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Who is still wavering?

Turnout and the undecided

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Summary

In a previous ScotCen Briefing, it was shown that a third of all respondents to the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2013 had not decided which way to vote in the referendum (Eichhorn, 'Don't Care or Deeply Conflicted?', 2014). This new Briefing looks at likely turnout in the referendum, as measured by SSA 2014, and also examines who the undecideds are.

Turnout

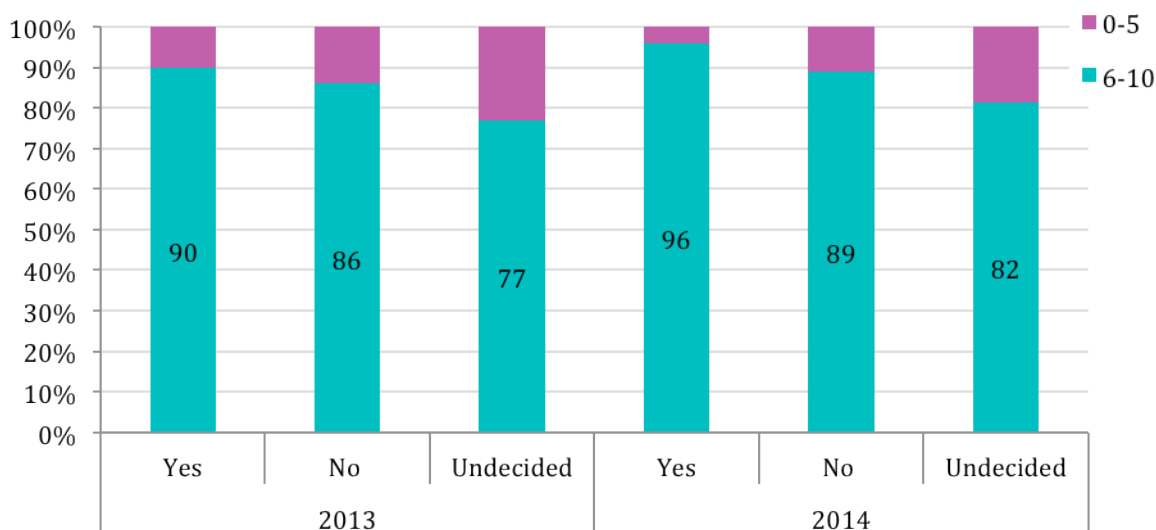
The level of turnout looks likely to be high. The survey measured respondents' likelihood of voting on a 10-point scale, with 10 meaning 'certain to vote'. Nearly three quarters of people now say they are certain to vote, up from under two thirds in 2013. Nearly nine out of ten say they are likely to vote.

Table 1. Likelihood of voting in referendum, by year

	2013	2014
Certain to vote (10)	62%	74%
Likely to vote (6-10)	81%	87%

Moreover, the likelihood of voting is up no matter what people's view is of the question in the referendum.

Figure 1. Likelihood of voting, by voting intention



When the undecideds were asked which way they are leaning, just over one half were willing to say, with responses very like those in Figure 1. The result is a slight advantage for the Yes side, as Table 2 shows: taking account of those leaning to Yes or No, the Yes tally is 41%.

Table 2. Voting intention, with and without weighting by likelihood of voting

	Yes	No
SSA 2014 (including leaning)	39	61
Weighted for voting likelihood	41	59

Who are the undecided?

Table 3: Key factors identifying those undecided

Percentage <u>undecided</u> in 2014 (2013 score in parentheses)					
Sex	Women			Men	
	33			26	
Party affiliation	Conservative	Labour	Lib Dem	SNP	None
	11 (11)	27 (36)	26 (15)	29 (35)	37 (48)
Political interest	A great deal	Quite a lot	Some	Not very much	None at all
	21 (20)	20 (30)	30 (36)	38 (39)	44 (47)
Knowledge perception	A great deal	Quite a lot	Some	Not very much	Nothing at all
	2 (19)	14 (17)	29 (32)	46 (49)	39 (48)
Difference to own life	A great deal	Quite a lot	Some	Not very much	None at all
	12 (16)	22 (25)	32 (39)	41 (47)	43 (37)

