



**Overview of a qualitative study on the impact of the
2014 referendum for Scottish independence in
Edinburgh, and views of the political process**



Dr Daniel Turner, March 2015
daniel@quirkos.com

www.quirkos.com

In February 2015, 12 people from Edinburgh were interviewed about their opinions on the campaigns for and against Scottish Independence in the run-up to the September 2014 referendum. We wanted to know what messages people thought were important from both sides, and how they perceived media and politicians in the run up to the vote. Finally, we were interested in the impact of the referendum on voting intentions and perceptions of political parties in Scotland before the 2015 UK General Election in May.

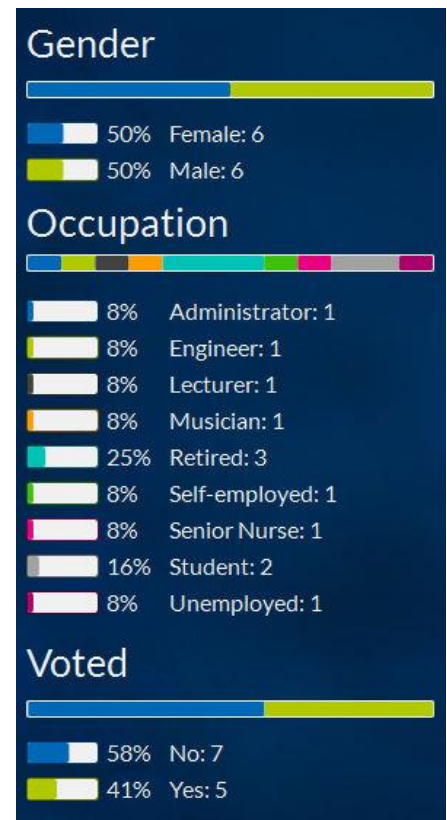
The semi-structured interviews were approximately 30 minutes long, and took place in cafés across Edinburgh. Each was recorded and fully transcribed, and participants gave consent to have their anonymised transcripts shared in full on our website, for use in training workshops. A key aim was to produce a project using Quirkos, showing from start to finish the steps required in doing qualitative analysis with this new software tool.

Sample overview

Our sample was comprised of 12 adults who live in Edinburgh, and were eligible to vote in the Referendum. There was a 50/50 gender split, and a slight over-representation of No voters (58%) which reflects the results in the referendum as closely as this small sample size allows.

While based around a convenience sample, we attempted to interview people of a range of ages and backgrounds, although none of the respondents were under 18 (yet 16 year-olds would have been eligible to vote).

The occupations shown to the left are slightly altered to preserve anonymity, but indicate a high number of middle-class backgrounds. It should also be noted that the sample obviously selects people who were interested in talking about politics in an in-depth discussion.



Interview process

Interviews were all conducted by DT, using a semi-structured topic guide which covered the following main themes:

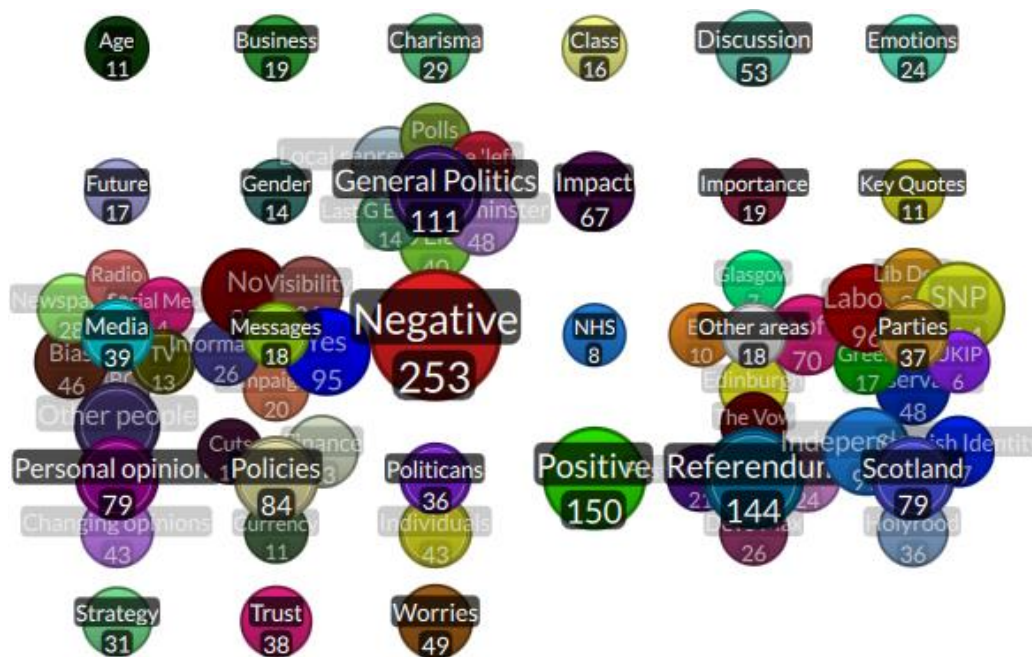
- When respondents first heard about the referendum
- Key messages from each campaign
- Opinions of how well each campaign was run
- How the debate was portrayed in the media
- The feeling in Edinburgh in the run-up to the election
- Discussion on independence with friends, family and colleagues
- The impact of the referendum on political parties
- Expectations for the 2015 general election

