UNIVERSITY OF TARTU
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH STUDIES

SCOTLAND'S VOTING BEHAVIOUR AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS INDEPENDENCE IN THE LIGHT OF GOVERNMENTAL REFERENDUMS IN THE 2010s

BA thesis

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TARTU
2023

ABSTRACT

This thesis gives an overview of how the Scottish people participated in two recent referendums held in Scotland and the UK.

Scotland has held referendums about devolution and independence, yet the country is still a part of the United Kingdom. The aim of this thesis is to give an overview of how Scotland participated in the 2014 Scottish independence referendum and the EU referendum, the reasons for voting in the referendum and how the UK leaving the European Union influenced Scotland's attitude towards independence.

This thesis consists of an introduction, three main sections and a conclusion. The introduction describes referendums, and their correlation with Scotland and describes the thesis aims. The first section gives an overview of how electorates can participate in constitution-making processes, how these apply to referendums held in the UK, and what influences voting behaviour in referendums. The second section delves deeper into Scottish national identity and the 20th independence movement, which ultimately led to the 2014 Scotland independence referendum. The second section also provides an overview of the 2014 Scotland independence referendum and the 2016 EU referendum held in the UK. The third section is a secondary analysis of Scottish electorates voting behaviour in the two referendums. The analysis considers how many electorates voted and their reasons for doing so based on opinion polls conducted by Lord Ashcroft Polls. The analysis then gives an overview of how the EU referendum influenced the Scottish attitude towards independence. The analysis is then followed by a sub-section, where the likelihood of independent Scotland is discussed. The key findings are summarised in the conclusion.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

UK The United Kingdom

EU The European Union

SNP Scottish National Party

INTRODUCTION

Until 1707, Scotland was an independent country, but the 1707 Act of Union merged it with England to form the Kingdom of Great Britain. Since then, Scotland has been one of the constituent countries of the UK. In 1999, the Scottish Parliament was established alongside the Scottish Executive to oversee and have responsibility for public services in Scotland (Delivering for Scotland 2023). Since then, Scotland has had two governments: the UK and Scottish Governments, and there have been tensions between them, particularly on the issue of independence for Scotland.

Two significant referendums in Scotland's recent history have highlighted the divergence of opinion regarding independence: the 2014 Scottish independence referendum and the 2016 UK European Union membership referendum (hereinafter referred to as "the EU referendum").

A referendum is a form of direct democracy that allows an electorate to vote on a specific question (UK Parliament 2023). In contrast to elections, which are primarily used to fill public offices and do not offer a reliable or direct way to influence policy content, referendums are typically used to support representative institutions rather than to displace them (Heywood 2002: 226). Referendums can be advisory or binding, they can be used to decide policy issues or to raise issues for discussion, and voters can decide on a policy that will be enacted (Rose and Weßels 2021: 360). When a question is put to the public, it should be understandable, to the point and precise. It should avoid being deceptive and encourage voters to vote for a specific decision (Electoral Commission 2023).

As the UK is a parliamentary democracy, not a direct democracy, the need for referendums has been a highly debated issue. According to the House of Lords Constitution Committee report (House of Lords 2010), Browning argues that referendums enhance the democratic process while Professor Bogdanor claims that they settle a problem or are a

protective device, promote voter education or accompany representative democracy. Professor Butler argues, however, that referendums can be seen as tactical devices, thought to be dominated by elite groups, have damaging effects on minority groups, or do not settle any issues. Scotland is an interesting case where the country has discussed independence for decades. Still, to this day, there has not been a successful independence referendum in Scotland.

This thesis's main aim is to analyse the results of two recent referendums held in Scotland and the UK. The 2014 Scottish independence referendum provided the platform for the public to voice their opinion regarding the future of Scotland: whether the country should remain part of the UK or become independent. The EU referendum revived the Scottish independence movement since there was a sense of feeling that Scotland's voice was not taken into consideration because it had to leave the European Union with the rest of the UK despite the fact that 62% of Scots voted to stay in the European Union (McEwen 2022).

