

Polls on National Independence: The Scottish Case in a Comparative Perspective

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Outline

- ✦ Background: Scotland & Quebec, similar, yet different.
- ✦ Referenda & elections, similar yet different.
- ✦ What happened in Quebec 1995?
 - ✦ How did the campaign polls fare?
 - ✦ Lessons for Scotland?
- ✦ What happened in Scotland?
 - ✦ How did the campaign polls fare?
 - ✦ Was it foreseeable?
- ✦ What do they want? Support for independence before and after the referendum.

Background

- ✦ Quebec had two referendums:
 - ✦ 1980: Mandate to negotiate an agreement based on equality between the two founding peoples of Canada, i.e., sovereignty-association (59.5% No)
 - ✦ 1995: Vote on a new constitutional agreement as agreed upon by three parties, i.e., sovereignty with a partnership with the rest of Canada (50.5% No)
- ✦ Scotland had 2 referendums on previous constitutional agreements
 - ✦ 1979: Legislative Assembly, 51.6% Yes but 64% participation. Needed 40% of all voters.
 - ✦ 1997: Legislative Assembly (74.3% Yes) + taxation powers (63.5% Yes).
 - ✦ 2014: Referendum on independence from the UK (55% No).

Quebec & Scotland, similarities

- ✦ Both movements are nationalist with an ethnic background.
- ✦ Both take place in a “British-type” system.
- ✦ Proportion of Non-Nationals were similar --around 17% -- with similar proportions of other Nationals (British, Canadians), other Europeans, and people from elsewhere.

Quebec & Scotland, differences

Québec

One of the poorest region

Own parliament since a long time with substantial powers

Inspired by National Liberation Movements of the 1960's

Social class related to language

No agreement with federal government

Question on sovereignty with partnership with the rest of Canada

Scotland

Somewhat poorer than England but Oil \$

Parliament created in 1997, not much powers

SNP created in 1934, success is only recent

Social class only. Speaking gaelic associated with preference for the No.

Agreement on the question & process

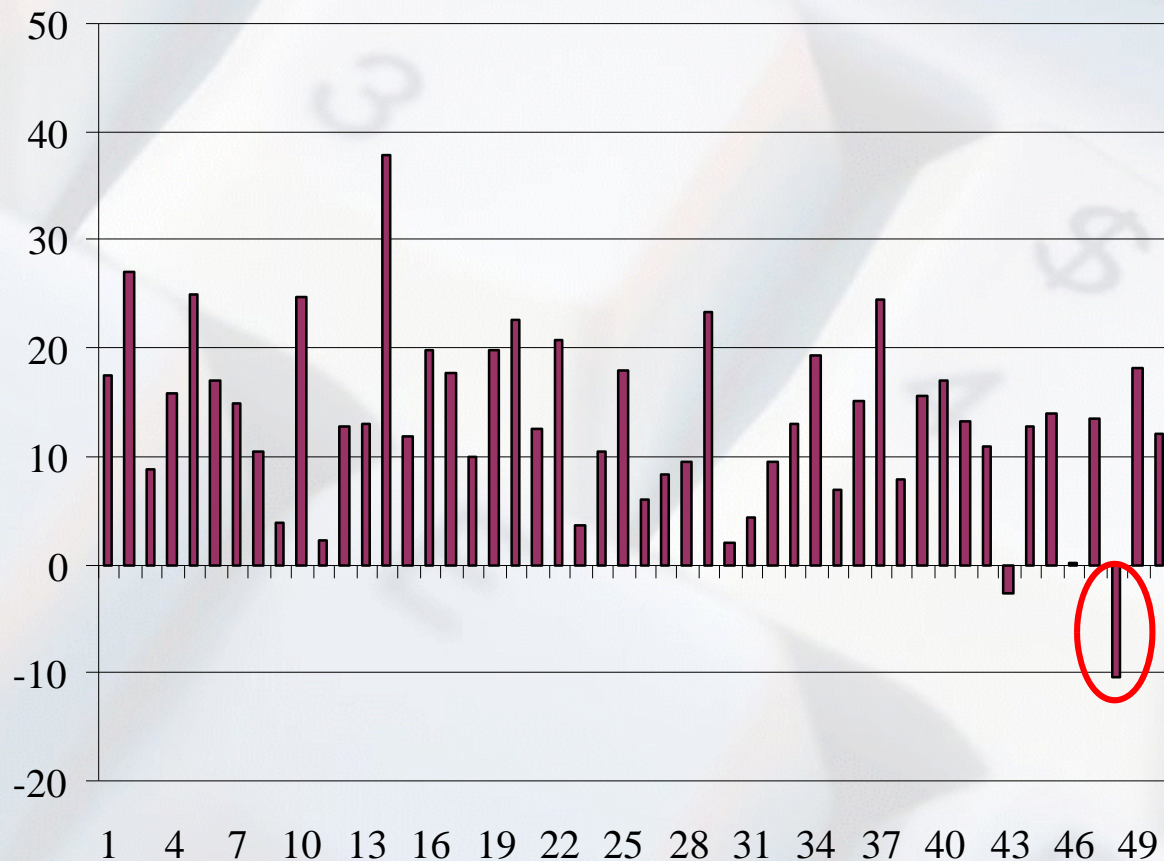
Question on Independence

Are referenda different?

- ✦ No constituencies, no regions or districts, no first Electors, no “first past the post”.
- ✦ Only 50% + 1.
- ✦ The outcome should be rather simple to predict. However, many errors of the polls:
 - ✦ On policies:
 - ✦ Switzerland and referendum on Minarets
 - ✦ Irish referendum on Gay marriage.
 - ✦ On independence/sovereignty:
 - ✦ Quebec referenda of 1980 and 1995.
 - ✦ Scottish referendum of 2014.
- ✦ Is there an “anti-incumbent”, i.e., anti-status quo, effect in polls estimates?

Difference between no in last poll & vote (Lutz & Pekari, 2010)

Switzerland: 50 referendums between 1998 & 2009



- + Vote = more No than polls.
- + Referendum on Minarets is an outlier
- + No constant ideological position for the no side.

Are referenda on national independence different?

- ✦ Based on national identity, therefore ethnic divide, feelings of exclusion, emotional debate.
- ✦ Ideological divide: Usually attempt at equating progressive / left-wing with independence.
- ✦ Change has a positive tone, easier to promote.
- ✦ Status quo is more difficult to support; those who support it are accused of being unpatriotic.
 - ✦ The No side is often a politically diverse coalition.

What is the possible impact on the reliability of opinion polls?

- ✦ As the battle heats up...
 - ✦ The No side has to bring together natural enemies (Liberals & Conservatives in QC; Labour and Conservatives in Scotland).
 - ✦ They usually do not have a unified strategy.
 - ✦ They appear as not willing to address the problems raised by the Yes side.
 - ✦ Voting intentions for the Yes increase.
 - ✦ Supporters of the No side tend to refuse to answer polls or to hide their position.
- ✦ The possible vote for the No side is underestimated.

