



PRESS RELEASE

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IT'S STILL ABOUT INDEPENDENCE

Throwing Scottish independence into the electoral debate benefits the SNP and penalises the Labour, according to a study by the University of Edinburgh and the European University Institute.

When the three main parties attack the SNP and make explicit reference to the issue of independence in their electoral arguments, Scottish voters are more likely to vote for the SNP, instead of stepping away from it. The same increase occurs when the SNP itself explicitly mentions independence and challenges all the other three parties together.

Framing the electoral competition in relation to Scottish independence, on the other hand, reduces support for Labour among Scottish voters. The results from the study, however, suggest that these “lost” Labour votes do not go directly to the SNP, but mostly to other parties, including the Lib Dems and the Green party.

Another finding of the study indicates that putting Labour and the SNP in direct opposition, polarises the electorate, as Labour and SNP voters drift apart. Meanwhile, when independence is kept out of the debate, those who intend to vote Labour are more favourable towards the SNP, and, at the same time, those who intend to vote SNP are more favourable towards the Labour.

Finally, results show that making Scottish independence salient in the electoral debate and directly challenging the SNP, increases Scottish voters’ support for a separation from the UK. This increased support occurs not only in the general pool of subjects, but especially among both Labour and SNP voters. In other words, not only do SNP voters react to the challenging arguments by further supporting the idea of an independent Scotland, but the same happens among Labour voters when Labour leaders explicitly frame themselves as a unionist party.

Quote:

“The results from this study indicate that framing the electoral competition in direct opposition to the SNP as a single-issue nationalist party can be counter-productive for the main Westminster parties, since it further increases the support for the SNP. This frame particularly penalises Labour, because voters perceive it as closer to the other unionist parties. Thus they become more likely to cast their vote for other parties.

The fact that the support for Scottish independence increases among Labour voters when the party directly challenges the SNP and takes an explicit unionist positions indicates a growing discrepancy between the party and its voters in Scotland. This result is in line with a documented long-standing shift from the Labour to the SNP, which peaked during the campaign for Scottish independence. Given these trends in the electorate, reconciling a “Scottish Labour” with the other pieces of the party in the rest of the UK becomes an extremely complicated task.”

The study

- An online experiment involving around 200 participants recruited by BLUE Lab, University of Edinburgh.
- The participants were all living in Scotland and registered to vote in the UK election
- Period: one week, from Wednesday 22 April to Wed 29 April
- Financed by the European University Institute and conducted by Davide Morisi, Ph.D. researcher at the EUI, SPS Department

Design of the study

A group of around 200 voters, mostly British students at the University of Edinburgh, filled in an online survey for around 20 minutes.

After replying to a series of preliminary questions, one group of randomly selected participants was asked to read 4 short texts (around 200 words each) containing arguments in favour of the Conservatives, Lib Dem, Labour and SNP. All the arguments consisted of real statements made during the last month by party leaders.

A second group was asked to read the same arguments, but all the texts contained an additional paragraph in which each party directly challenged the policies proposed by the SNP and their support for independence. In the case of the text for the SNP, the additional paragraph contained an explicit mention to independence and portrayed the SNP in opposition to all the other three parties

After reading the texts, both groups replied to a series of additional questions, including the intentions to vote at the UK election, the propensity to vote for the Conservatives, the Lib Dem, Labour and the SNP, and the agreement/disagreement on the fact the Scotland should be an independent country.

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Kind regards,

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