As attitudes to Scottish independence are extremely volatile, the focus of the thesis remains on public opinion rather than economic and political affairs. This thesis looks only into how Scotland's electorate voted in the referendums and discusses the likelihood of another independence referendum happening. The main research question is: how has the UK leaving the European Union influenced Scotland's attitude towards independence? Two specific research questions are:

(1) How did Scotland vote in the 2014 Scottish independence and the EU referendum?

(2) What was Scotland's attitude towards the 2016 European Union referendum before it happened?

The thesis falls into three main sections. Section One discusses citizens' participation in constitution-making processes and their voting behaviour. Section Two is devoted to the Scottish independence movement. It considers Scottish national identity and how it relates to the desire for independence from the UK while also discussing the 2014 Scottish independence referendum and the EU referendum held in the UK. Section Three presents a secondary analysis of two referendums that provide context on Scotland's attitude towards independence and further expands on the topic of independence for Scotland in the future.

1. REFERENDUMS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

This section discusses different ways people can get involved in the constitution-making process and how these processes apply to the referendums held in the UK. As voters are essential to democratic processes, this section also considers aspects that can affect voters' opinions when voting in referendums.

1.1. Citizen participation in referendums

Negretto (2017: 21) claims that there are two main mechanisms that Western countries have historically used to change constitutional laws: conducting a referendum or an election. When specific proposals are made to change the constitutional systems, there are three ways of how they can be dealt with, according to Renwick (2014: 27): the proposed request is dictated to the legislature for them to decide the outcome, the proposal's outcome is determined using elections, or an assembly is given the power to decide the outcome.

Renwick (2014: 17-18) distinguishes three constitution-making processes:

(1) A specific constitutional reform, where the constitution is changed in a very specific way. An example would be the Canadian Citizens' Assembly, which was tasked with changing the electoral system.

(2) A general constitutional review, where a constitution-making government may request a review of all the current governmental institutions and suggest new widespread reforms. An example would be Sweden in the 1950s, where a parliamentary committee was established to investigate potential reforms after it became evident that the constitutional structure had become outdated.

(3) A new constitutional design, where there is a possibility to establish procedures that can be used to implement completely new constitutional orders. A new constitutional design can happen when a new state is founded, or an existing state experiences a regime change.

Before determining how these categories apply to referendums that have been held in Scotland, it is essential to understand what type of referendums have taken place in the UK. According to the House of Lords (2010), before 1973, there had been some local referendums in the UK on less essential topics. Since 1973, however, there have been thirteen referendums, only four of which were held before the 21st century (Independent Commission on Referendums 2018: 31).

The first non-local referendum in the UK's recent history was held in 1973 in Northern Ireland called the "Border Poll", which determined whether Northern Ireland should remain in the UK or join the Republic of Ireland (House of Lords 2010). The first UK-wide referendum was held in 1975 on the issue of whether the UK should remain in the European Community (now the European Union) (Independent Commission on Referendums 2018: 31). The second UK-wide referendum was held in 2011 when the electorate had to decide whether the UK should change the parliamentary voting system. The third and most recent UK-wide referendum was held in 2016 when the UK had to decide whether to remain in the European Union. There have also been referendums on the devolution in Scotland in 1979 and 1997, Wales in 1979 and 1997, London in 1998 and North East England in 2004 (Independent Commission on Referendums 2018: 32).

Applying Renwick's (2014: 17-18) constitution-making processes to referendums held in the UK provides an understanding of citizens' decisions when casting a ballot. A specific constitutional reform applies best to the 2011 UK-wide referendum on modifying the parliamentary voting system. Even though the result meant that the system did not change (32.1% of the electorate voted "Yes", whereas 67.9% voted "No" (Independent Commission on Referendums 2018: 32)), a specific aspect of the constitution would have needed to be changed if the referendum had been successful.