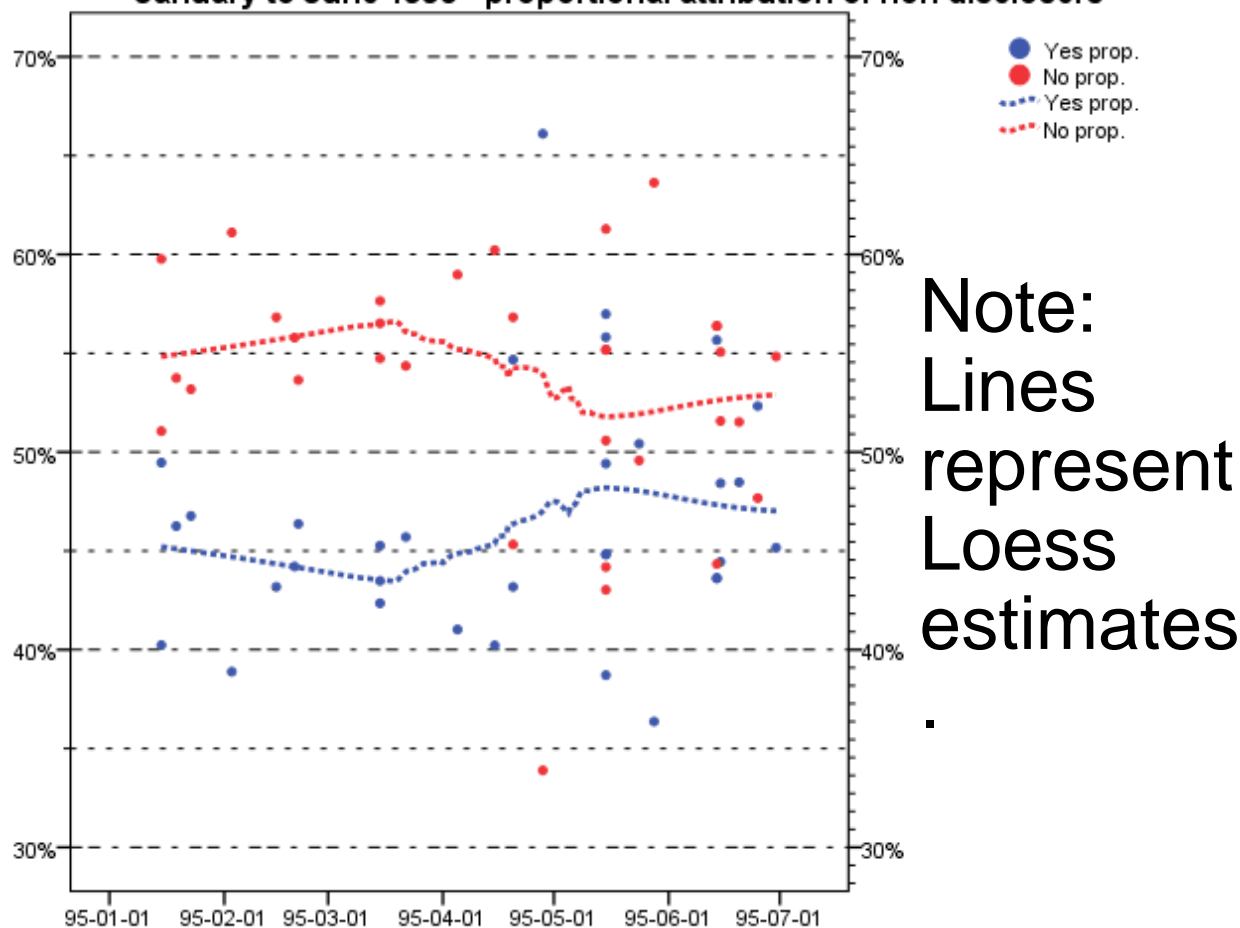
What happened in the Quebec 1995 referendum?

January - June

✦ A referendum was promised although there was a substantial majority against sovereignty.

✦ Much variability in estimates.

Evolution of support for Quebec Sovereignty or Sovereignty Association from January to June 1995 - proportional attribution of non disclosers

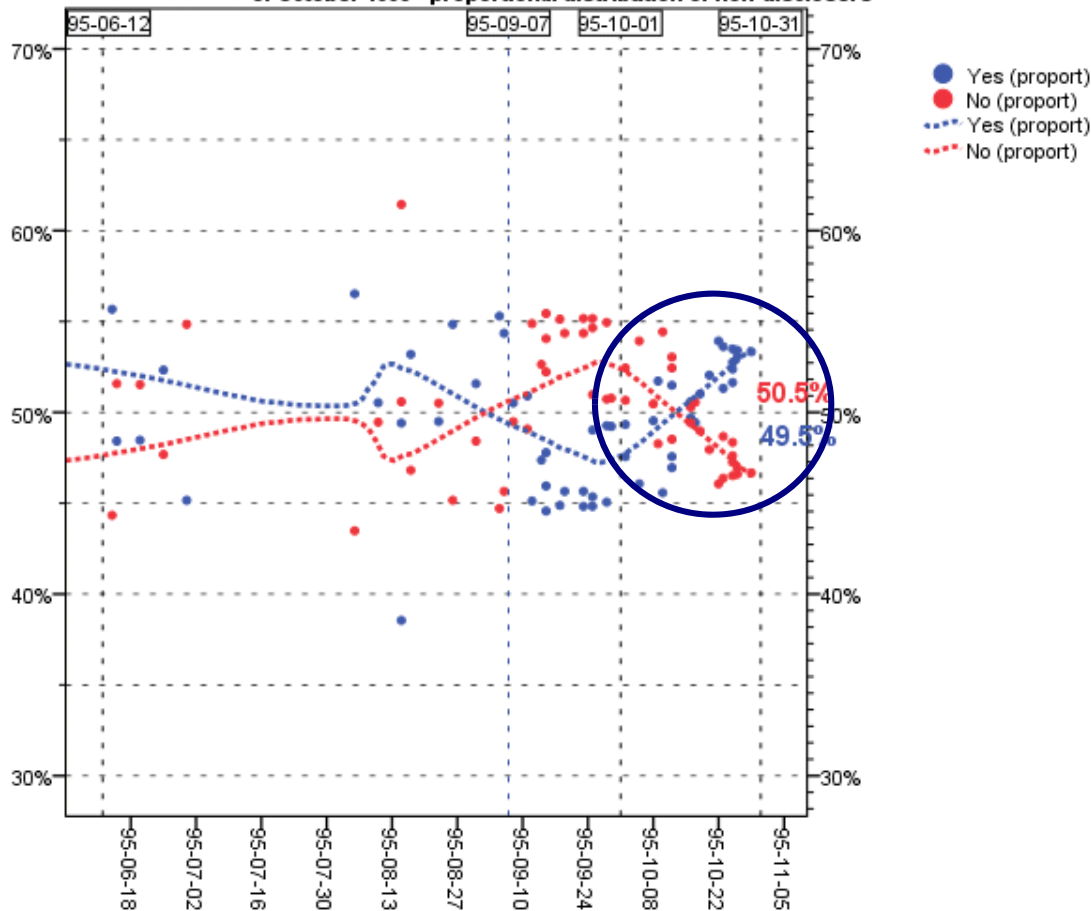


Each point represents a poll estimate positioned at the end of fieldwork; lines represent the likely evolution. © Claire Durand, 2014

What happened in Qc 1995?

From June 1995 to referendum Day

Quebec: Support for sovereignty with partnership w Canada - From the 3-party agreement on June 12 to End of October 1995 - proportional distribution of non-disclosers



Each point represents a poll estimate. Lines represent the likely change in support for sovereignty (with partnership with the rest of Canada) estimated using Loess. The first vertical line represents the launching of the Campaign, the second, October 1st, one month before referendum Day on October 31th. © C. Durand, 2014

