

# Estimating the “No” Vote in Scotland

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# Outline

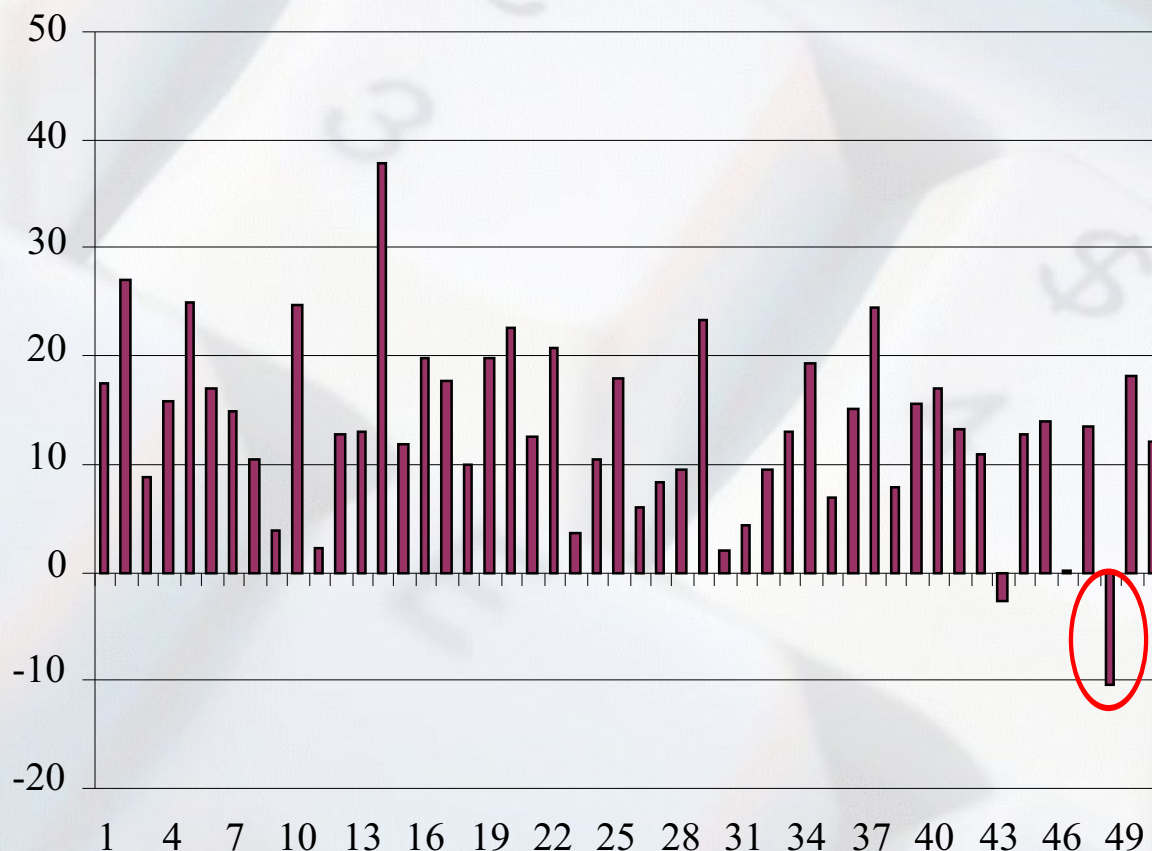
- ✦ Are referenda different from elections?
- ✦ Are referenda/political campaigns pertaining to independence much different?
- ✦ What is the possible impact on opinion polls' capacity to estimate the results?
- ✦ What happened in Quebec 1995?
  - ✦ How did the campaign polls fare?
  - ✦ Teachings for Scotland?
- ✦ What happened in Scotland?
  - ✦ How did the campaign polls fare?
  - ✦ Was it foreseeable?
- ✦ And now? UK ?

# 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 referenda between 1998 & 2009



\* Vote = more No than polls.

\* Referendum on Minarets is an outlier

\* No ideological position of 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?