All devolution referendums as well as the Scottish independence referendum are examples of a new constitutional design, where the "Yes" vote would have ultimately led to changes in the constitution of that area. The 1997 Scottish Devolution referendum, for example, resulted in Scottish electorates voting for the establishment of the Scottish Parliament as well as for its tax-varying powers - the right to lower or raise the income tax (Independent Commission on Referendums 2018: 32). If the 2014 Scottish independence referendum had been successful, Scotland would have become a sovereign country. It would have been a new constitutional design because a new state would have been founded. The 1975 European Community membership and the 2016 EU referendum are also examples of a new constitutional design, where the existing state experiences a significant alteration in the constitution, ultimately changing the way of life for the country's residents.

1.2. Voting behaviour in referendums

According to Renwick and Sargeant (2021: 75), who can vote in the referendum is determined by the laws of the country. Most European countries have outlined in their constitution or other established laws that electorates allowed to participate in referendums are the same that can participate in national elections. In the case of the UK, the qualifications for voting in a referendum are determined by the legislation that enables this particular referendum.

Leduc (2002: 711) argues that information and voting cues are gathered by referendum voters from various sources. For example, political parties could be internally conflicted during referendum campaigns, which can then cause parties to communicate conflicting messages to their voters. Because of this, voting patterns in referendums frequently display higher volatility than those in elections. Topaloff (2017: 136-137) expresses a similar view explaining how voters may need to learn a lot about the given topic when going to vote and tend to follow voting cues provided by the political parties.

When comparing elections to referendums, voter turnout is among the first issues discussed (Leduc 2002: 715). Compared to larger-scale elections (for example, European Parliament elections) and referendums, voters are more likely to participate in local elections because they believe their vote will have more impact there (Heath et al 1999: 389). In a referendum, a voter must select from options that are frequently unfamiliar voting cues (Leduc 2002: 727). When a ruling party chooses a referendum strategy, it typically does so with the hope of winning or maintaining its stance on a particular issue. In turn, voters have an easier time making a decision earlier in the campaign when the issue is well-known.

Rose and Weßels (2021: 359) argue that voters are the key when deciding a particular governmental policy without the influence of elected representatives. Voters have found that referendums and elections are important democratic institutions; therefore, participation in them is necessary. Referendums allow voters to clearly demonstrate their preferred choice, eliminating the confusion about what voters want (Rose and Weßels 2021: 360). By participating in referendums, the voter's voice influences and ensures that the promised outcome will be achieved.

Laycock (2012: 237) claims that, when it comes to voting in referendums, voting cues sent by political parties can make it easier for the voter to make a decision, thus, influencing the voter. As the voter lacks the time, interest as well as competence to absorb all the information that comes with the referendum, political party cues are the main influence that helps them to understand the issue. Voting in referendums is unusual for voters in comparison to general elections because they are based on a single issue and happen sporadically. Henderson et al (2022: 8) point out that a voter’s choice can be influenced by the popularity of campaign leaders, the voter’s connection to the community and the public’s opinion of the government that called for the referendum.

According to the Independent Commission on Referendums (2018: 44), evidence of voting behaviour in the UK referendums is relatively limited. Opinion polls about referendums in the 2010s have been conducted, but evidence beforehand has been limited.

2. SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT

Before analysing the Scottish electorate's voting behaviour in the 2014 Scottish independence referendum and the EU referendum, it is necessary to first discuss the 20th-century independence movement and how it relates to national identity in Scotland, which is the catalyst for independence-related discussions.

2.1. Scottish independence movement in the 20th century

In the 20th century, the independence movement started to gain momentum with the establishment of the Scottish National Party (hereafter, the SNP) in 1934 when two political parties, the National Party of Scotland and the Scottish Party, united (SNP 2023). The first SNP Member of Parliament, Dr Robert McIntyre, was elected in 1945. Throughout the years, the independence movement was gaining momentum, and in 1967 Winnie Ewing was elected as a member of the SNP and won an election that decided a new Member of Parliament.