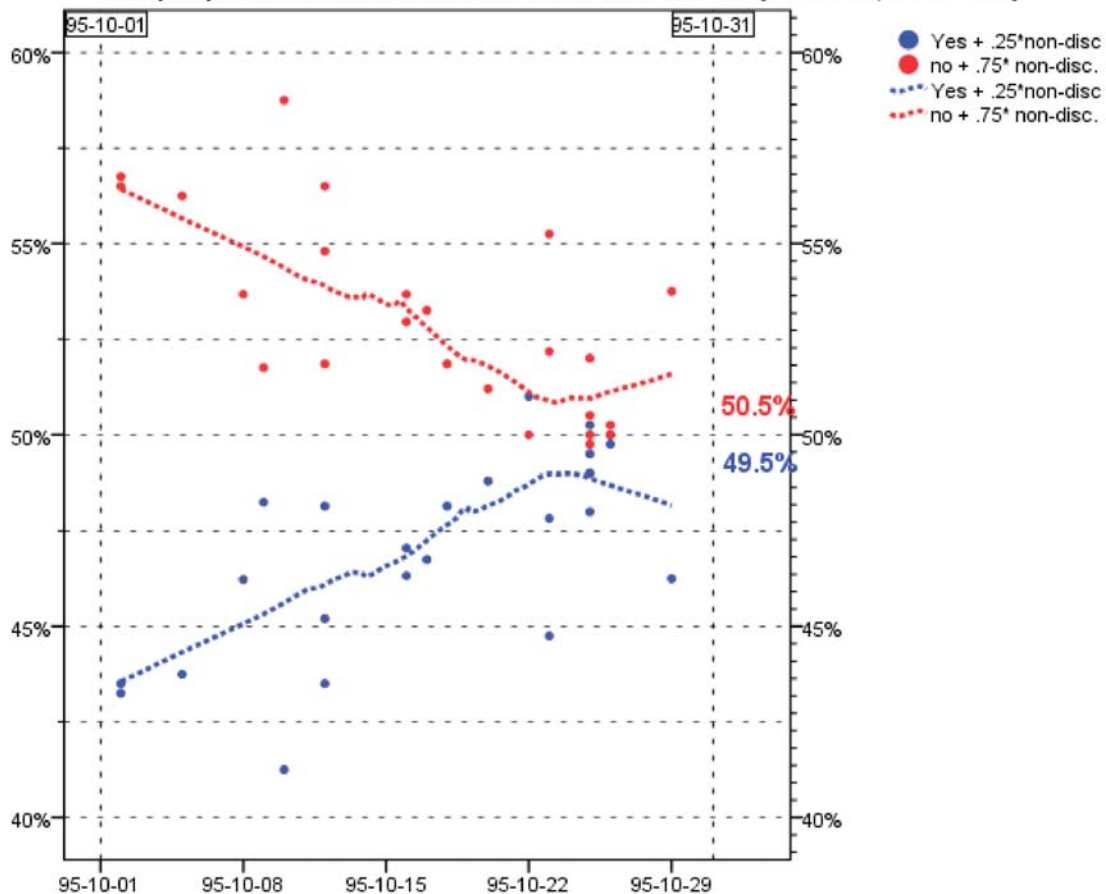
✦ Substantial increase in support for Yes during official campaign.

✦ Substantial underestimation of No.

What happened in Qc 1995?

Estimates when 75% of non-disclosers attributed to No.

Quebec: Support for sovereignty with partnership w Canada - October 1995 - nonproportional distribution of non-disclosers (75% No, 25% Yes)



Each point represents a poll estimate. Lines represent the likely change in support for sovereignty (with partnership with the rest of Canada) estimated using Loess. The first vertical line represents the launching of the campaign, the last, referendum Day. © C. Durand, 2014

✦ With a non proportional attribution of non-disclosers, prediction is close to perfect.

Lessons for Scotland?

- ✦ Close contest does not always mean close and
 - ✦ May be more likely to lead to heated debate and hostile climate.
- ✦ Don't know does not always mean don't know.
- ✦ Non-disclosers should **not** be attributed proportionally, in order to compensate for
 - ✦ Differences in the proportion of non-disclosers between pollsters.
 - ✦ The collaboration gap – unit and item non-response – between Yes and No supporters.
 - ✦ The gap in the presence of Yes and No supporters in the sampling bases.

Lessons for Scotland

- ✦ Because of the historical, demographic and political differences, we hypothesized that the tendency to underestimate the No vote would not be as substantial in Scotland than in Québec.
 - ✦ We attributed 67% of non-disclosers to the No side.
- ✦ Contrary to Quebec (telephone only), there were 3 modes of administration used in Scotland.
 - ✦ We needed to estimate whether there were differences according to modes.
 - ✦ We also checked for differences according to question wording.

What happened in Scotland?

Differences between pollsters/methods?

- ✦ For the polls published between January 2014 and August 10,
- ✦ Controlling for time,
 - ✦ Opt-in web polls (including YouGov) estimated the support for the Yes side, **3.1 points higher**, on average, than the other polls (telephone & FTF).
 - ✦ Opt-in web polls (Survation, ICM and Panelbase) **excluding YouGov** estimated the support for the Yes side, **4.6 points higher**, on average, than the other polls.
- ✦ **The difference between methods disappeared for the polls conducted during the last month.**

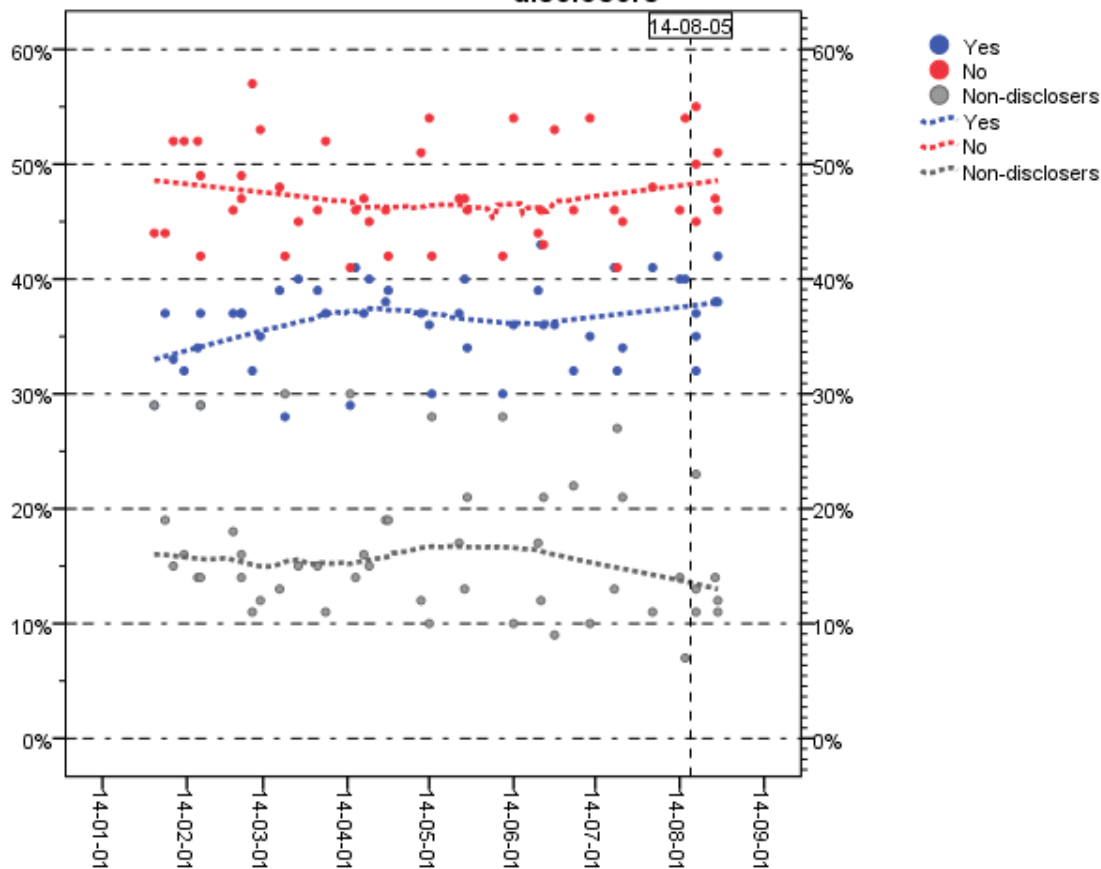
What happened in Scotland?

Differences between pollsters/methods?

- ✦ For the polls published between January 2014 and August 10, the proportion of non-disclosers
 - ✦ Did not decrease over time and varies only between pollsters;
 - ✦ Therefore it is a question of methods.
- ✦ Asking respondents how they would vote if the referendum were held **today** instead of “**in September**” resulted in 5 points less non-disclosers.