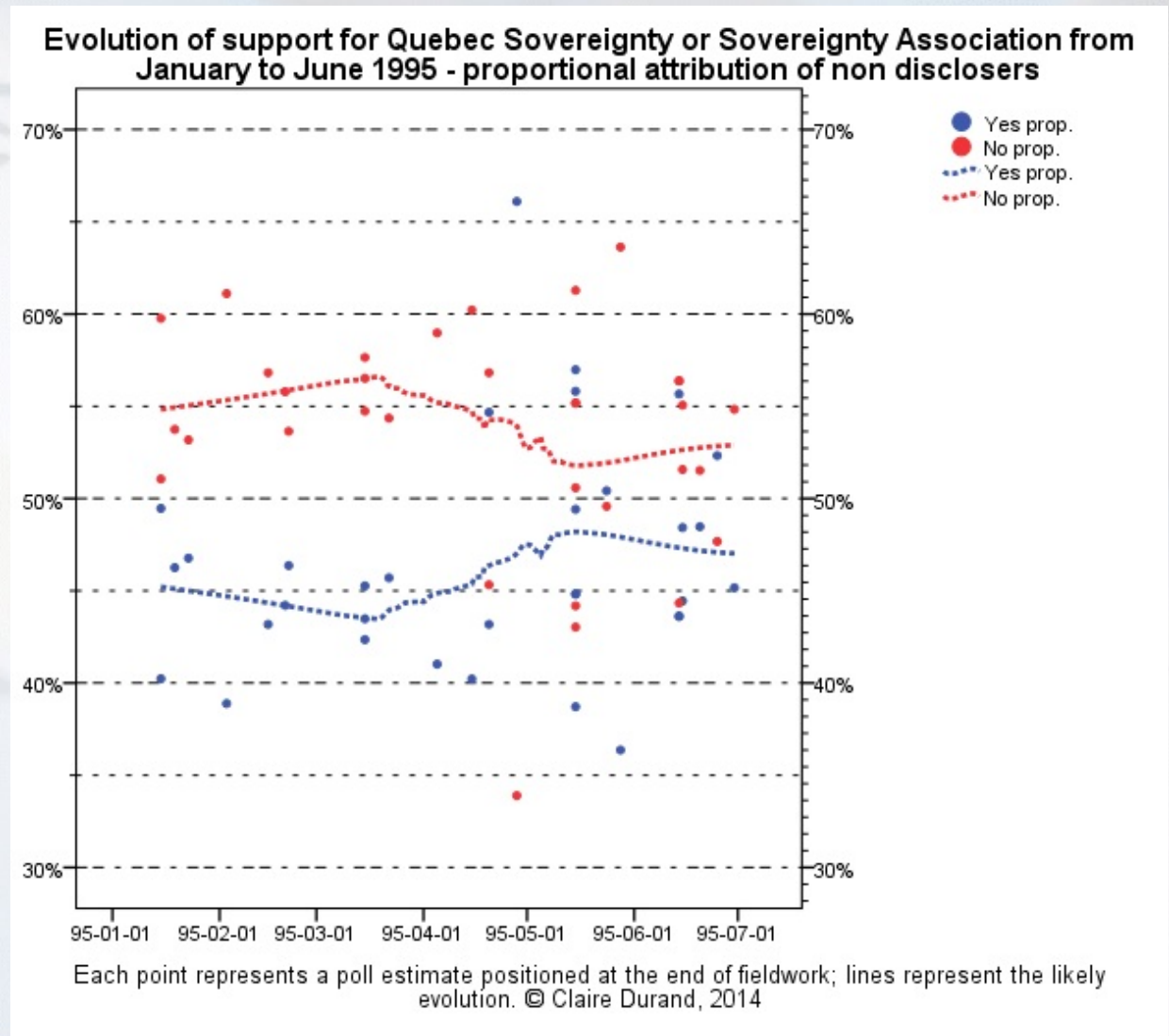
- ✦ As the battle heats up...
  - ✦ The No side has to bring together natural enemies (Liberals & Conservatives in QC; Labour and Conservatives in Scotland).
    - ✦ They usually do not have a united strategy.
    - ✦ They appear as not willing to address the problems raised by the Yes side.
  - ✦ **Voting 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.

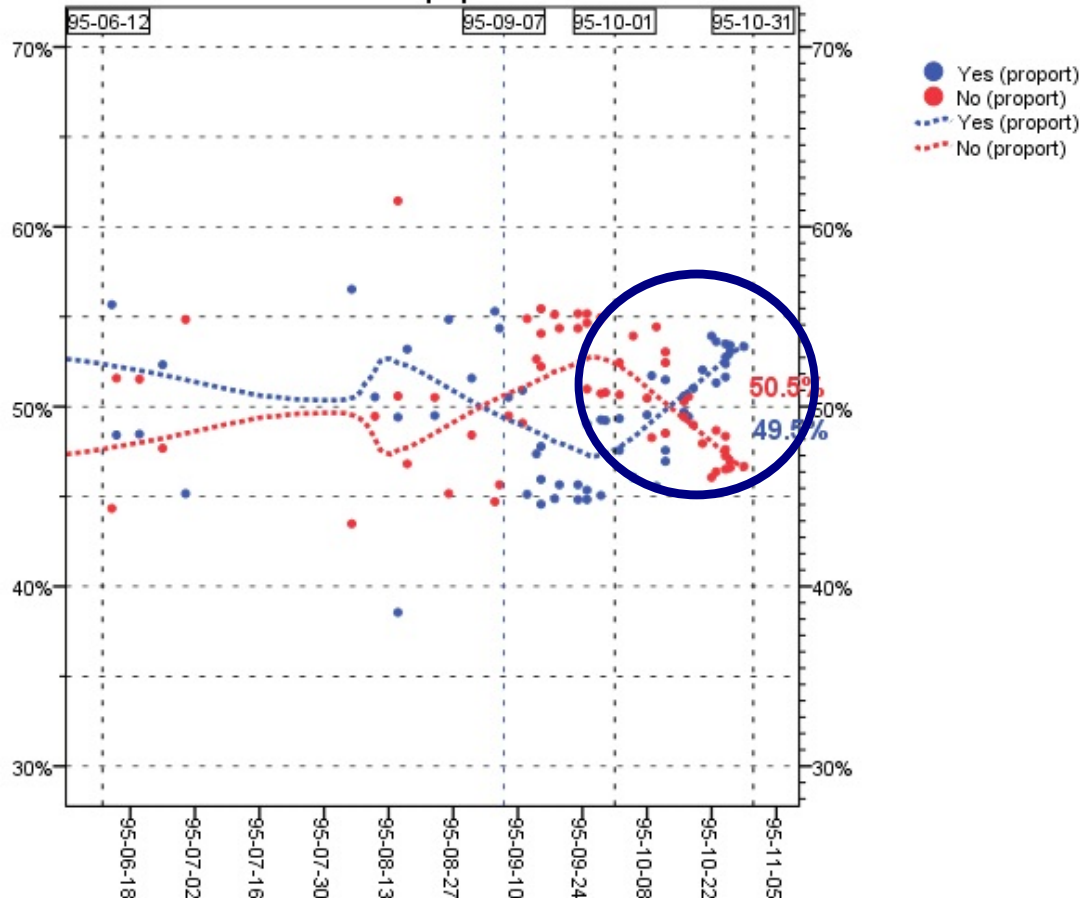
✦ Much variability in estimates.