What characterises the undecided? The next table (3) picks out factors that were associated with being undecided in 2013, and shows that they are again important, although the level of undecided is down in all groups. On sex, there is the same relationship as before: a greater proportion of women than of men is undecided. On party-political identity, people closer to Labour or the SNP are still the most undecided, and those not close to any party have the highest level of all, but to a slightly lesser extent than before.¹ For those who are interested in politics ‘a great deal’ or ‘quite a lot’, the relationship with being undecided has weakened somewhat, whereas in 2013 those with ‘a great deal’ of interest were substantially less likely to be undecided than those with only ‘quite a lot’ of interest. Those who say they know a great deal about the issues in the referendum are now almost certain to have decided, but otherwise the relationship is similar to 2013, meaning that those who feel they know less about the referendum also are more likely to be undecided. And on whether independence would make a difference to the respondent’s own life, the pattern is again similar to 2013: the more a person feels that independence would affect their life, the more likely they are to have made up their mind (with very few people saying independence would have no effect at all – just 66 cases in 2014).

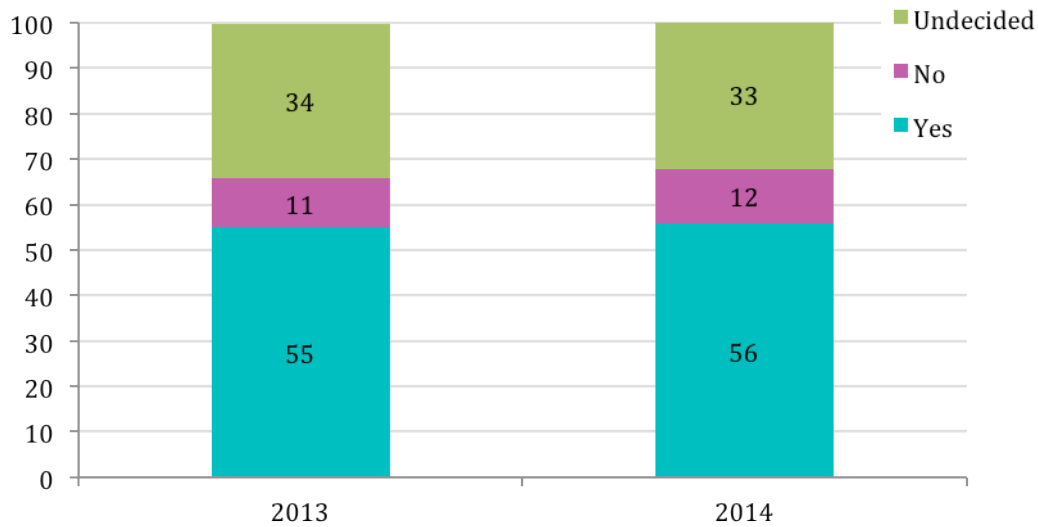
An important source of uncertainty in deciding how to vote is in the very concept of ‘independence’. The SSA 2014 repeated a question about the full range of constitutional options from previous years of the SSA, in which the options are as shown in Table 4: note that the word ‘independence’ is not used, but rather the concept that the Scottish Parliament might ‘make all decisions for Scotland’. The table shows that there has been a marked rise between 2013 and 2014 in support for that option.

Table 4. Constitutional preferences		
	2013 (%)	2014 (%)
The Scottish Parliament should make all decisions for Scotland	31	41
The UK government should make decisions about defence and foreign affairs; the Scottish Parliament should decide everything else	32	29
The UK government should make decisions about taxes, benefits and defence and foreign affairs; the Scottish Parliament should decide the rest	25	22
The UK government should make all decisions for Scotland	8	6
Don't know/refused	4	3

Yet, despite the rise in support for this ‘full powers’ option, people who favour it are no less undecided in 2014 than they were in 2013, and indeed one in eight of them intend to vote No: only just over one half of them would vote Yes, as Figure 2 shows.