The interviews lasted between 18 and 49 minutes, and were recorded with a digital Dictaphone, and sent to a professional transcriber. Interviews were conducted in a café of the respondent's choice, and the enumeration provided was tea and cake. All names, places and occupations were modified to ensure the respondents could not be easily identified. A consent form based around Social Research Association best-practice guidelines was signed before the start of each interview.

Data and analysis overview

The interviews generated very rich data, with respondents being remarkably candid and open about sharing their political views. Only one respondent (Julie) gave brief, one sentence answers, and this was the shortest interview in the project. Respondents talked about campaigning they had been involved in, their history of political voting, and the opinions of family and friends they had discussed the referendum with. Generally interviews were well focused, and at no point did it seem that respondents were uncomfortable sharing information on a particular topic. Indeed, many commented they had enjoyed the experience of being able to share their political views without critique. Respondents were not directly asked how they had voted in the referendum, or in previous elections, but most shared this information anyway.

The transcribed interviews were imported directly into Quirkos, where some typographical errors were edited. DT coded the interviews using a basic thematic coding strategy, creating thematic codes on-the-fly as coding progressed. After completing coding for all 12 interviews, DT went back to some of the earlier coded interviews, and using the keyword search function, added relevant text from these interviews to codes that were created later in the coding process.



The interviews together lasted 6.5 hours and once transcribed comprised just under **58000 words**, an average of 4800 words per interview. **75 themes** were used to code the project, with **3160 coding events** logged, although each text may cover multiple coding events. In total, 87% of the text was

coded with at least one topic. The coding took an experienced coder approximately 7 hours (over a three day period) once any breaks longer than 5 minutes were removed, an average of one code every 8 seconds. The canvas overview above provides a rough overview in alphabetical order of the codes generated in the project, and the numbers of codes attached to each code. Many categories were grouped with subcategories, for example Media contained codes for Newspaper and Radio etc. The full list of codes used is provided here:

2015 Election	Gender	Parties
Age	General Politics	Personal opinions
Alex Salmond	Glasgow	Policies
BBC	Gordon Brown	Politicians
Bias	Green	Polls
Business	Holyrood	Positive
Campaigning	Impact	Radio
Changing opinions	Importance	Referendum
Charisma	Independence	Rest of UK
Class	Individuals	Scotland
Conservative	Information	Scottish Identity
Currency	Key Quotes	SNP
Cuts	Labour	Social Media
David Cameron	Last G Election	Strategy
Devo Max	Lib Dem	The 'left'
Discussion	Local representation	The Vow
Ed Miliband	Media	Trust
Edinburgh	Messages	TV
Emotions	Negative	TV Debates
EU	Newspapers	UKIP
Family	NHS	Visibility
Finance	Nicola Sturgeon	Westminster
First head of ref.	No	Wording of Ref
Friends	Other areas	Worries
Future	Other people	Yes

Participatory coding



As an experiment in using Quirkos with non-specialist researchers, all participants in the project were invited to come to a workshop to analyse two transcripts from the project for themselves. The aim was to see how easy 'lay' members of the public would find using Quirkos, and doing qualitative thematic coding. Three people (25%) turned up for the workshop, completed coding, and gave comments on the process.

To facilitate the process, a basic framework was provided, (left) with a few example topics already created. Participants were given a quick 20 minute overview of using Quirkos and thematic analysis, and given a two transcript (from another person's interview to code.

Participants seemed to have no problem in coding interviews, and all chose to add additional themes to the coding framework. Coding was completed quicker than anticipated, and participants commented they found the process interesting and enjoyable.

It was interesting from the research point of view to see the interpretations of different participants come out in the types of themes each created, and what they deemed significant for coding. A separate report will detail this stage of the project in more detail.

General findings

The interviews revealed a great depth of understanding of a wide range of political issues, and a nuanced understanding of many arguments for and against independence. Many people described some uncertainty about which way to vote, but it did not seem that anyone had changed their mind over the course of the campaigning.