What happened in Scotland, the first stretch

Evolution of support for Scottish Independence since January 2014 - with non disclosers



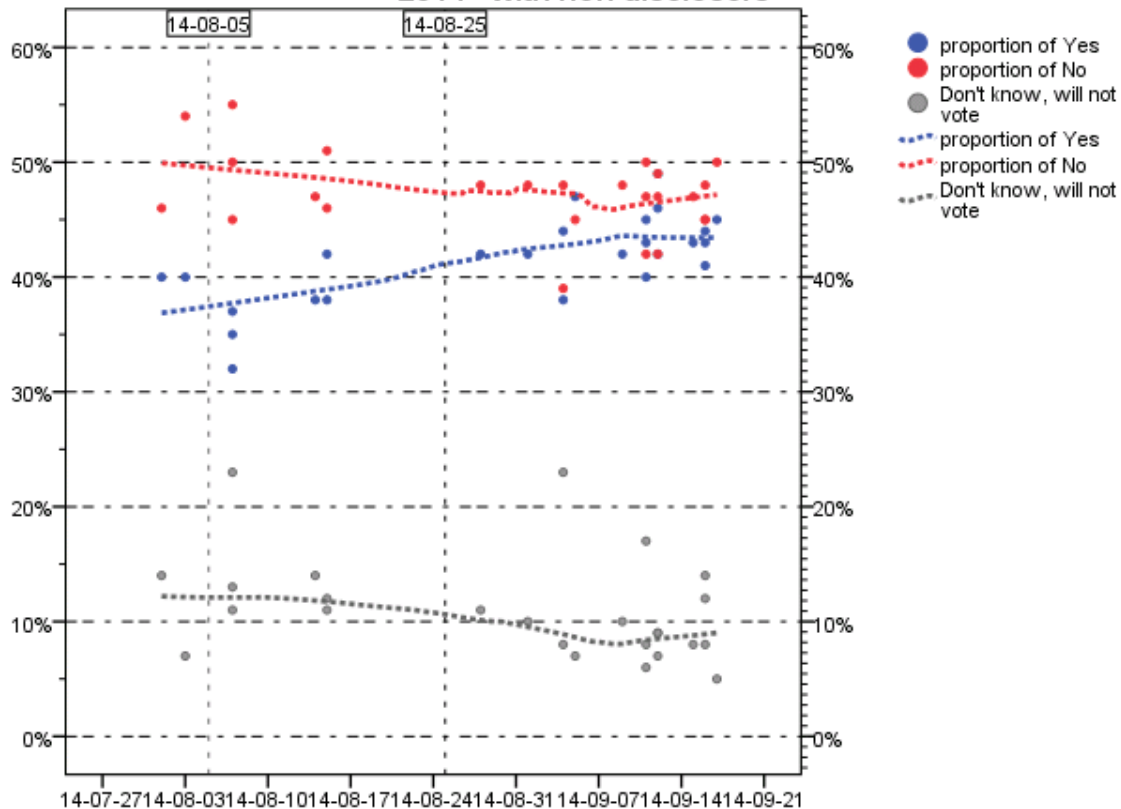
Each point represents a poll estimate positioned at the end of the fieldwork; lines represent the likely change in support estimated using Loess. © C. Durand, 2014.

✦ **January - August:**

✦ The campaign started and went on with a clear advantage for the No side.

What happened in Scotland: The last stretch, oh la la!

Evolution of support for Scottish Independence since beginning of August 2014 - with non disclosers



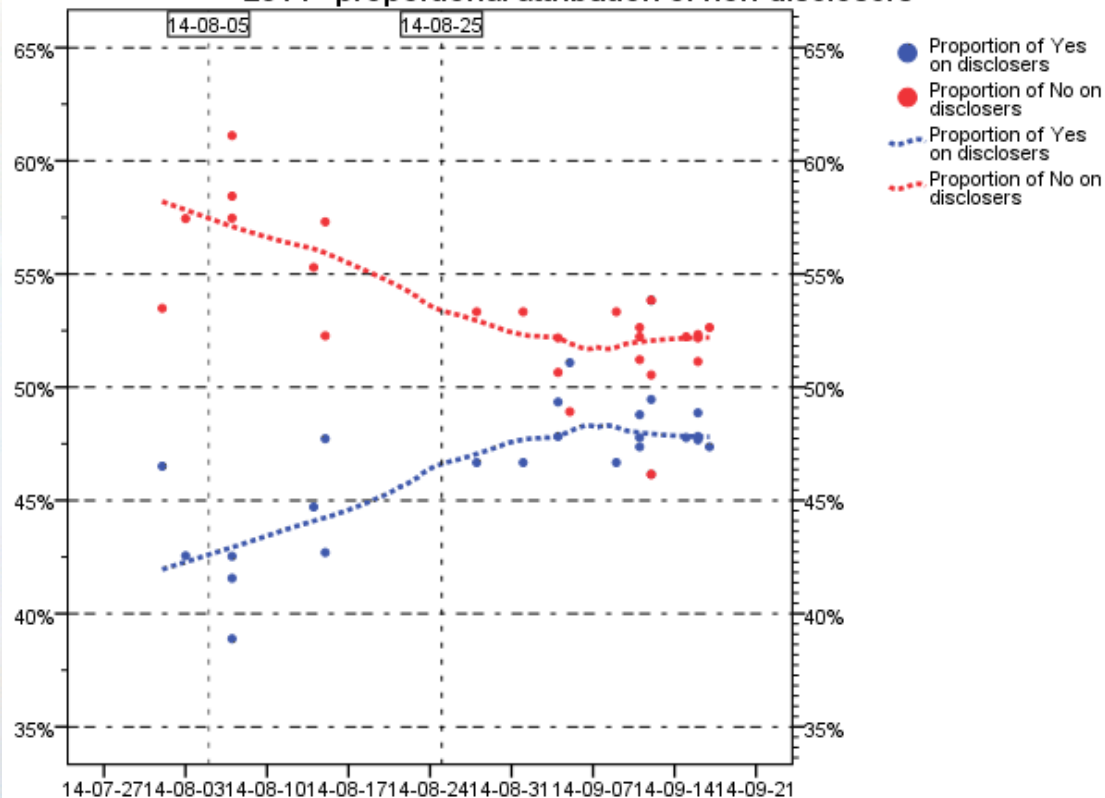
Each point represents a poll estimate positioned at the end of the fieldwork; lines represent the likely change in support estimated using Loess; vertical lines represent the two debates. © C. Durand, 2014.

* The two sides seem to get close.

* The proportion of non-disclosers still does not decrease much on average.

What happened in Scotland: The last stretch, oh la la!