Two years later, in 1969, a Royal Commission of the Constitution was established to examine the structure of the Constitution (Scottish Parliament 2023). Several devolution models were rejected in the process and in the mid-1970s the pressure to reform the constitution grew. During that period, the Labour Party held a majority in the Parliament and introduced legislation to establish a Scottish Assembly. This ultimately resulted in the Scotland Act 1978 which was to become a law on July 31, 1978. In order for the Act to become a law, 40% of the Scottish electorate had to support it.

The referendum for the Scotland Act 1978 was held in 1979 and it resulted in 33% of the electorate supporting it, therefore it was not passed and the Act was not implemented.

The failure of the Devolution referendum led to complications for the Labour Party and the SNP, which consequently led to a decline in support for the latter when the Conservatives, led by Margaret Thatcher, gained the majority in the 1979 general election (Glen 2015: 8). The devolution issue that Scotland presented to the UK was repressed by Margaret Thatcher's pro-union attitude and centralisation of political power. Scotland then faced more problems when the poll tax was introduced. This resulted in widespread protests and the formation of an Anti-Poll Tax Union, leading to the Conservative Party losing support in Scotland. When the 1987 general election ended with another Conservative victory, the Scottish people were not pleased with the result and eventually formed the Scottish Constitutional Convention (Scottish Parliament 2023). It was made up of people from churches, organisations, local authorities and representatives from Scotland's political parties. The late 1980s saw a resurgence of nationalist attitudes in Scotland when the "Claim of Right for Scotland" emerged (Glen 2015: 8).

In 1997, Scotland held another devolution referendum, which resulted in the re-establishment of the Scottish Parliament with the Scotland Act 1998 (Glen 2015: 9). Compared to the 1979 referendum, this referendum took place before the introduction of the devolution bill in the UK Parliament to ensure that devolution fully expressed people's opinions (Scottish Parliament 2023). The Scottish Parliament was granted control over education, local government, health and economic development (Glen 2015: 9). In 1999, Scotland held the first election to the Scottish Parliament, where the Labour Party secured 56 seats, the SNP 35 seats and the Conservative Party 18 seats. Even though the election result did not grant the SNP a majority in the Parliament, the party leaders viewed it as a vital step towards independence or further devolution.

2.2. Scottish national identity and independence

The issue of national identity in Scotland presents a complex subject in terms of identity politics because the country has been a part of the UK for a long time. In 2011, Scotland's Census included the question 'What do you feel is your national identity?' for the first time. According to the website (Scotland's Census 2021), the results showed that 82.7% of the individuals living in Scotland had some form of Scottish national identity, which at the time was 4.4 million people. A total of 3.3 million individuals, which represented 62.4% of the population, identified as "Scottish only." This was most common among the 10 to 14-year-olds many of whom had the opportunity to express their opinion regarding independence in the 2014 Scotland's independence referendum. A further 18.3% of the population identified as "Scottish and British." Among minority groups, 28.2% of people claimed that they had "some Scottish identity." 8.4% of the Scottish population at that time expressed that they identified as having "British identity only." The least common identity was "no UK identity," which was exhibited in 234,00 people. The Scottish national identity is most notably discussed and highlighted by the SNP in the Scottish political sphere as stated by Leith (2008: 83). The political party is known to have a solid commitment to inclusivity and civic views, advocating for a Scotland where legal concepts instead of ethnic groups determine a person's citizenship.

According to Bond (2006: 611), there are three markers of identity that can explain a person's national identity: birthplace, current residence, and ancestry. Bond (2006: 623) claims that, in Scotland, national identity primarily stems from birthplace rather than ancestry or current residence. On the other hand, Kiely et al (2005: 170) argue that one cannot simply add up the Scottishness criteria to determine who is more Scottish than another. In turn, they propose that Scottishness is not determined by the place of birth but by the place of residence. Scotland's sense of belonging is linked with civic engagement and

residency (Kiely et al 2005: 151). In their everyday lives, individuals often do not feel the need to rank different degrees of Scottishness (Kiely et al 2005: 152).