There was a general negative opinion towards the general political system, especially Westminster, from both yes and no voters. Participants had varying opinions on political leaders and parties, even though some people were active members of political parties. Yes and No supporters both felt that the No campaign was poorly run, and used too many negative messages, this feeling was especially strong in No voters.

The most important concerns for responders was about public finances, financial stability of an independent Scotland, the issue of currency for Scotland was often mentioned, but often with distrust of politicians comments on the subject. Westminster induced austerity and the future of the NHS also featured as important policy considerations.

People expressed generally negative views of the media portrayal of the referendum, most feeling that newspapers and especially the BBC had been biased, although No supporters were more likely to find the media balanced.

In general, people felt that the process had been good for Scotland, even No supporters, and there was general support for greater devolution of powers. People had seen the process as being very positive for the SNP, and nearly all respondents felt the Yes campaign had been well run. People expressed a negative view of the Labour party during the campaign, although voters also mentioned strong criticism of Labour's wider policy position in recent years. People had generally positive opinions of Nicola Sturgeon, mixed reactions to Alex Salmond, and generally negative comments on Ed Miliband's public image, while also stating that this should not be an important factor for voters. People believed that the polls would be correct in predicting a swing from Labour to the SNP in Scotland.

Many expressed a belief that the level of debate in Edinburgh had been good, and that the Yes campaign was very visible. Respondents were positive about the inclusion of voters from the age of 16, were surprised at how much support the Yes campaign generated, and some felt that a future referendum would be successful in gaining independence for Scotland.

Selected findings: media bias



In general, people interviewed for the project had negative impressions of the media coverage of the referendum. The cluster view above shows themes that were closely associated with bias, in descending order: general Media, the Yes campaign, Newspapers, negative associations and the BBC. Perceptions of bias were generally split between Yes and No voters, with Yes voters seeing a Westminster bias in much of the mainstream media, but No voters more likely to see the media as balanced. These quotes about Bias and the BBC illustrate some of the different opinions:

"It's the British Broadcasting Corporation, you know, [laughter] it's in the name. They're supposed to be public broadcasters and they're supposed to be neutral but it's really difficult to be neutral and I think I felt there was a bias towards a 'No' vote" - **Simon**

"I think the BBC in particular was playing a seemingly equal but pro-Westminster position." - **Jim**

"I think James Naughtie, I know he was trying to be balanced but I couldn't help feeling he was a little bit pro-, I think pro-Scottish and also therefore pro-independence" - **Helen**

"I thought they were fair but afterwards the 'Yes' campaign felt like people like the BBC were being very 'No' oriented but I haven't noticed that, but then perhaps I wouldn't have noticed that because I was 'No' orientated anyway." - **Julie**

People also felt that newspapers supported only one side of the campaign, but this seemed more acceptable, and many people commented on the lack of newspapers supporting the Yes campaign:

"I got a feeling that-, I think the Glasgow Herald came out as being quite for independence and the rest, to a greater or lesser degree, against it." - **Eila**

"The Scotsman was just loud and clear every time there was a story. I forget the journalist's name, but he was always-, and he was obviously told what line to present in his articles and it was always twisted round to give a negative message. I think the Herald was a bit more balanced; but it was the Sunday Herald that that gave more balanced view." - **Alistair**

"It was really difficult, to be honest, even the daily papers, because what is the source of this information and how do you trust it? Everybody's got their own wee agenda."
- **Paula**

Many people also talked about the impact of social media, for some people the first time it had an impact on campaign communications:

"I think there was actually a lot more social media about this than I've ever seen about any other political things really, you know, not just things were coming up on news feeds on Facebook but people were actually attaching tags to their cover pages and things saying, you know, 'Yes' or 'No'."

- Eda

"Social media had a lot to play in that because it picks up on what you post and what you look at, you know, as more 'Yes' stuff's coming through, it's like are you in a bubble here? You just become in a bubble of-, surrounded by people who want the same thing or posting similar information"

- Simon

Selected findings: SNP – Labour shift



Polls have predicted for many months a large shift in support from Labour to the SNP in Scotland, which would result in many Westminster seats going to the SNP for the first time. Even in February when the interviews were conducted, this was something that almost everyone in the study talked about.