Evolution of support for Scottish Independence since beginning of August 2014 - proportional attribution of non-disclosers

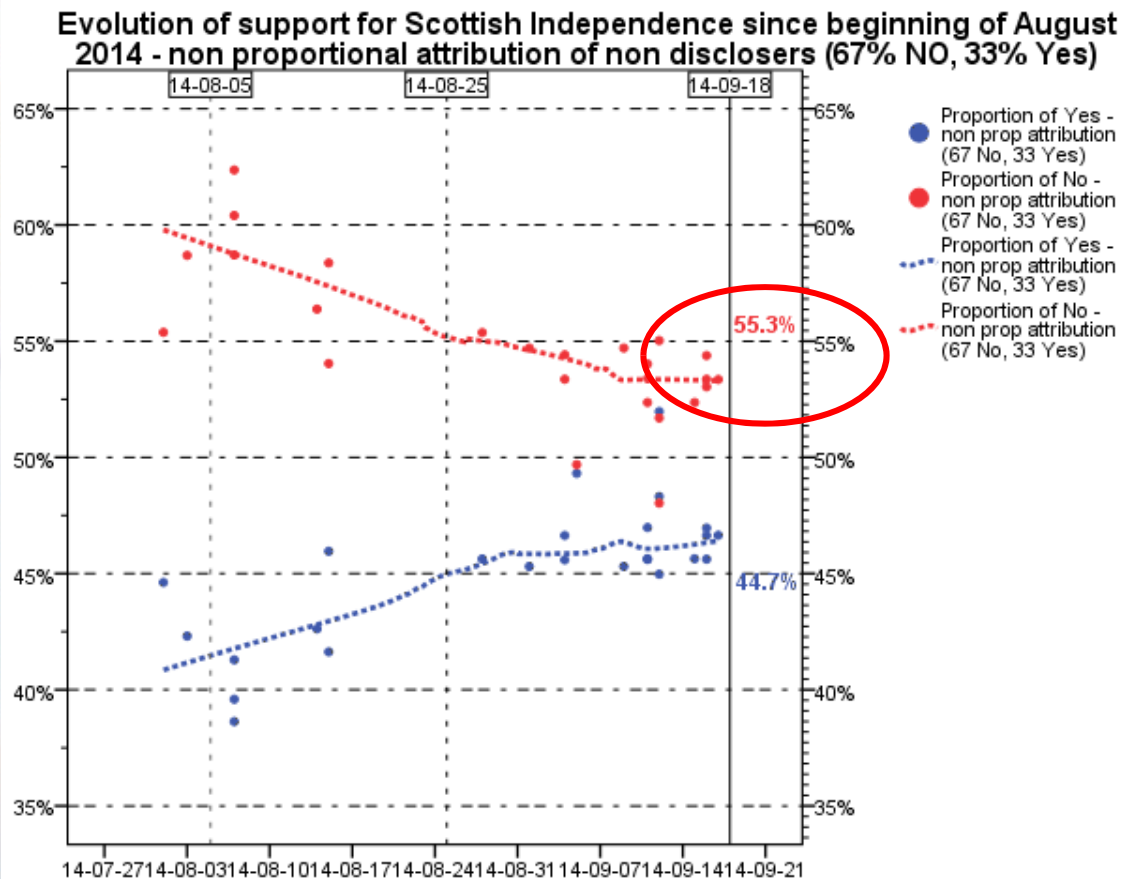


Each point represents a poll estimate positioned at the end of the fieldwork; lines represent the likely change in support estimated using Loess; vertical lines represent the two debates. © C. Durand, 2014.

✦ **With proportional attribution of non-disclosers, the two sides seem close.**

✦ **2 polls put the Yes side ahead.**

What happened in Scotland: The last stretch, oh la la!



Each point represents a poll estimate positioned at the end of the fieldwork; lines represent the likely change in support estimated using Loess; vertical lines represent the two debates. © C. Durand, 2014.

- ✦ With non proportional attribution of non-disclosers,
- ✦ The No side is clearly ahead.
- ✦ But still underestimated a bit.

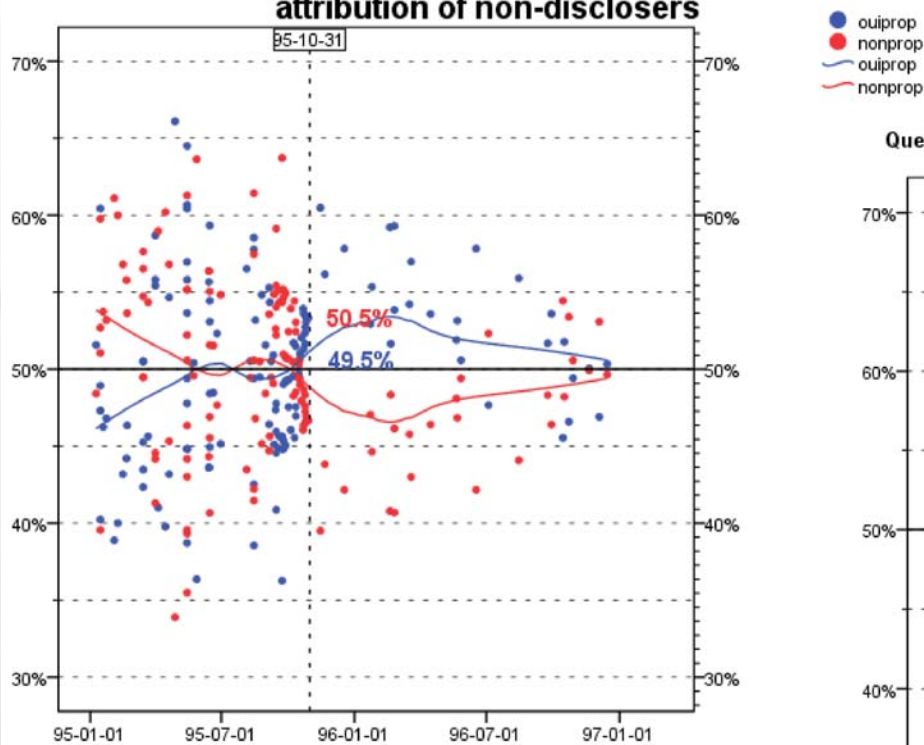


Before and after, what do they want?

Quebec 1995-1996

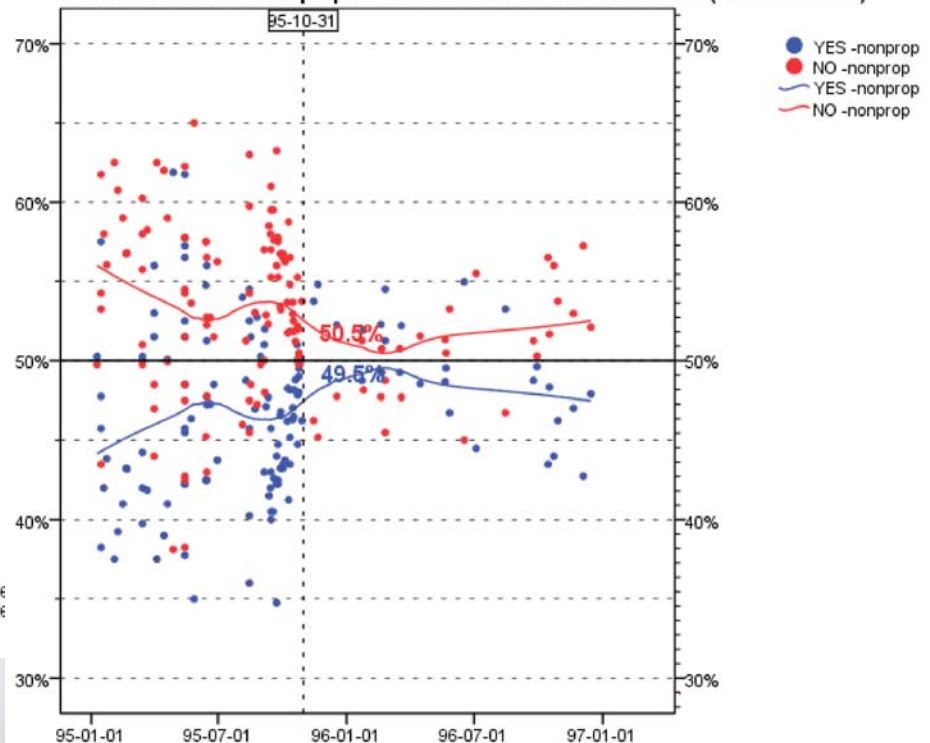
Support for sovereignty

Quebec: Support for sovereignty with or without partnership w Canada - January 1995 to December 2016 - proportional attribution of non-disclosers



Each point represents a poll estimate. Lines represent the likely change in support for sovereignty (with or without partnership with the rest of Canada) estimated using Loess. The vertical line represents referendum day. © C. Durand, 2015