# 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.

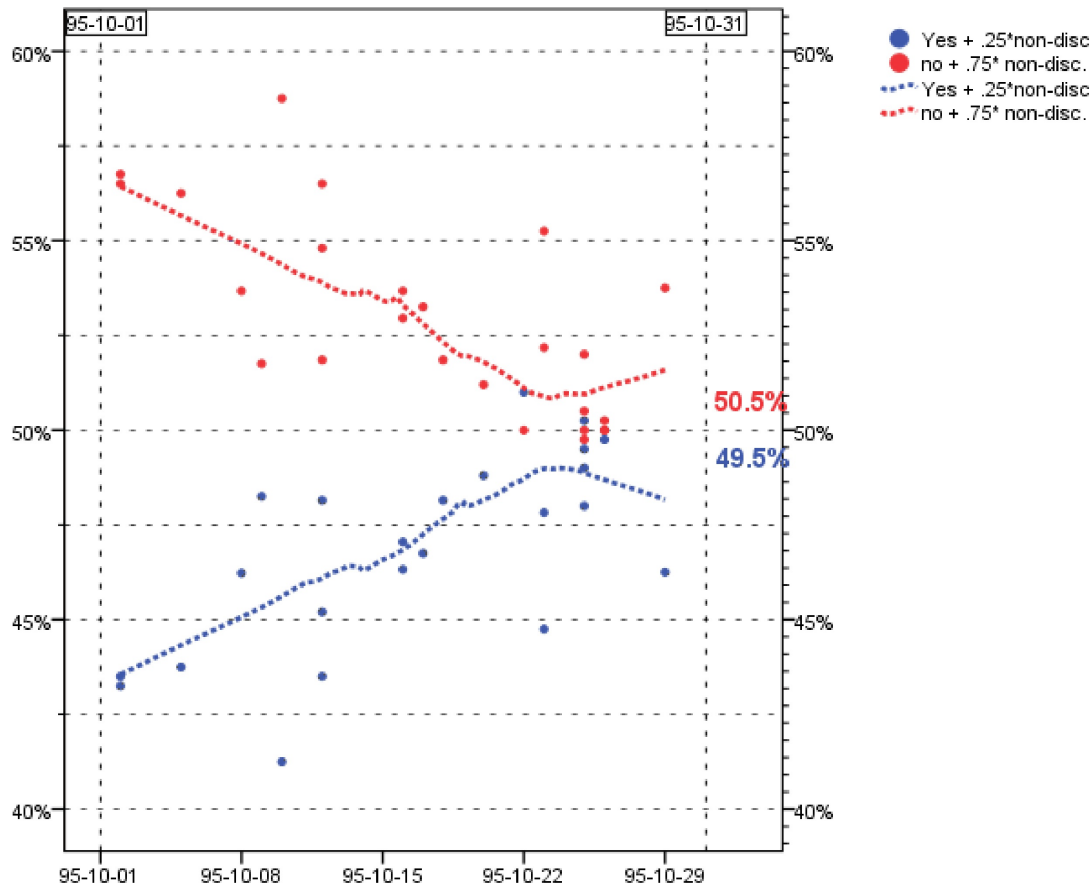
✦ Substantial underestimation of No.



# 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 conduct to heated debate and hostile climate.
- ✦ Don't know does not always mean don't know.
- ✦ Non-disclosers should **not** be attributed proportionnally, this 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?

Similar or not, Scotland and Quebec?

- ✦ Both regions justify the battle for sovereignty on “ethnic”, nationalistic, bases but
- ✦ Quebec was almost the poorest region of Canada, contrary to Scotland vs UK.
- ✦ A language component is present in Quebec, quite absent in Scotland.
- ✦ The movement in QC had a social class component, linked to the language question.
- ✦ The movement in Qc was inspired by the national liberation, anti-colonialist movements of the 1960's and 1970's, more progressive.
- ✦ The proportion of the population that was not of national origin – French Canadian or Scottish – is higher in Quebec (15-20%) than in Scotland.

# Lessons for Scotland

- ✦ Because of the historical, demographical and political differences, we hypothesized that the tendency to underestimate the No vote would not be as substantial in Scotland than in Québec.
  - ✦ We gave 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.
- ✦ Generations are very important in these debates. Were young people the fuel behind the battle for independence?

# 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.**

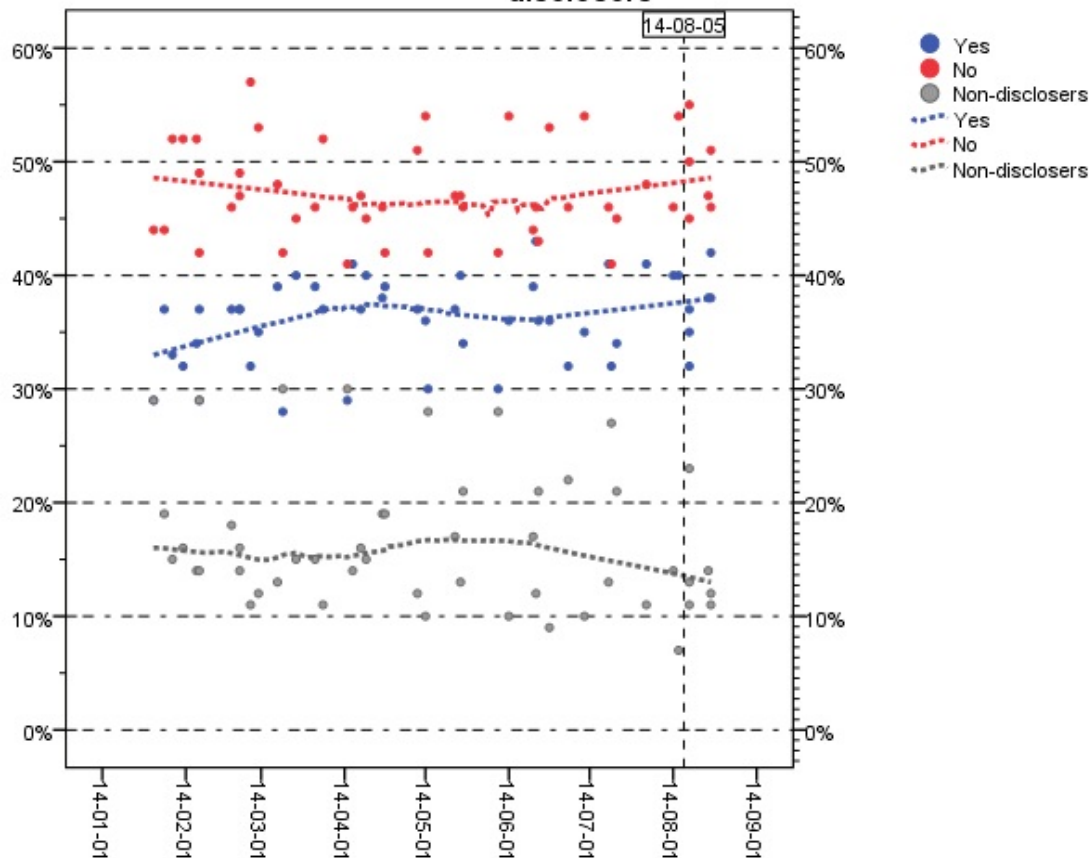
# What happened in Scotland?

