Feb-13	34	55	11	-21	38	62	-24	Ipsos MORI	The Times	Phone	1,003	18+	-
28-Feb-13	33	52	15	-19	39	61	-22	TNS-BMRB	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament	Face-to-face	1,001	16+	-
22-Mar-13	36	46	18	-10	44	56	-12	Panelbase	Sunday Times	Online	885	18+	-
02-Apr-13	30	51	19	-21	37	63	-26	TNS-BMRB	Self-funded or Unknown	Face-to-face	1,002	16+	-
05-May-13	31	59	10	-28	34	66	-31	Ipsos MORI	The Times	Phone	1,001	18+	-
16-May-13	36	44	20	-8	45	55	-10	Panelbase	Sunday Times	Online	1,004	18+	-
24-Jul-13	37	46	17	-9	45	55	-11	Panelbase	Sunday Times	Online	1,001	18+	-
22-Aug-13	29	59	12	-30	33	67	-34	YouGov	Devo Plus	Online	1,171	18+	-
27-Aug-13	25	47	28	-22	35	65	-31	TNS-BMRB	Self-funded or Unknown	Face-to-face	1,017	16+	-
28-Aug-13	44	43	13	1	51	49	1	Panelbase	Scottish National Party	Online	1,043	18+	-
05-Sep-13	37	47	16	-10	44	56	-12	Panelbase	Sunday Times	Online	1,002	18+	-
13-Sep-13	32	49	19	-17	40	60	-21	ICM	The Scotsman (Scotland on Sunday)	Online	1,002	18+	-
15-Sep-13	31	59	10	-28	34	66	-31	Ipsos MORI	Scottish Television	Phone	1,000	16+	-
16-Sep-13	32	52	15	-20	38	62	-24	YouGov	The Times	Online	1,139	18+	-
02-Oct-13	25	44	31	-19	36	64	-28	TNS-BMRB	Self-funded or Unknown	Face-to-face	1,004	16+	-
24-Oct-13	37	45	17	-8	45	55	-10	Panelbase	Wings Over Scotland	Online	866	18+	-
30-Oct-13	25	43	32	-18	37	63	-26	TNS-BMRB	Self-funded or Unknown	Face-to-face	1,010	16+	-
20-Nov-13	38	47	15	-9	45	55	-11	Panelbase	Sunday Times	Online	1,006	16+	-
27-Nov-13	26	42	32	-16	38	62	-24	TNS-BMRB	Self-funded or Unknown	Face-to-face	1,004	16+	-
02-Dec-13	31	55	15	-24	36	64	-28	YouGov	Self-funded or Unknown	Online	1,118	18+	-
05-Dec-13	34	57	10	-23	37	63	-25	Ipsos MORI	Scottish Television	Phone	1,006	16+	-
09-Dec-13	33	52	15	-19	39	61	-22	YouGov	The Times	Online	1,074	18+	-
10-Dec-13	27	41	33	-14	40	60	-21	TNS-BMRB	Self-funded or Unknown	Face-to-face	1,055	16+	-
20-Jan-14	29	42	29	-13	41	59	-18	TNS-BMRB	Sir Tom Hunter	Face-to-face	1,054	16+	-

24-Jan-14	37	44	19	-7	46	54	-9	ICM	The Scotsman (Scotland on Sunday)	Online	1,004	18+	-
27-Jan-14	33	52	15	-19	39	61	-22	YouGov	Self-funded or Unknown	Online	1,192	18+	-
31-Jan-14	32	52	16	-20	38	62	-24	Survation	The Mail on Sunday	Online	1,010	16+	3.1
05-Feb-14	34	52	14	-18	40	60	-21	YouGov	Scottish Sun	Online	1,047	18+	-
06-Feb-14	37	49	14	-12	43	57	-14	Panelbase	Sunday Times	Online	1,012	16+	-
06-Feb-14	29	42	29	-13	41	59	-18	TNS-BMRB	Self-funded or Unknown	Face-to-face	996	16+	-
18-Feb-14	38	47	16	-9	45	55	-11	Survation	Scottish Daily Mail	Online	1,005	16+	3.1