Quebec: Support for sovereignty with or without partnership w Canada - January 1995 to December 2016 - Non proportional attribution of non-disclosers (75% to NO side)

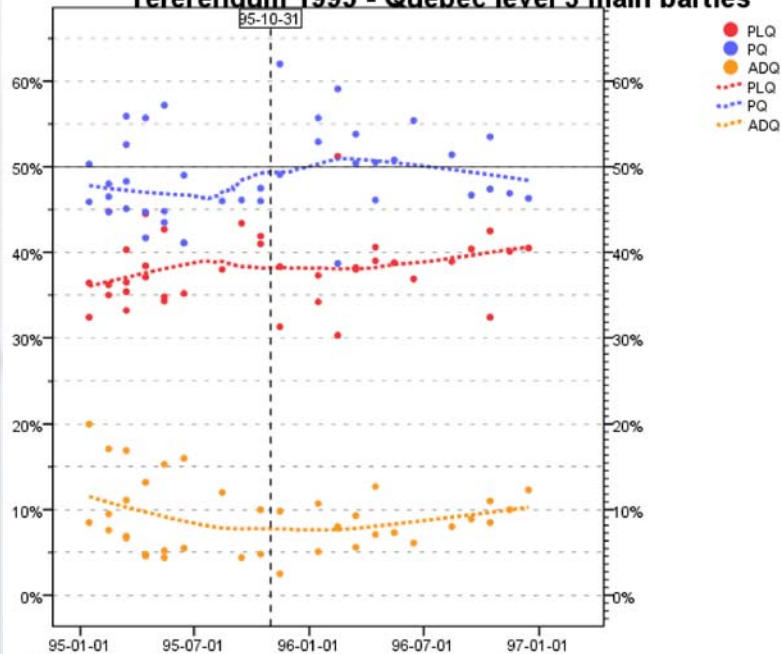


Each point represents a poll estimate. Lines represent the likely change in support for sovereignty (with or without partnership with the rest of Canada) estimated using Loess. The vertical line represents referendum day. © C. Durand, 2015

Quebec 1995-1996

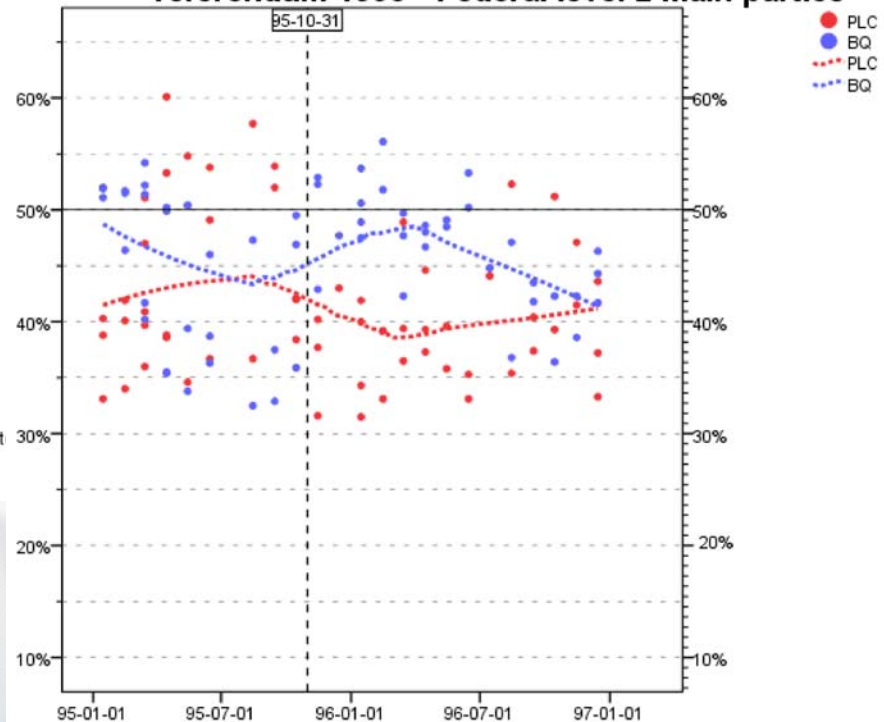
Support for sovereigntist parties - PQ & BQ

Support for political parties - before & after - Quebec referendum 1995 - Quebec level 3 main parties



Each point represents a poll estimate positioned at the middle of the month when they were conducted; lines represent the likely change in support estimated using Loess; the vertical line represents Referendum Day. © C. Durand, 2015.

Support for political parties - before & after - Quebec referendum 1995 - Federal level 2 main parties

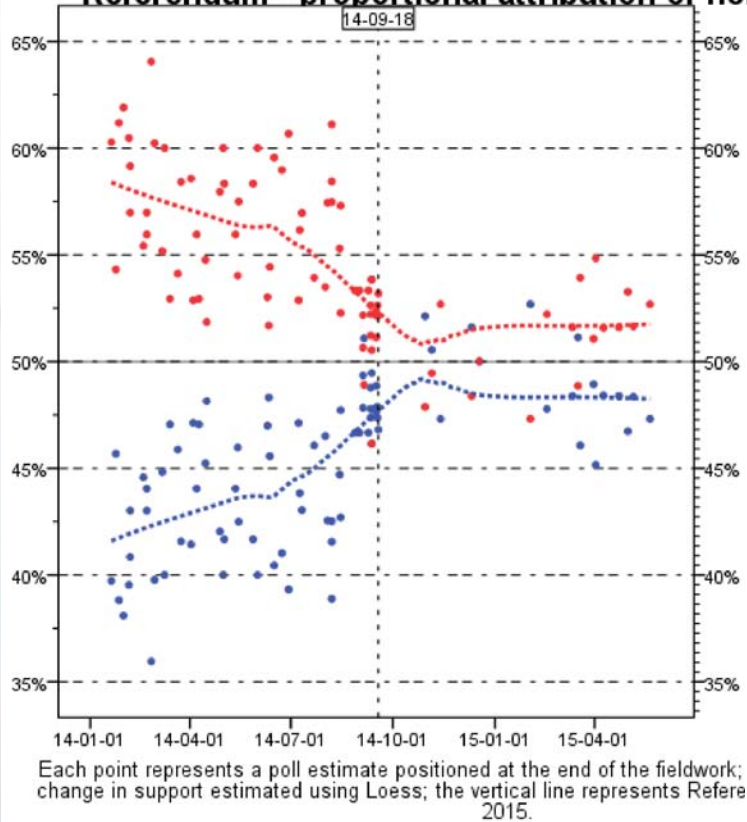


Each point represents a poll estimate positioned at the middle of the month when they were conducted; lines represent the likely change in support estimated using Loess; the vertical line represents Referendum Day. © C. Durand, 2015.