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

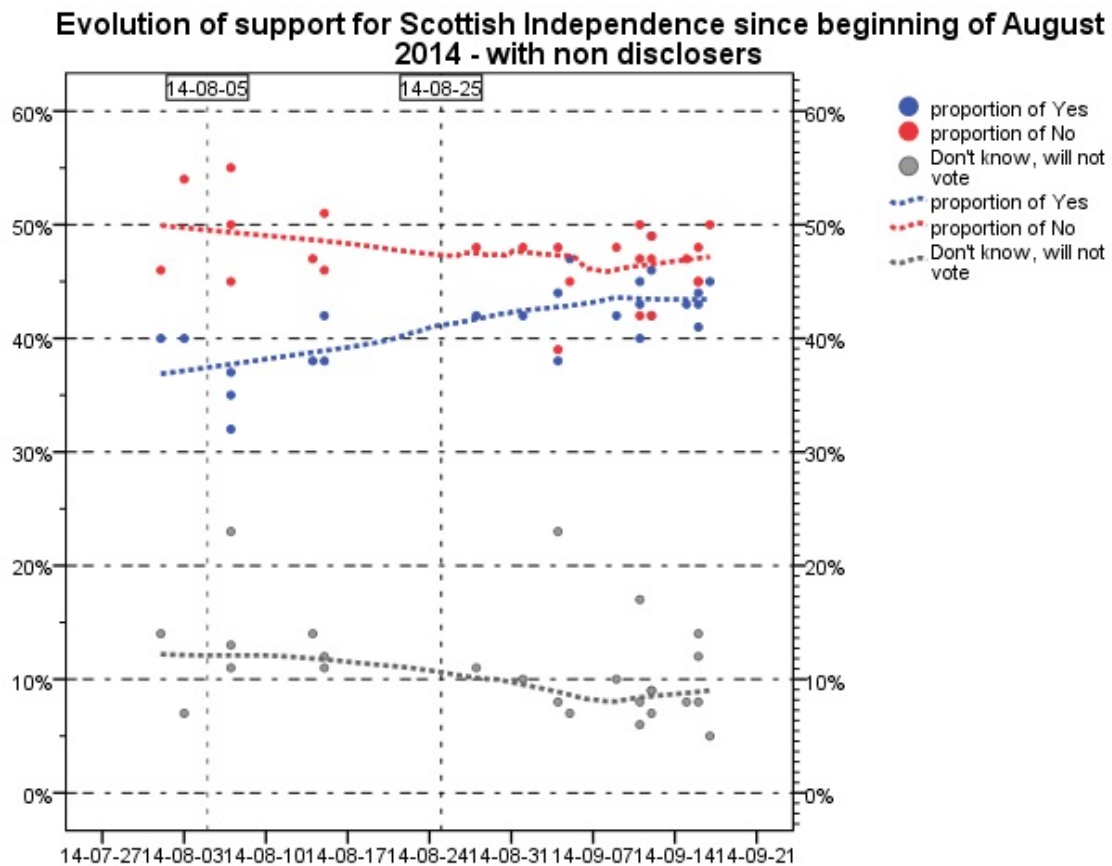


Each point represents a poll estimate positioned at the end of the fieldwork; lines represent the likely change in support estimated using Loess. © C. Durand, 2014.

✦ **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!