Rosie and Bond (2006: 141) claim that Scottish identity has been made politically visible with the restoration of the Scottish Parliament, and multiple academics have remarked that there has been a shift in the understanding of independence among Scottish people. Mullen (2016: 18) discusses how in the past there was less confusion about the concept of independence because sovereignty and independence were seen as synonyms. Nowadays, independence is seen more as a range of possibilities rather than a concrete term. McCrone (2020) claims that, in the past 30 years, the connection between the Scottish national identity and support for Scottish independence has become stronger. People who identify as Scottish rather than British favour independence. The author emphasises that it is important to understand that "Scottish national identity" does not have one meaning and is combined with various identity markers which have developed over time, as similarly mentioned by Bond (2006: 141). This is prevalent, for example, in religion, where Protestantism is less important to Scots today than a century ago. Examining the impact of devolution on electoral politics in Scotland, Jones and Scully (2006: 130) point out that when Scottish electorates vote in the UK's national elections, they feel a sense of nationalism and connection to their roots. This type of nationalism is not that prevalent in the Scottish electorate when participating in European Parliamentary elections, as they lack the same connectivity to European values as they have to Scottish values.

In the context of the 2014 Scottish independence referendum, Bond (2015: 9) points out that the right to vote was granted to those who were resident in Scotland. This, in turn, did not include non-residents who could have had the same sense of national identity but based on factors like ancestry and birthplace. Bond claims that these identity markers are known to be more significant in the Scottish context. This inconsistency was particularly

evident for people born in Scotland, having Scottish parents but not residing in Scotland and living in different parts of Britain and, therefore, not able to participate in the 2014 Scotland independence referendum. Overall, national identities are seen as a complex combination of different identity markers which develop over time (Bond 2015: 10).

2.3. The 2014 Scottish independence referendum

In 2007, the SNP was elected to the Scottish Parliament as the largest political party, but without an absolute majority (The Electoral Commission 2014: 22-24). Four years later, they won the majority of seats in the Scottish Parliament election and began to discuss holding an independence referendum with the UK Government. On 15 October 2012, the two governments signed the Edinburgh Agreement (United Kingdom Government 2012: 2) that gave the Scottish Government the right to conduct a referendum on Scottish independence (United Kingdom Government 2012: 2). The Agreement stated that the referendum should (1) be legal, (2) be authorised by the Scottish Government, (3) be carried out in a way that is supported by parliaments, governments, and the general population**,** (4) be a fair referendum that expresses the opinion of the people in Scotland (United Kingdom Government, 2012: 2). In 2012, campaigning for the independence referendum began. The opposite sides campaigned under the names “Yes Scotland” and “Better Together.” Both campaign parties were determined to be the leading campaigners for the referendum outcome. The promotion for the referendum started on 11 August 2014.

Initially, the 2014 Scottish independence referendum question proposed by the Scottish Government read: “Do you agree that Scotland should be an independent country?”. However, the Electoral Commission decided that the wording was leading the voter (Henderson et al 2022: 4-5). After deliberation, the final question was proposed as “Should Scotland be an independent country?” (Henderson et al 2022: 5). The choices on the ballot

became “Yes” and “No” and critics of independence claimed that the wording of the referendum presented a strong preference for independence.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE SCOTTISH ELECTORATE’S VOTING BEHAVIOUR IN 2014 AND 2016 REFERENDUMS

This section is divided into four main topics: the 2014 Scottish Independence referendum, the EU referendum, how the EU referendum influenced Scottish perception on independence and the likelihood of independent Scotland. The purpose of this analysis is to determine whether attitudes towards independence in Scotland have changed since 2014. To achieve this, the thesis examines voter turnout and opinion surveys to determine how people felt about the 2014 independence referendum as well as Scottish views on European integration and how they relate to the EU referendum outcome.

