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Yes vote chances rise with access to more information, study says

The more information voters have in the Scottish referendum debate, the more likely they are to vote Yes, according to new research.

When voters are presented with a balanced set of arguments, researchers have found that support for independence among undecided voters increased by between 10 and 15 per cent.

Nearly 300 individuals eligible to vote on 18 September took part in study at the University of Edinburgh in April and May of this year.

Before the experiment, 70 per cent said they were either undecided or admitted they might change their mind on how they vote. By the end of the test, researchers found that when more information was provided, the level of indecision among voters halved.

The voters were split into groups and presented with 16 articles, eight in favour of independence and eight against. Each voter was told they could only read eight of the 16 items.

Some groups were allowed to choose which articles they read, while others were made to pick four supporting each side of the debate.

The majority of participants who could choose their articles opted for a balance of items, but voters who were already decided were significantly more likely to select an unbalanced number of articles.

The likelihood of voting No among undecided voters only increased in the group that chose which articles to read and, even then, only in a few cases.

The articles were taken from news sources, campaign websites, political statements, policy documents, and academic reports. Mentions of politicians or political parties were omitted.

The research was carried out at the Behavioural Laboratory at the University of Edinburgh (BLUE Lab) by visiting academics from the European University Institute (EUI), and was overseen by the University's School of Economics.

Ranked among the top universities in the world

Researcher Davide Morisi from the Department of Political and Social Sciences at the EUI in Florence said: “Since independence is related to more uncertainty than keeping the status quo, reading convincing arguments has a stronger effect on a Yes vote, because it contributes to reducing these uncertainties to an ‘acceptable’ level.”

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