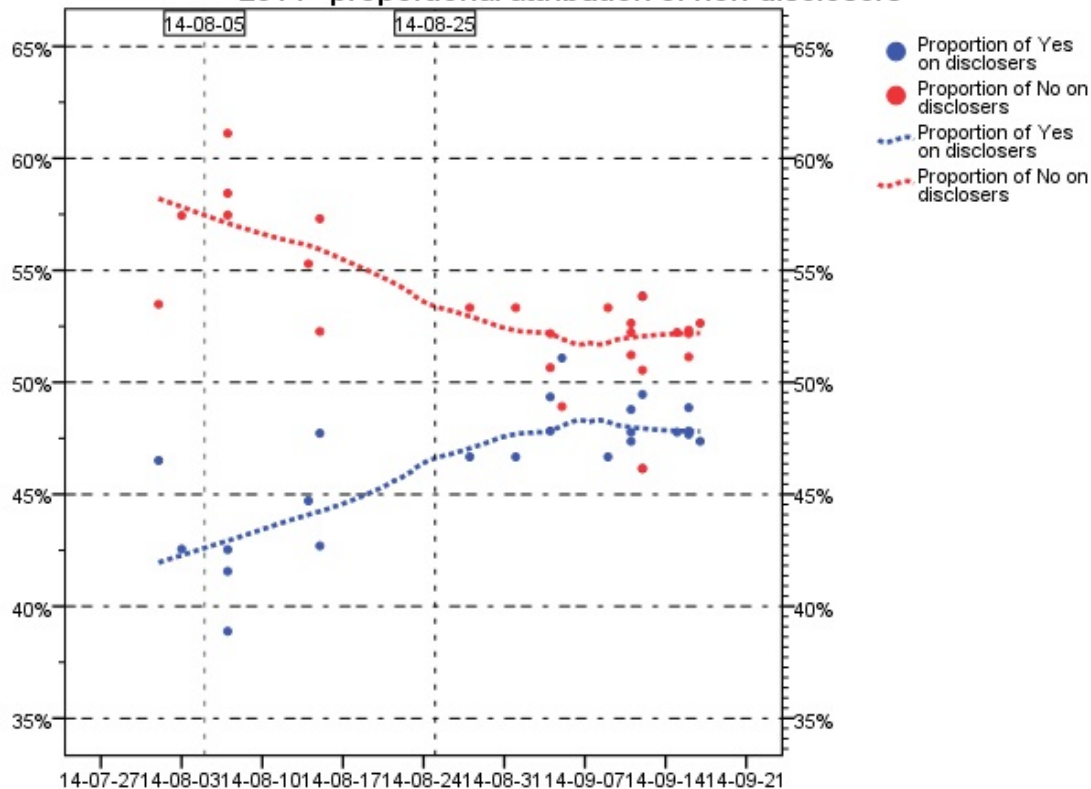
Each point represents a poll estimate positioned at the end of the fieldwork; lines represent the likely change in support estimated using Loess; vertical lines represent the two debates. © C. Durand, 2014.

- ✦ 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



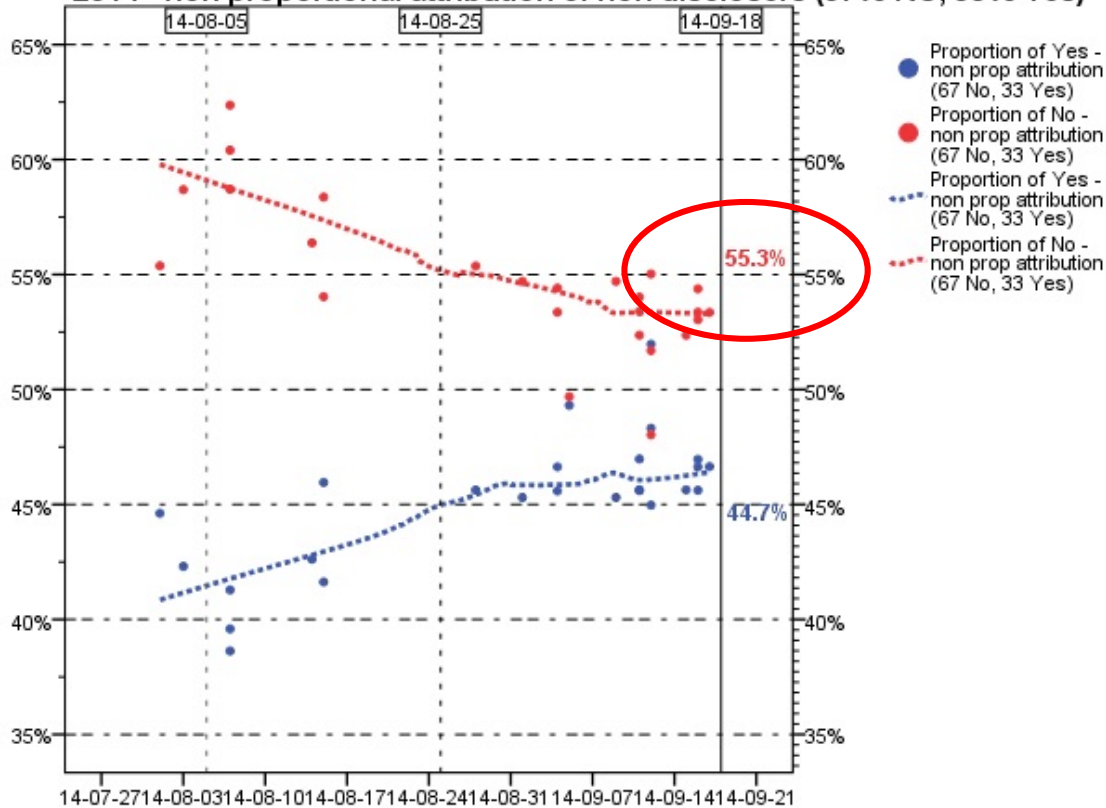
Each point represents a poll estimate positioned at the end of the fieldwork; lines represent the likely change in support estimated using Loess; vertical lines represent the two debates. © C. Durand, 2014.

✦ **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!

Evolution of support for Scottish Independence since beginning of August 2014 - non proportional attribution of non disclosers (67% NO, 33% Yes)