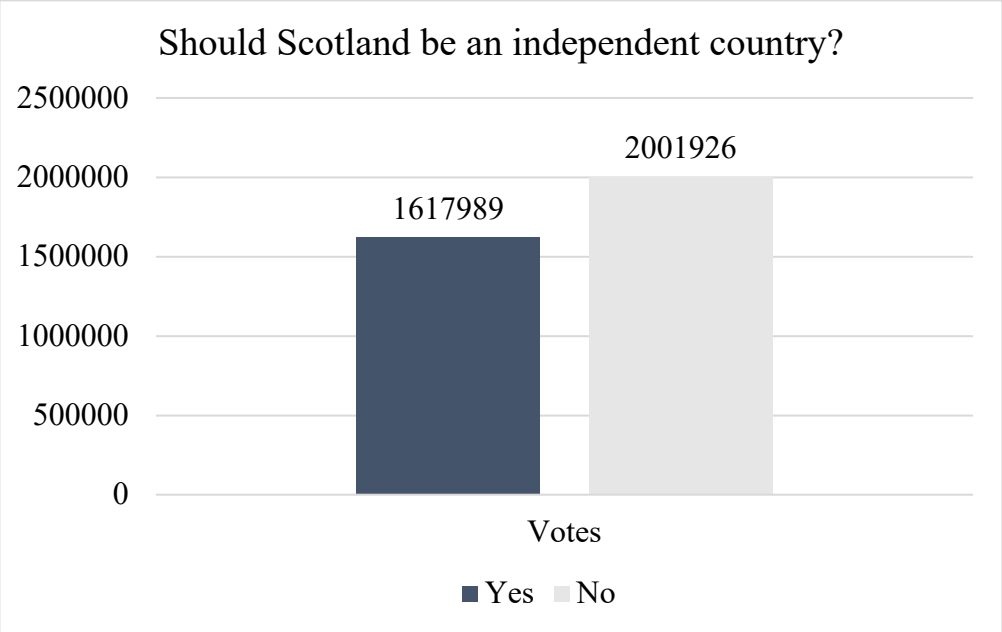
3.1. Data and methodology

The author assembled the data used in the analysis from a number of sources, including the House of Commons Library, Lord Ashcroft Polls, the Electoral Commission, the Scottish Attitudes Survey and the website What Scotland Thinks? The thesis author chose to use secondary research as her methodology as there is a wealth of reliable data available and combining and comparing data from different sources might reveal new insights. The analysis focuses on why the electorates voted the way they did in the two referendums.

3.2. The 2014 Scottish independence referendum and the Scottish Electorate’s vote

In the independence referendum held in 2014, 1,617,989 people supported independence from the UK by voting “Yes”. Scotland did not become independent, however,

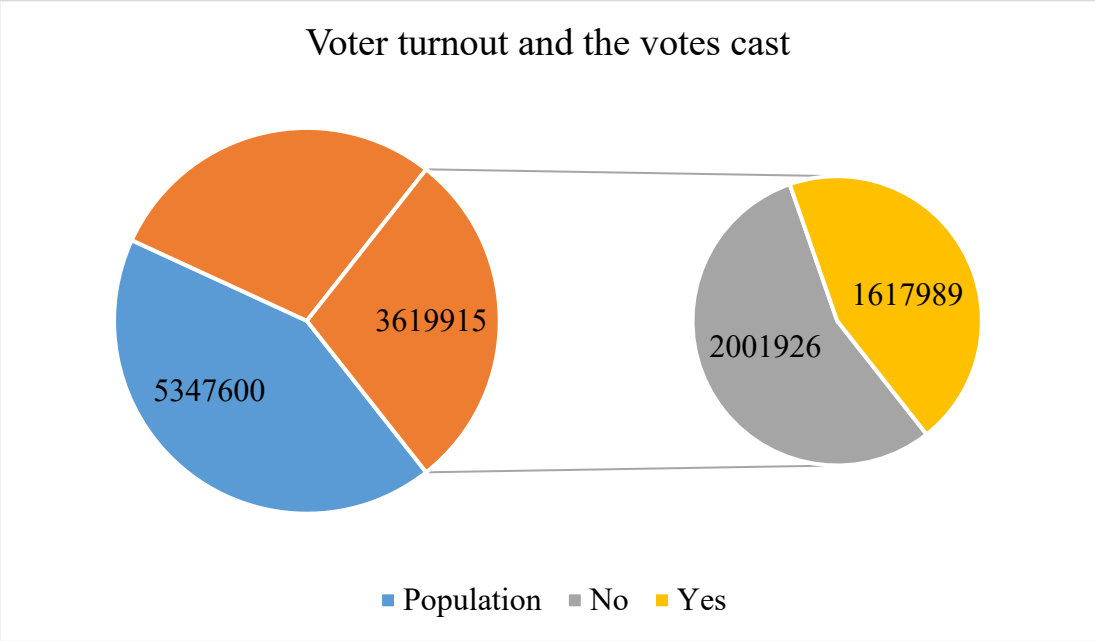
because 2,001,926 people chose “No” in the referendum (see Graph 1), This result demonstrates how divisive the desire for independence from the UK was.