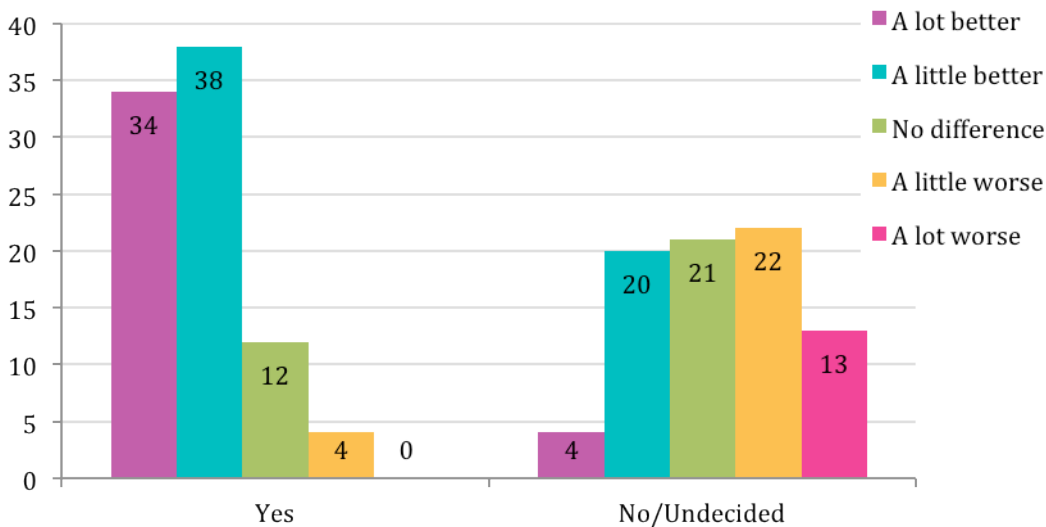
¹ For Liberal Democrats the small sample size of just 66 in 2014 makes it unreliable to conclude that there has been any significant rise from the 15% undecideds in 2013.

Figure 2. Voting intention of those favouring the Scottish Parliament deciding everything



Part of the explanation of this discrepancy between ideal and intention is an awareness of the economic issues in the debate, as Figure 3 indicates. For those who want the Scottish Parliament to make all decisions for Scotland, it shows the percentage intending to vote Yes according to views about the economic prospects of an independent Scotland.

Figure 3. Voting intentions among those favouring the Scottish Parliament deciding everything, according to economic expectations of independence



The economic question seems to be crucial here: we have a group of people who like the idea of independence, but are doubtful about the economic prospects of an independent Scotland. Although the number of those ideally wishing for the Scottish Parliament to run everything has grown substantially, that ideal will not be translated into a vote for independence by most unless they can also be convinced that it can be afforded.

For the whole sample (not just those favouring full powers), Figure 4 shows not only that views about economic prospects have become more important between 2013 and 2014 in distinguishing between Yes and No intentions, but also that the middle group (those saying the economy in an independent Scotland would be neither better nor worse) is now more favourable to independence than it was before (48% compared to 30%). Figure 3 suggests that one way in which the Yes side could increase the Yes vote further in that middle group would be to concentrate on those who favour the Scottish Parliament deciding everything. We come back to views of economic prospects in connection with education, below.

Figure 4. Voting intention by economic expectation for independence (including the leanings of people who are undecided)