The two overlap views above show the generally positive comments about SNP (left), and the negative comments about Labour (right), as well as how often talk of the two parties overlapped. A common theme was that Labour's support for the No campaign felt like another way they were closer to the line of the Conservative party, a common reason given for the declining support for Labour:

"Well, I mean, it's just a bigger instance of what they've been doing wrong over the last four or five years, which is that anytime the Tories say something, they say something very slightly to the left of it"

- Jim

"There was the thorny problem with Labour and Conservatives both wanting the same result, so finding there were two of them combined [laughter], that was always going to be difficult and they had different reasons for wanting the same result, didn't they?" - **Helen**

"There's a significant number of working class people who have voted Labour all the way but some of them will not vote Labour again because they didn't like the idea that the Labour party was associated with the Tories in the campaign" - **Mark**

For many Scottish voters who consider themselves left-leaning politically (indeed, most people in this study), the SNP have come to occupy a left-of-centre view point and policy stance that was formerly associated with Labour:

I mean, it used to just be like, "If you dislike the Tories, you had to vote Labour," and then you kind of vote Lib Dem but now the SNP are a realistic choice as well. - **Eda**

I think even a lot of no voters, they actually agreed with a lot of what the SNP say in terms of social policy and in some degree the taxation policies, and were maybe hurt by some of how the Labour campaign during-, what Labour's done. So, I think a lot of more traditional Labour voters probably identified with SNP policies a lot more now. - **Jim**

A lot of the SNP's policies are quite left wing, I think, and Labour ought to be, that should be their ground so the SNP were sort of stealing Labour's voters. Not stealing in a bad way but taking over Labour ground, so the Labour party have lost out on support because they've tried to go a bit more middle to counteract the Conservatives. - **Helen**

Selected findings: important messages from the campaigns

Participants were asked if there were messages, from either the Yes or No campaigns that resonated with them, or were still memorable. Many people mentioned the negative tone of the No campaign:

"I didn't agree with whatever they called themselves, the 'No' people, because I thought it was a very negative campaign...They didn't give any good reason for remaining in Britain." - **Helen**

"People who I knew would vote 'No', even Scottish people who I knew would vote 'No' and were rolling their eyes with every kind of newspaper story that came out with more doom and gloom rather than saying, "Hey, Scotland. We'd like you to stay."" - **June**

"For a long time, I felt that the 'No' politicians weren't putting forward their case very well, and I felt that the one person that came in and either saved the day or not was Gordon Brown because he suddenly did this very impassioned speech for the 'No'" - **Julie**

Hotly debated issues at the time, such as the likelihood of an Independent Scotland keeping the pound, were generally met with scorn:

"Well, we were talking about making up our own currency and you would have things like a hundred sporrans to a Nessie [laughter]. You'd have a mealy pudding note and things like that [laughter]. We don't care if we don't get the pound, we'll make our own things." - **Eda**

"I thought George Osborne really made it plain. He said, 'Well, if you go for independence you can't have the pound.' Well, the pound: it's a United Kingdom, there are two kingdoms in it and the pound belongs as much to Scotland as it does to England and he said, 'Well, you can't have the pound.' Well, that suggested to more than myself that Scotland isn't an equal partner." - **Adrian**

General financial issues seemed to be much more important to the responders, with many people discussing oil revenues, debt and austerity policies.

"I think the question of whether or not Scottish people would be better off financially made a big impact" - **Jim**

"At the same time, there's the economics of it, it all has to be funded. Are there enough taxpayers in Scotland to pay this? So, I think that's a point, we needed a lot more information on how they thought this was all going to work, and now that the oil's going down the tubes, they've all gone pretty quiet." - **Paula**

"I'm not an economist but how does the [wider] UK finance its debt without the projected earnings of the [Scottish] oil industry? What does that mean for the UK's financial rating and the amount they pay on interest on loans?" - **Simon**

Summary

In general, respondents to our project were very willing to share their opinions on the referendum campaign and wider political issues. Their comments illustrate the impact that the Independence debate has had on how voters see political parties in Scotland, and likely explain some of the projected results in the 2015 election. The SNP is expected to keep momentum, and people had largely positive opinions of the new leader, Nicola Sturgeon (indeed she was seen in a much more positive light than Alex Salmond).

This report only gives an insight into a few selected issues, as the whole coded dataset is available as a series of reports, and also a Quirkos project file, interested readers are invited to download Quirkos, and explore the data for themselves, and make their own conclusions. These materials can be downloaded from www.quirkos.com/workshops/

Quirkos

Quirkos is a new software tool for qualitative text analysis, with a unique and intuitive interface that lets researchers get going quickly, and keeps them close to their data. Live visualisations and powerful search and query tools let users explore their data, showing connections and comparisons in coded text. Quirkos is used across the world by researchers, market research agencies, public sector bodies and students for research, social understanding and customer insight.

Download a free trial today from www.quirkos.com/get.html

Published by Quirkos Limited

*27 Ocean Drive, Edinburgh, EH6 6JL
Registered in Scotland No. 458174*