Graph 1. The results of the 2014 independence referendum held in Scotland (House of Commons Library 2014).

Scotland's population was 5,347,600 as of June 30, 2014, which was a record high (National Records of Scotland 2015: 11). Within this referendum, the Scottish government granted the opportunity for 16- and 17-year-olds to vote, which added 109, 593 new eligible voters to the referendum (The Electoral Commission 2014: 7). 84.6% of Scotland's population were registered to vote (see Graph 2). Out of the 84.6% voters, 55.3% voted “No”, whereas 44.7% of the voters voted “Yes” in the referendum. The results indicate that Scots were aware of the independence debate, apparent in the 84.6% turnout and took a personal interest in the topic. As published by UK’s Parliament (Ayers 2014), the 2014 Scottish independence referendum had a higher turnout than the 2010 General Election and the 2011 Scottish Parliament Election and, according to the Institute for Government (2016), the 2014 Scottish independence referendum had the highest electoral turnout before the 2016 European Union referendum. Because the voting system entailed that a secret ballot must be

cast in the referendum, it is more difficult to determine the characteristics of individual voters.



Graph 2. Voter turnout in the 2014 independence referendum and the votes cast (House of Commons Library 2014).

Between September 18 and 19, 2014, directly after the 2014 Scotland independence referendum, Lord Ashcroft's Polls gathered the opinions of 2,047 voters to analyse the reasons for voting in a certain way in the referendum (Lord Ashcroft Polls 2014). The people who participated in the survey were interviewed by phone (1216 participants) and online (831 participants). The respondents were asked to rank the statements the pollster gave in the order of importance. The following reasons were provided to those who had voted “Yes”:

(1) all decisions relating to Scotland should be made in Scotland;

(2) Scotland's future appears to be brighter with independence from the UK;

(3) Scotland's independence would mean no Conservative governments would rule the nation.

The results show that the dominant reason for voting for independence was the wish that all decisions regarding Scotland should be taken only by Scotland as 70% of the

respondents considered it the most important aspect. 20% of those who voted “Yes” thought that Scotland’s future would be brighter if independent. 10% of the respondents thought that independence from the UK would mean that the Conservative Party, a majority in the Parliament, would not be in charge of decisions regarding Scotland any more.