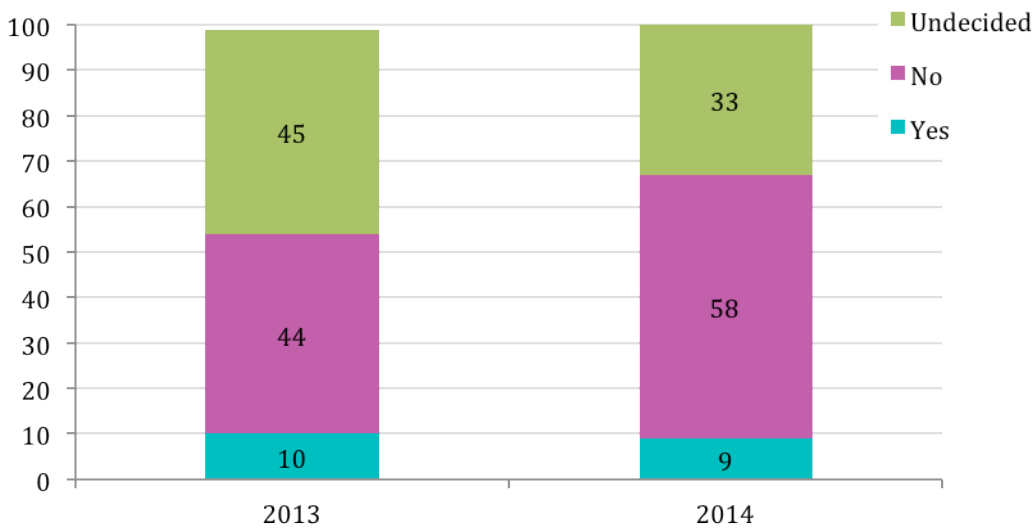
As in 2013, an important group of undecideds is those who favour maximal devolution – the second option in Table 3, which in 2014 still commanded 29% support. The gap in the proportion of undecided between those favouring maximal devolution and other voters is smaller now, but still there, as Table 5 shows.

Table 5. Undecided, by whether 5respondent supports maximal devolution

	2013 (%)	2014 (%)
Maximal devolution	45	33
All others	30	27

Nevertheless, the level of undecided among this group in 2014 is now almost down to that level among the other group a year ago. The No side has been the main beneficiary of increased decidedness amongst maximal devolutionists. As Figure 5 shows, 58% of maximal devolutionists now intend to vote No compared to 44% last year.

Figure 5. Voting intention of those favouring maximum devolution



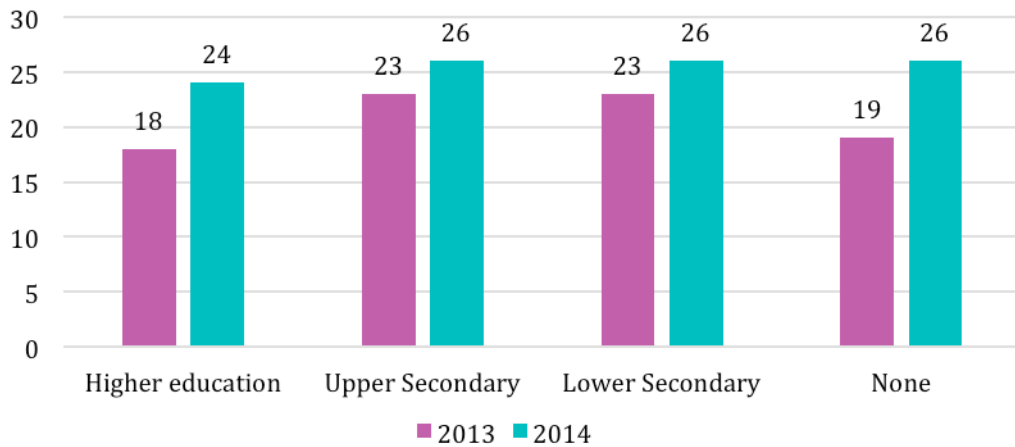
The importance of education

A topic which has not previously been investigated in connection with the undecideds is education. Might it be that the people who are taking longest to make up their minds are those who have most education, and who are therefore trained not to come to conclusions without evidence and debate? Education is summarised here by the highest qualification attained. In 2014, for 39% their highest attainment was a higher-education qualification, for 20% it was an upper-secondary qualification (mainly Highers), for 22% it was a lower-secondary qualification (such as Standard Grades), and 18% had no formal qualifications at all.²

One notable change has taken place with respect to education: in 2014, the percentage intending to vote Yes was almost the same in all these education categories, as Figure 6 shows, whereas in 2013 the Yes percentage was higher for the two middling education categories

