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News Release

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Young peoples' independence referendum intentions narrow

The proportion of people under the age of 18 who would vote yes in the Scottish independence referendum increased in the past year, research shows.

Support for independence has risen to 29 per cent among under-18s who are eligible to vote compared with 23 per cent in a similar representative survey in spring 2013.

The proportion of undecided voters under 18 is unchanged at 19 per cent, while support for the no vote has reduced from 58 to 52 per cent.

Excluding undecideds, 36 per cent of this age group eligible to vote now say they would vote yes compared with 28 per cent last year. The no vote has gone down from 72 to 64 per cent.

These patterns are similar to the changes seen among adult voters, with most polls recording support for independence growing at the beginning of 2014.

The latest study was carried out by researchers from the University of Edinburgh. The representative survey was carried out in April and May 2014. There were 1006 respondents in total, with 726 of them eligible to vote in September.

Despite the increase in support for independence, the majority of under-18 year olds would vote no in September. Support for independence among this age group remains lower than among the overall adult population, according to recent polls.

Voter turnout among under-18s can be expected to be high with 72 per cent of those eligible to vote saying they are 'very' or 'rather likely' to do so - an increase from 66 per cent last year. This is close to levels for the overall adult population.

Like older adults, yes supporters under 18 are slightly more likely to vote in September than no supporters.

The economy was the strongest influence on whether someone under 18 would vote yes or no. Of those who think a post-independence economy would be 'a lot better', 92 per cent would vote yes. Among those who think it would do 'a little better', 65 per cent would support independence. Conversely, of those who think it would do 'a little worse' or 'a lot worse', only three and one per cent respectively would vote yes.

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Most under-18s still would like to be better informed - 61 per cent say they would like more information before finally deciding, compared with 67 per cent last year.

Yes supporters are more likely to say they have enough information (48 per cent) compared with no supporters (41 per cent). The figures were nearly identical for both groups last year.

To source information about the referendum under-18s use social media (64 per cent), TV and radio programmes (63 per cent), online news websites (46 per cent), print newspapers (35 per cent) and campaign publicity materials (30 per cent).

Reading a print newspaper had the most pronounced effect on whether young people felt informed. Those who read print newspapers were much more likely to say they had sufficient information (48 per cent) compared with those who did not (32 per cent).

Some 40 per cent of online news users said they had enough information compared with 35 per cent who did not; 40 per cent of social media users and 41 per cent of TV and radio programme users said they had enough information compared with 32 per cent who did not use all of these sources.

Yes supporters have an equal, or mostly higher, likelihood of having used these information sources compared with no supporters.

A significant proportion (42 per cent) of under-18s said they had argued about independence with someone else. Of those who had an argument, 77 per cent talked to parents about the referendum and 77 per cent talked to friends. Of those who did not have an argument, only 63 per cent had spoken to their parents about the referendum and 56 per cent had discussed it with their friends.

Young people in Scotland aged 14-17 are more pro-European than their adult counterparts - only 5 per cent want to leave the European Union, compared with 19 per cent amongst adults in the 2013 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey. Some 22 per cent want to stay in the EU, but see its powers reduced, compared with 40 per cent of adults. And 44 per cent want to leave things as they are, compared with 25 per cent of adults. Meanwhile 23 per cent want to extend the powers of the EU, compared with 11 per cent of adults.

Dr Jan Eichhorn, who coordinated the study, said: "Apart from the increased support for yes amongst voters under 18, the most important insight from our survey is about the high level of engagement young people show. Voting turnout can be expected to be much higher than in normal elections and very close to adult levels. Their high degree of interest and wide-ranging discussions show that young people are not apolitical. On the contrary, they engage with politics extensively if the issue is important and they think their vote matters."

A briefing event will be held on Monday, 9 June in Edinburgh. Details can be found here: <http://aqmen.ac.uk/events/June2014/ScottishIndependence>

For further information and images please contact:

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Notes

1. The research was carried out by Dr Jan Eichhorn, Prof Lindsay Paterson, Prof John MacInnes, Dr Michael Rosie in the University of Edinburgh's School of Social and Political Science.
2. The work was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council through the Future of the UK and Scotland Programme and carried out under the umbrella of the Applied Quantitative Methods Network (AQMeN).
3. The survey was carried out in April and May 2014 using random digit dialling. Households with children aged 14 to 17 were eligible to participate. Eligible voters were identified by asking for the age in years and whether those aged 15 years old had birthdays on or before 18 September. Details about the methodology will be presented in a briefing paper, which will be published on Friday, 6 June, at the AQMeN website: www.aqmen.ac.uk.