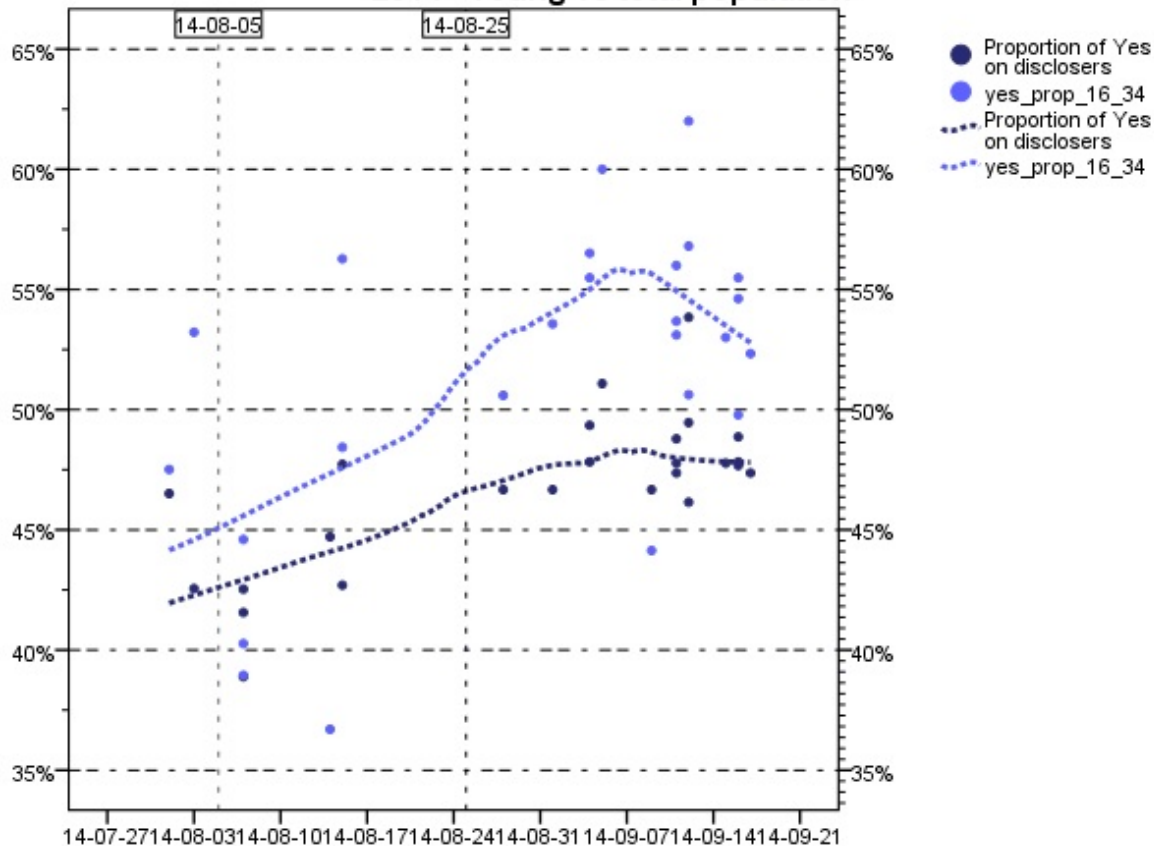


Each point represents a poll estimate positioned at the end of the fieldwork; lines represent the likely change in support estimated using Loess; vertical lines represent the two debates. © C. Durand, 2014.

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

# What about Young people?

Evolution of support for Scottish Independence since beginning of August 2014 - Young vs total population



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

\* They are the main responsible for the last stretch increase in voting intention for the Yes side.

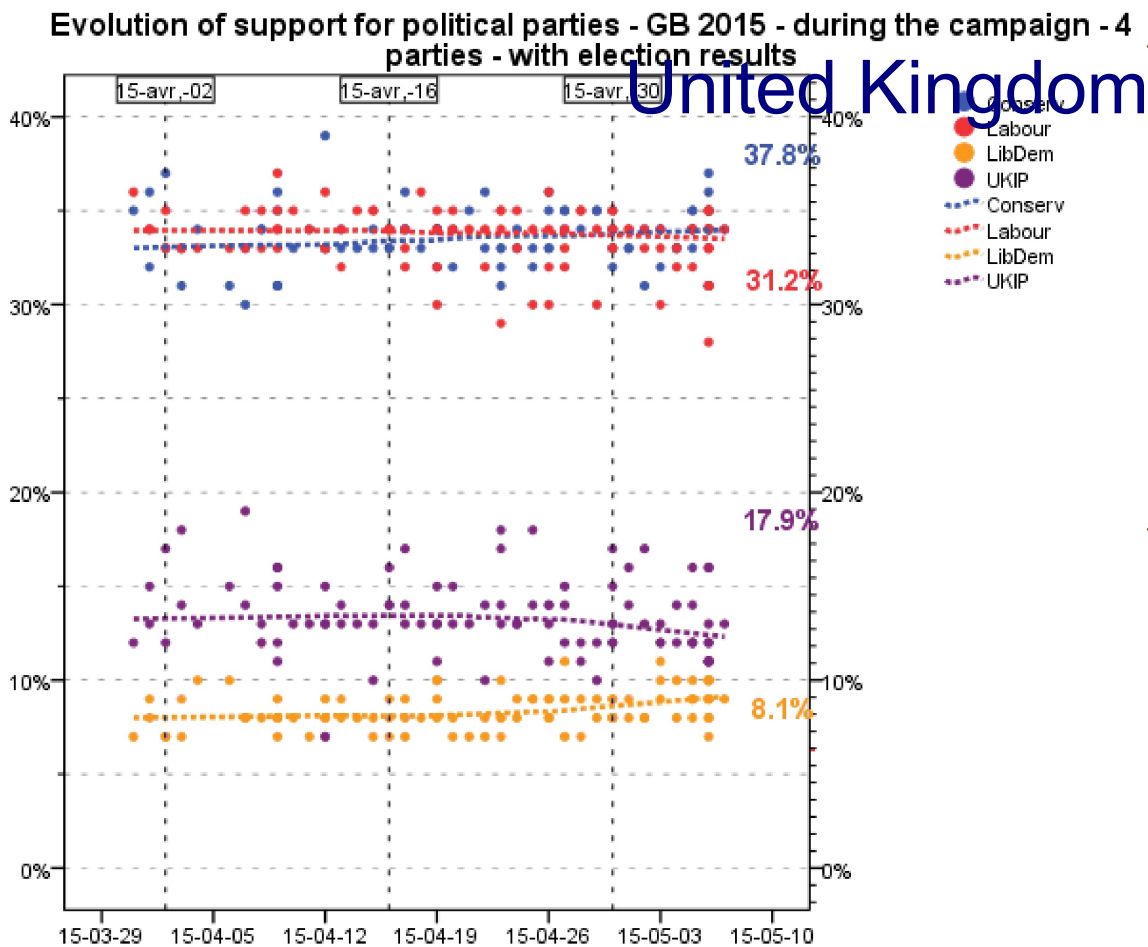
# Conclusion

- ✦ In campaigns marked by
  - ✦ Tension and emotion, hostile climate (?)
  - ✦ Choice between change and status quo
- ✦ Status quo 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.
- ✦ And therefore better inform the voters.