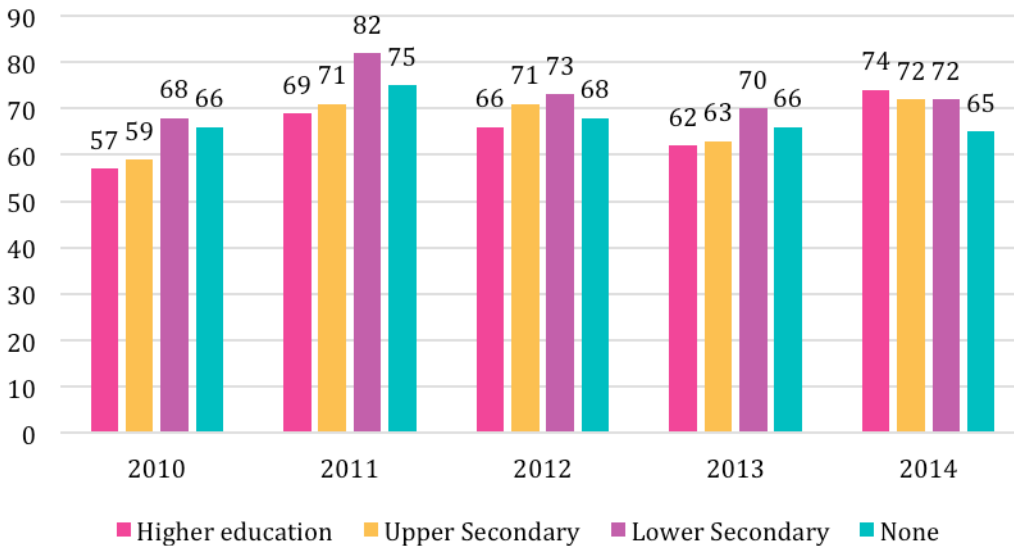
² The SSAS series measures education levels reasonably accurately when compared with population data: for example, in 2011, the SSAS percentages for highest qualification were, with Population Census figures in brackets: higher education 36% (36%), Highers etc 20% (14%), Standard Grade etc 23% (23%), no formal qualification 21% (27%). These Census figures are from Figure 1 of Release 2B of the 2011 Census: <http://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/census-results>.

Figure 6. Percentage Yes, by education



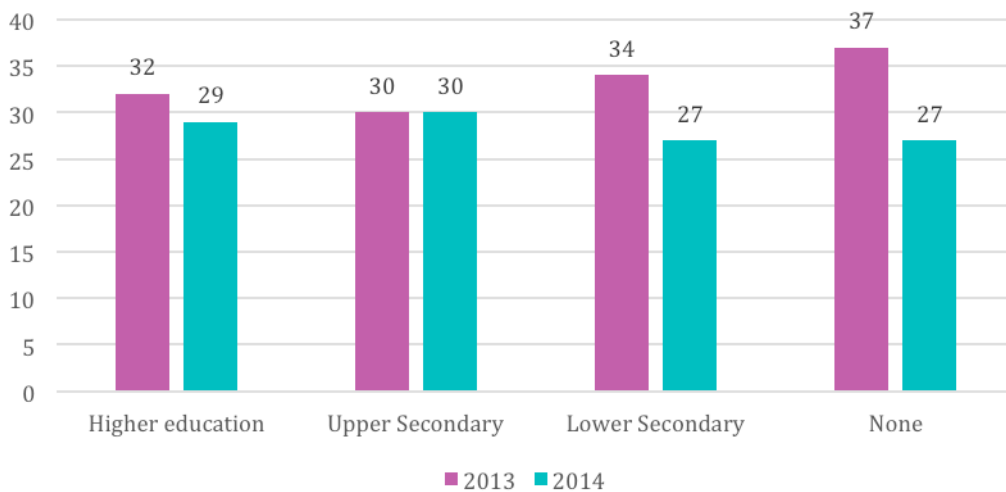
This weakening of the relationship between education and constitutional preference is unprecedented, as the long series of SSAs show when we use longer-established measures of constitutional preference. Indeed, because people with large amounts of education remain more in favour of maximal devolution than people with less education, the overall support for greater Scottish autonomy is now stronger among the well-educated than among the rest – something that has never happened before, when Scottish self-government has always been most strongly supported by people who have not had much education: see Figure 7 for the period since 2010; analogous measures in previous surveys find an education gradient as in 2010 going right back to the 1970s.