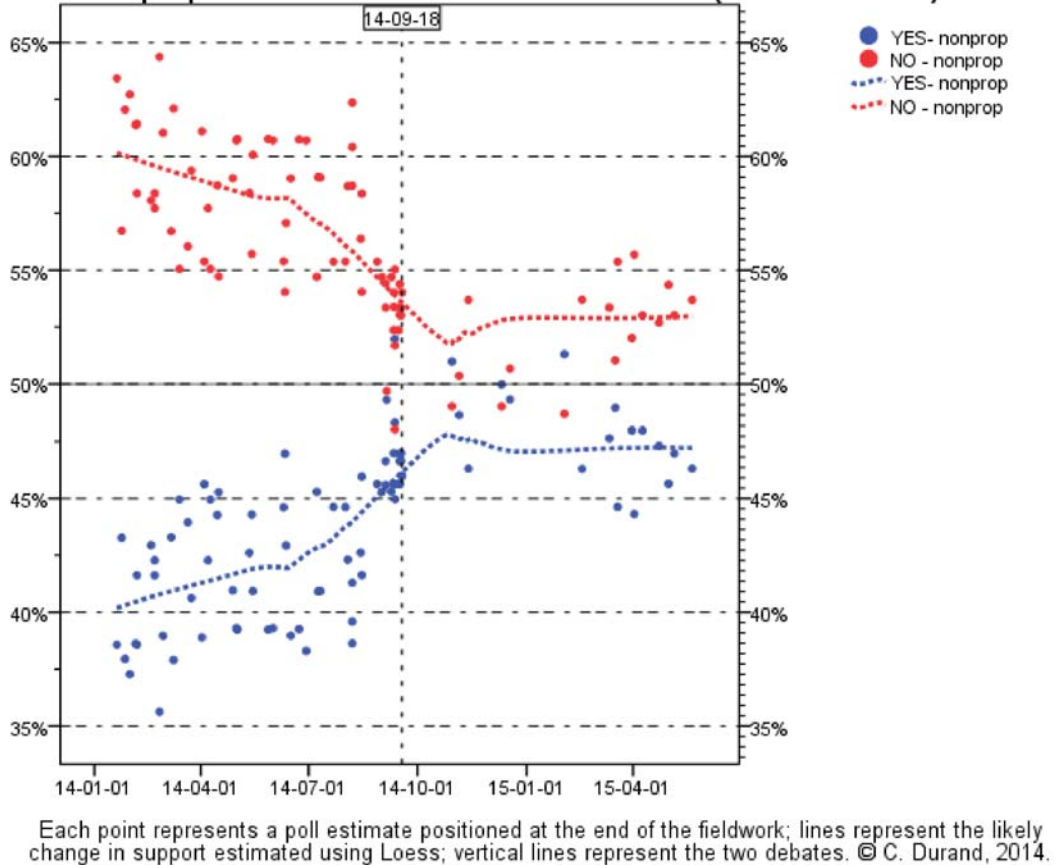
Scotland 2014-2015

Support for independence

Support for Scottish Independence before and after the Referendum - proportional attribution of non-disclosers



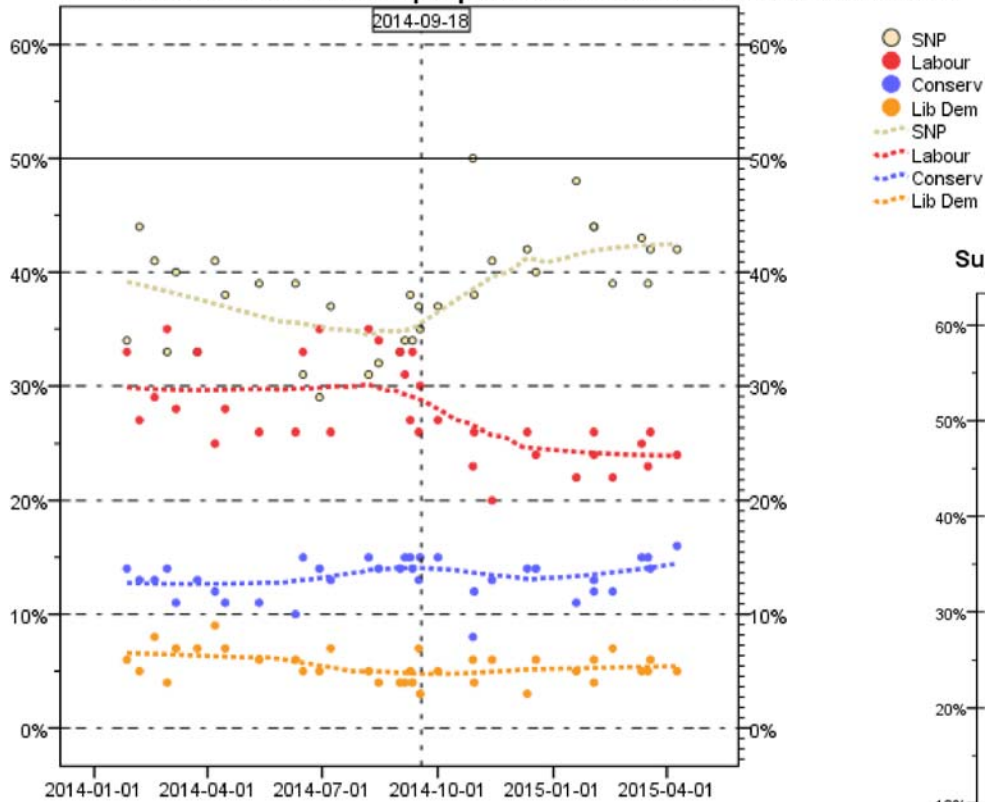
Support for Scottish Independence before and after the Referendum - non-proportional attribution of non-disclosers (67% to No side)



Scotland 2014-2015

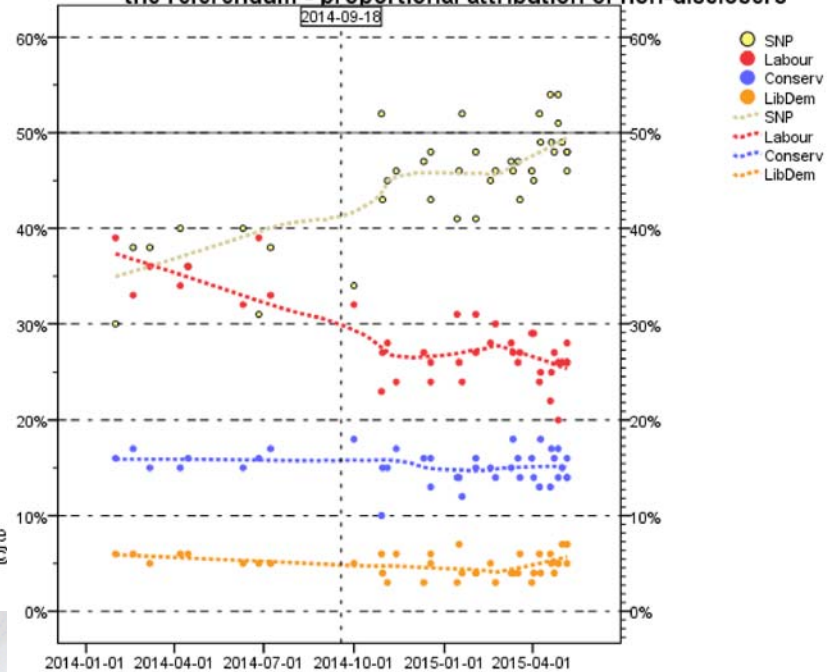
Support for SNP

Support for Scottish political parties in Scottish elections (LIST) - before and after the referendum - proportional attribution of non-disclosers



Each point represents a poll estimate positioned at the end of the fieldwork; lines represent change in support estimated using Loess; the vertical line represents Referendum Day. © 2015.

Support for Scottish political parties in the UK elections -- before and after the referendum - proportional attribution of non-disclosers



Each point represents a poll estimate positioned at the end of the fieldwork; lines represent the likely change in support estimated using Loess; the vertical line represents Referendum Day. © C. Durand, 2015.

Conclusion

Estimation of the vote

- ✦ Campaigns dealing with nationalist or ethnic issues are often marked by tension and emotion, a hostile climate.
- ✦ The No side -- is frequently – usually? -- underestimated.
- ✦ It is possible to estimate the correction that can – should – be applied to polls' estimates in order to better estimate the final results.
- ✦ This correction should be applied also after the referendum.