# **Electoral Polls of UK 2015**

# Prediction using campaign polls only UK 2015



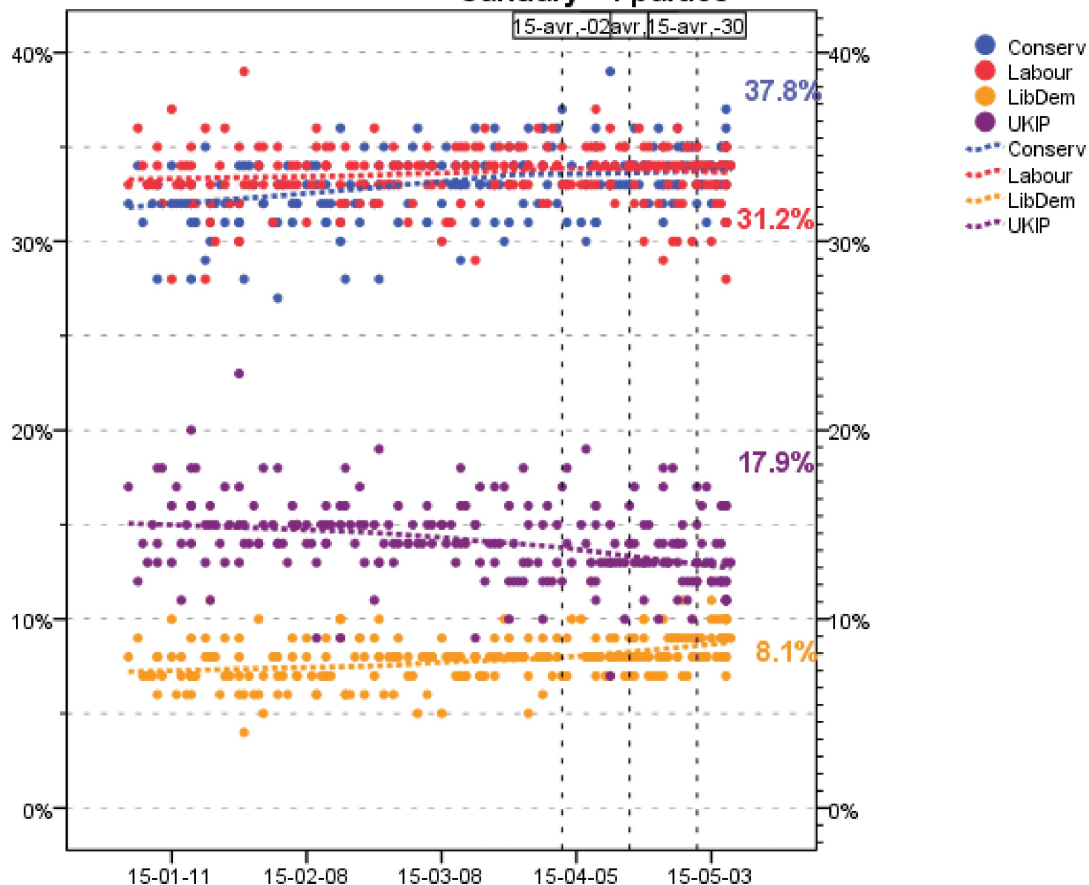
◆ Under-estimation of the Conservatives AND UKIP

◆ No evidence of herding

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.  
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# Prediction using polls conducted since January 1st UK 2015

Evolution of support for political parties - GB 2015 - from the beginning of January - 4 parties



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.  
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- ◆ Results similar as with campaign polls:
- ◆ Under-estimation of Conservatives and UKIP

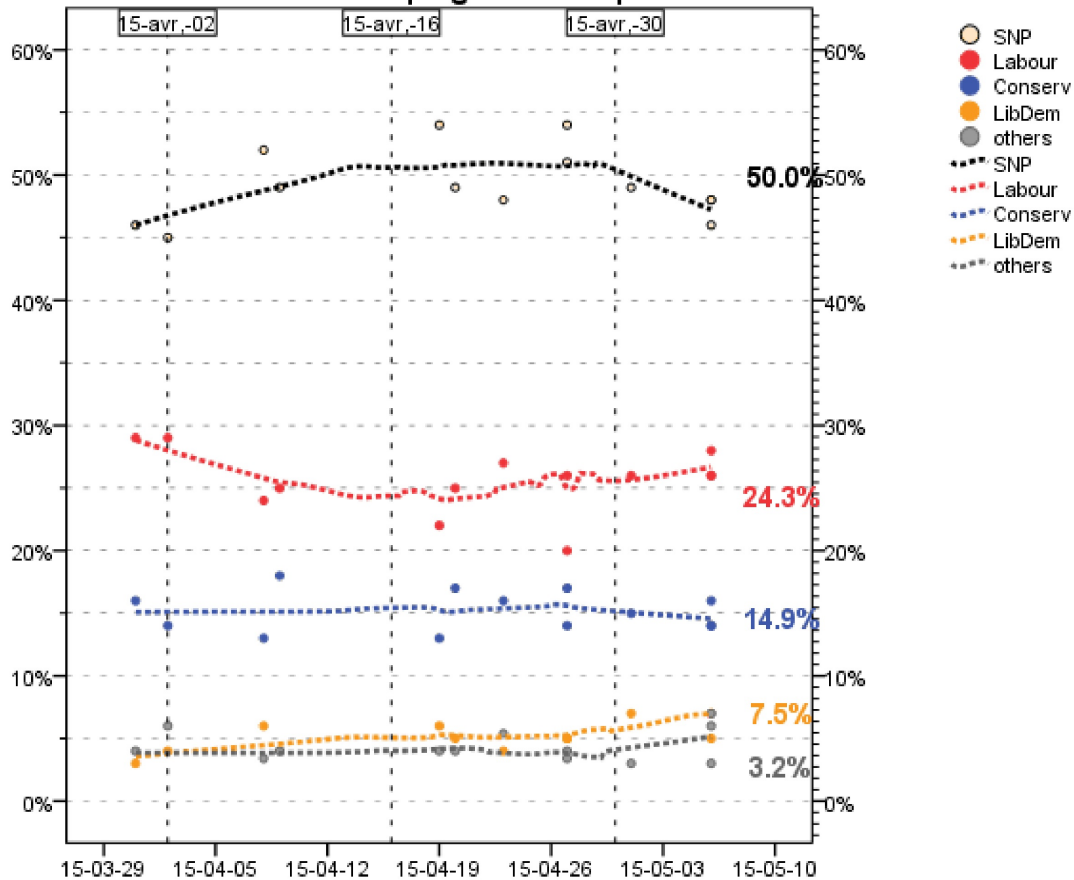
# Do some methods fare better than others?