Figure 7. Percentage for full powers or maximal devolution (see Table 2), by education



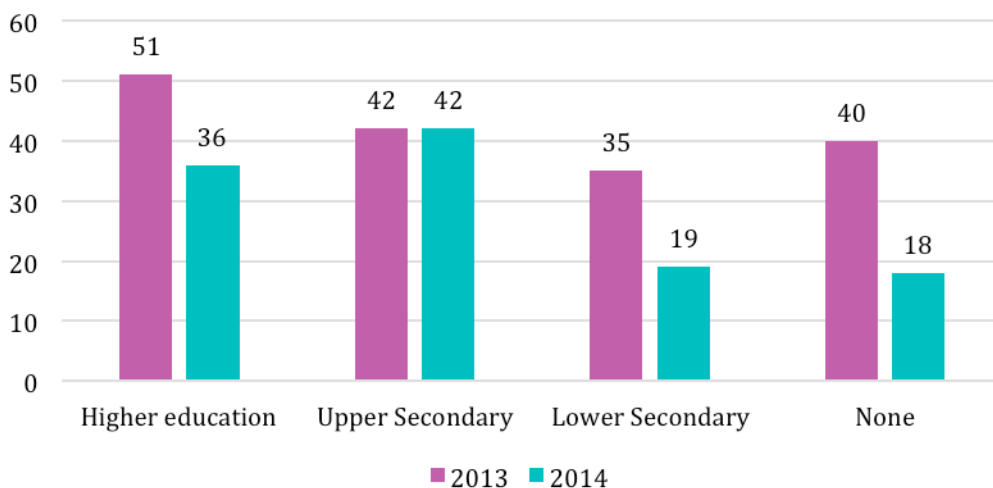
Yet at the same time, the well-educated are also now more likely than other educational groups to be undecided how they will actually vote, in contrast to 2013: see Figure 8.

Figure 8. Percentage undecided, by education



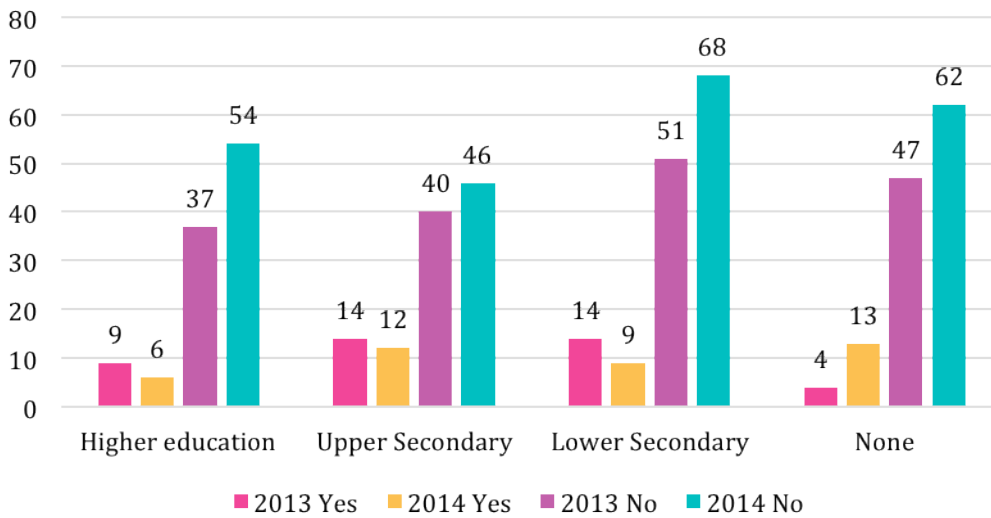
In other words, those with lower levels of education are indeed making up their minds more quickly. This is especially so among those with low education who favour maximal devolution: see Figure 9.