21-Feb-14	37	49	14	-12	43	57	-14	ICM	The Scotsman (Scotland on Sunday)	Online	1,004	18+	-
21-Feb-14	37	47	16	-10	44	56	-12	Panelbase	Scottish National Party	Online	1,022	16+	-
25-Feb-14	32	57	11	-25	36	64	-28	Ipsos MORI	Scottish Television	Phone	1,001	16+	-
28-Feb-14	35	53	12	-18	40	60	-20	YouGov	Scottish Sun	Online	1,257	18+	-
07-Mar-14	39	48	13	-9	45	55	-10	Survation	Daily Record	Online	1,002	16+	3.1
09-Mar-14	28	42	30	-14	40	60	-20	TNS-BMRB	Self-funded or Unknown	Face-to-face	1,019	16+	-
14-Mar-14	40	45	15	-5	47	53	-6	Panelbase	Newsnet Scotland	Online	1,036	16+	-
21-Mar-14	39	46	15	-7	46	54	-8	ICM	The Scotsman (Scotland on Sunday)	Online	1,010	18+	-
24-Mar-14	37	52	11	-15	42	58	-17	YouGov	The Times	Online	1,072	18+	-
02-Apr-14	29	41	30	-12	41	59	-17	TNS-BMRB	Self-funded or Unknown	Face-to-face	988	16+	-
04-Apr-14	41	46	14	-5	47	53	-6	Panelbase	Wings Over Scotland	Online	1,025	16+	-
07-Apr-14	37	47	16	-10	44	56	-12	Survation	Daily Record	Online	1,006	16+	3.1
09-Apr-14	40	45	15	-5	47	53	-6	Panelbase	Yes Scotland	Online	1,024	16+	-
15-Apr-14	38	46	16	-8	45	55	-10	Survation	The Sunday Post	Online	1,001	16+	3.1
16-Apr-14	39	42	19	-3	48	52	-4	ICM	The Scotsman (Scotland on Sunday)	Online	1,004	18+	-
28-Apr-14	37	51	12	-14	42	58	-16	YouGov	Channel 4 News	Online	1,208	18+	-
02-May-14	30	42	28	-12	42	58	-17	TNS-BMRB	Self-funded or Unknown	Face-to-face	996	16+	-
12-May-14	37	47	17	-10	44	56	-12	Survation	Daily Record	Online	1,003	16+	3.1
14-May-14	40	47	13	-7	46	54	-8	Panelbase	Scottish Sunday Times	Online	1,046	16+	-
15-May-14	34	46	20	-12	43	58	-15	ICM	The Scotsman (Scotland on Sunday)	Online	1,003	18+	-
28-May-14	30	42	28	-12	42	58	-17	TNS-BMRB	Self-funded or Unknown	Face-to-face	1,011	16+	-
01-Jun-14	36	54	10	-18	40	60	-20	Ipsos MORI	Scottish Television	Phone	1,003	16+	-
10-Jun-14	39	44	17	-5	47	53	-6	Survation	Daily Record	Online	1,004	16+	3.1
11-Jun-14	43	46	12	-3	48	52	-3	Panelbase	Yes Scotland	Online	1,060	16+	-
12-Jun-14	36	43	21	-7	46	54	-9	ICM	Scotland on Sunday	Online	1,002	16+	-
16-Jun-14	36	53	11	-17	40	60	-19	YouGov	The Sun	Online	1,039	18+	-
23-Jun-14	32	46	22	-14	41	59	-18	TNS-BMRB	Sir Tom Hunter	Face-to-face	1,004	16+	-
29-Jun-14	35	54	12	-19	39	61	-21	YouGov	The Times	Online	1,206	18+	-

8-Jul-14	41	46	13	-5	47	53	-6	Survation	Daily Record	Online	1,013	16+	3.1
9-Jul-14	32	41	27	-9	44	56	-12	TNS-BMRB	Self-funded or Unknown	Face-to-face	995	16+	-
11-Jul-14	34	45	21	-11	43	57	-14	ICM	The Scotsman (Scotland on Sunday)	Online	1,002	16+	-