- ✦ Controlling for time, Web opt-in polls...
  - ✦ **Had UKIP 1.9 points higher** than the other surveys; since UKIP was underestimated, their estimates are better than those produced by other methods.
  - ✦ **Had the Labour 1.1 points higher** than the other surveys, therefore contributing to error.
  - ✦ **Had the conservative 0.75 points lower** than the other pollsters, there contributing to error.
  - ✦ **Did not differ much in their estimation of the Liberal Democrats (-.39).**



# Prediction using campaign polls only Scotland - UK 2015

Evolution of support for political parties - Scotland-UK 2015 - during the campaign - 4 main parties + others

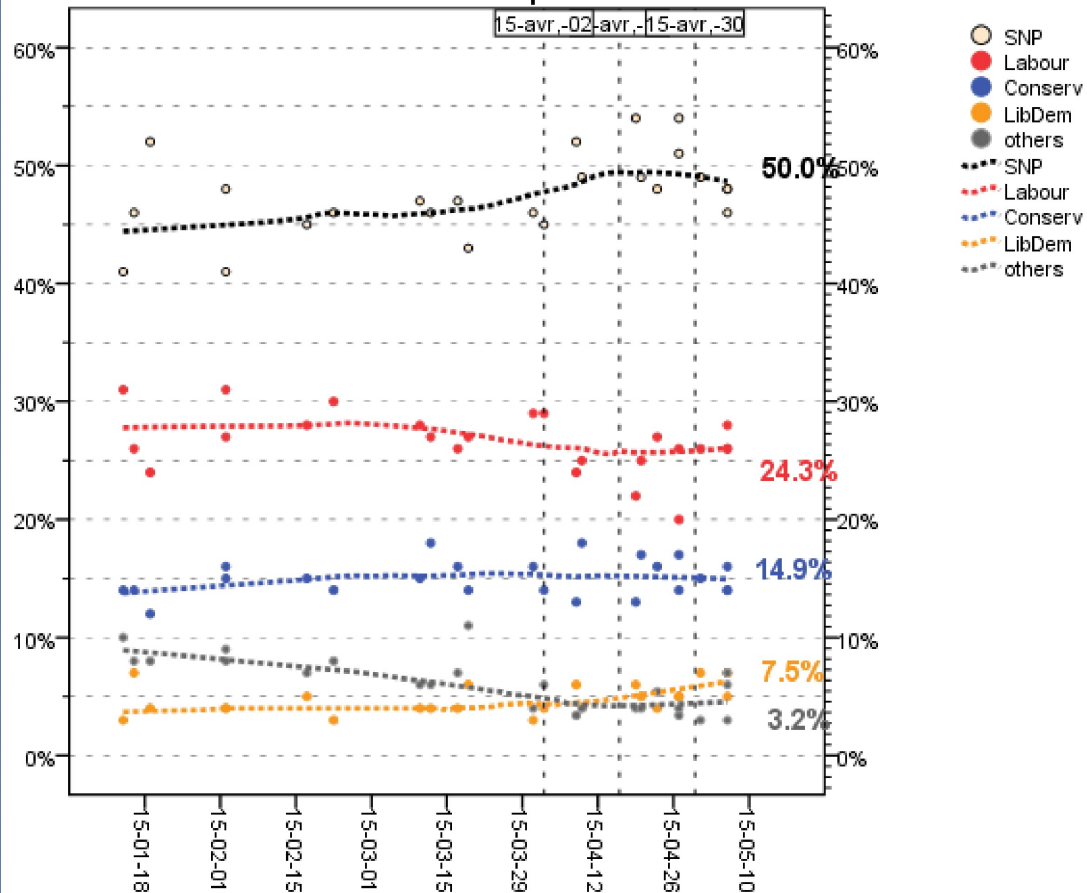


Each point represents a poll estimate positioned at the end of the fieldwork; lines represent the likely change in support estimated using Loess; vertical lines represent the two debates and Question Time.  
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- ◆ Almost perfect prediction from the polls 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.  
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◆ Even better prediction if we use all the polls published since January.

# Conclusion

- ✦ Generally, underestimation of the right, overestimation of the left.
- ✦ No evidence of herding at the end (normal variation between estimates).
- ✦ Web opt-in panels contribute to error by overestimating Labour and underestimating the Conservatives, but fare better in their estimation of UKIP.
- ✦ Scotland had a much different distribution of the vote than the rest of UK and the polls provided a good estimation of the results.