Figure 9. Supporters of maximal devolution: percentage undecided, by education



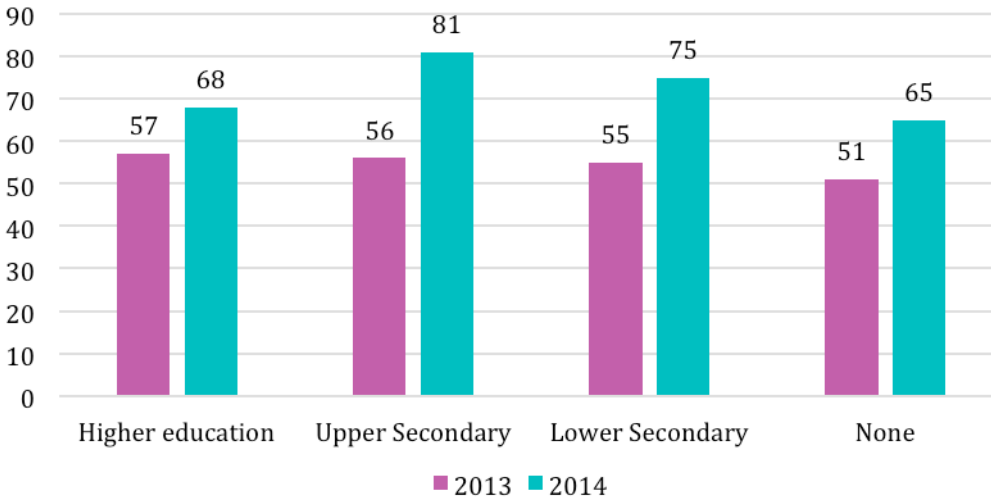
As we saw earlier in this Briefing, the maximal devolutionists have moved towards No. That is particularly true of maximal devolutionists who are low-educated, where the No proportion was around two thirds in 2014. The promises of more devolution from the No campaign seems to have got through particularly to the low-educated group of maximal devolutionists: two thirds of them intend to vote No.

Figure 10. Supporters of maximal devolution: vote intention, by education



As SSA analysis has frequently noted, positive evaluations of the economic prospects of an independent Scotland tend to be translated into Yes votes. That is particularly the case among people who are well-educated, as Figure 11 shows. The people represented in Figure 11 all expect independence to benefit the economy, but, in each year, the low-educated are less likely to vote Yes than the well-educated. The somewhat lower Yes percentage for those with higher-education in 2014 is because that group also had more undecideds than the others, and when their leanings are included the Yes intention of those with higher education rises to 90%, whereas the Yes intention among the people with no qualifications is only 75%.

Figure 11. Percentage intending to vote Yes, among those who expect independence to benefit the economy, by education



Conclusion

A great deal of indecision remains, despite one of the lengthiest political campaigns in the UK's democratic history: around 30% of the electorate have still to make up their mind. This is not because people are not engaged: all the signs are that the turnout will be high, with 74% saying they are 'certain' to vote, and 87% that they are at least likely to vote. The undecided are concentrated in the areas of greatest disputes – between people who identify with Labour or SNP (each about 30% undecided), or around maximal devolution (33% undecided), or about whether, for people who want the Scottish Parliament to have power over all aspects of Scottish politics, the current economic prospects of an independent Scotland are secure enough to justify a Yes vote (one half undecided for those who ideally want full powers but are not convinced of the economic case, as opposed to just 7% among people who want full powers but are convinced of the economic case). Those who are well-educated are also now more likely to be undecided than those who are not (about 30% compared to about 25%). There is some evidence that the No campaign has been successful in persuading maximal devolutionists who have minimal education that a Yes vote is too much of a risk: maximal devolutionist with no educational qualifications now have 17% undecided, 12% Yes but 61% No, whereas maximal devolutionists with a higher-education qualification have 35% undecided, 7% Yes and 52% No. But there is also evidence that, when the Yes campaign persuades well-educated people that an independent Scotland would have a secure economic future, they are very likely to vote Yes: among people with a higher education qualification and who expect independence to benefit the economy, 90% intend to vote Yes.