Conclusion

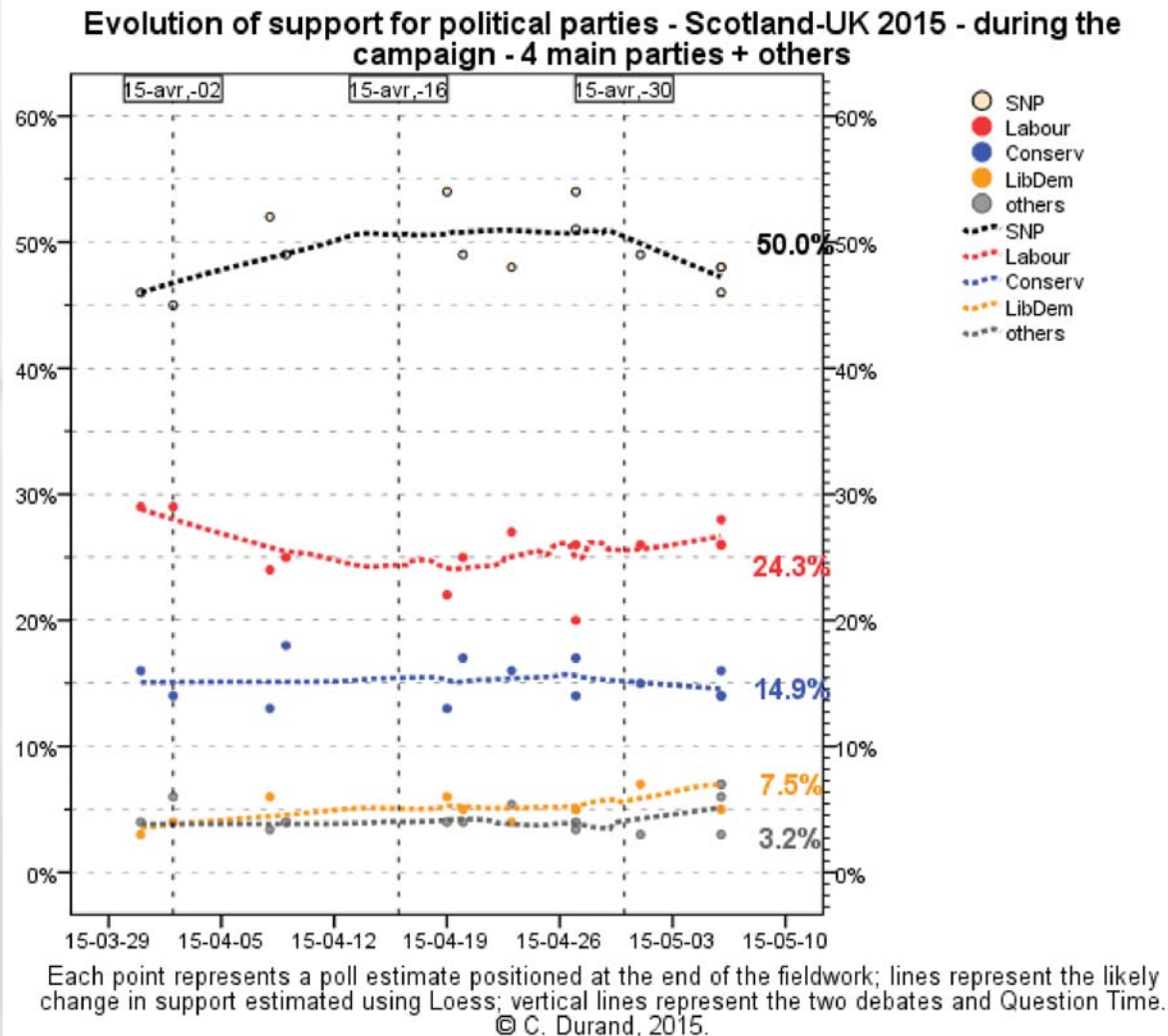
Before and after

- ✦ In both Quebec & Scotland:
 - ✦ Support for independence/ sovereignty went up during and after the referendum and then plateaued and eventually decreased (Quebec).
 - ✦ The “threat” remains for some time.
 - ✦ Support for independentist/ sovereigntist parties also went up after the referendum, both at the UK/federal level and local level, reaching close to 50%.
 - ✦ People may agree with the general demands of the nationalist parties but not with the solution they propose. Maintaining the “threat” allows them to maintain pressure for change.

A close-up, slightly blurred photograph of a computer keyboard. The keys are white with some characters visible, including the dollar sign (\$), the hash symbol (#), and the percent sign (%). The image is framed by a thin blue border.

Extra slides

Prediction using campaign polls only Scotland - UK 2015

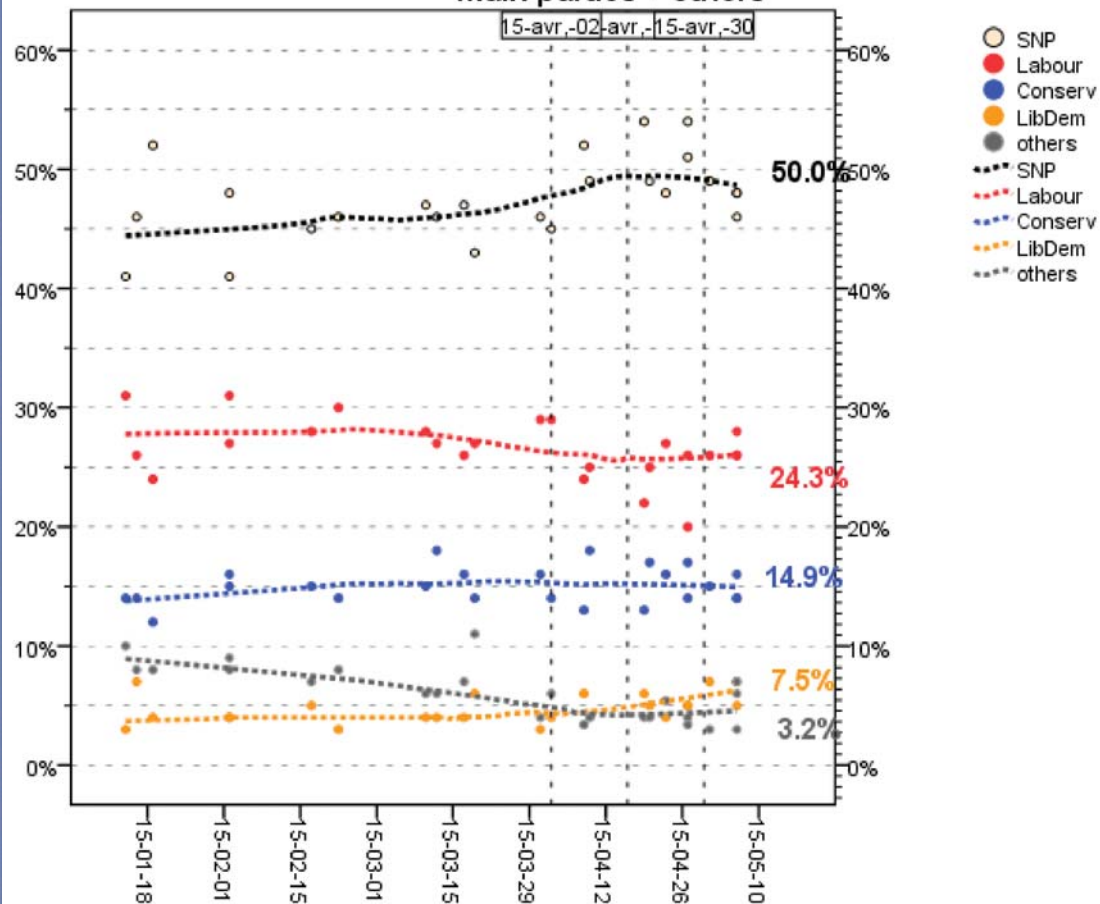


◆ Almost perfect prediction from the polls but,...

◆ Not many polls.

Prediction using polls conducted since January 1st Scotland - UK 2015

Evolution of support for political parties - Scotland-UK 2015 - from January - 4 main parties + others



Each point represents a poll estimate positioned at the end of the fieldwork; lines represent the likely change in support estimated using Loess; vertical lines represent the two debates and Question Time.
© C. Durand, 2015.

◆ Even better prediction if we use all the polls published since January.