Those who had voted “No” in the referendum were asked to rank the following statements in the order of importance:

(1) when becoming an independent country, risks to currency, European Union membership, economic issues, jobs, and prices would become impending;

(2) there is a deep connection to the UK and its shared culture, history and traditions;

(3) when voting “No”, the Scottish government would gain additional power paired with the security of remaining in the UK. (Lord Ashcroft Polls 2014)

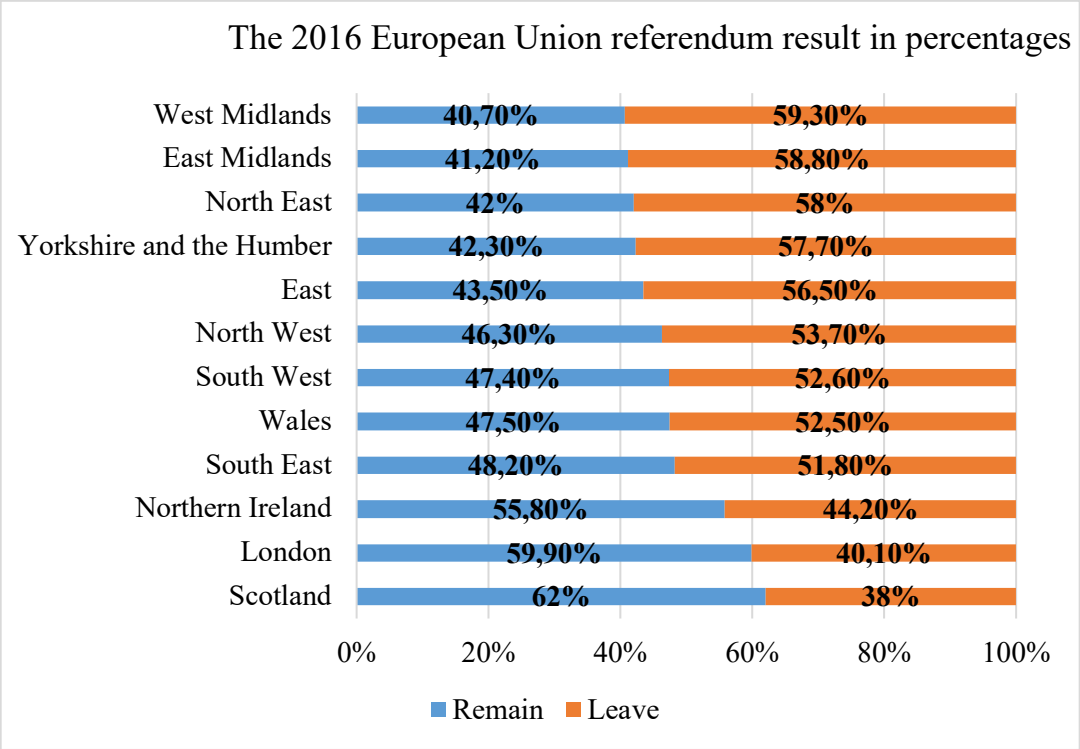
47% of the respondents who voted “No” considered risks to currency, European Union membership, jobs and prices the most concerning aspects of Scottish independence. 27% thought that the most important reason for voting “No” was linked to a deep connection with the UK. 25% thought that voting “No” in the referendum would not mean anything and that the Scottish Government would gain additional security when Scotland remained in the UK.

These justifications illustrate how difficult the question of Scottish independence was. From one perspective, the key to the independence debate is whether Scots would be willing to sever their ties with the UK and take a chance on the additional challenges of doing so. From another angle, if Scotland were to gain independence, decisions about the country would only be made by Scotland, and the ruling government would have to change their style, implying that the Conservatives, who are a majority in the Parliament, would no longer be in power in Scotland. The 2014 independence referendum's outcome demonstrated the growing unhappiness with the UK central government's control over Scotland.

3.3. EU referendum and the Scottish vote

In 2016, the UK held a EU referendum that resulted in the country's withdrawal from the European Union. This concrete event gives excellent insight into Scotland's thinking since the 2014 Scottish independence referendum. This section analyses Scotland's impact on the EU referendum. When the referendum was held, it was expected that, as a result, the UK would remain in the European Union, yet the results proved the opposite.

Graph 3 provides an overview of how the various regions of the UK voted in the EU referendum in 2016. 33,551,983 voters participated in the referendum, 72.2% of all voters (the total number of the electorate was 46,500,001) (The Electoral Commission 2019).



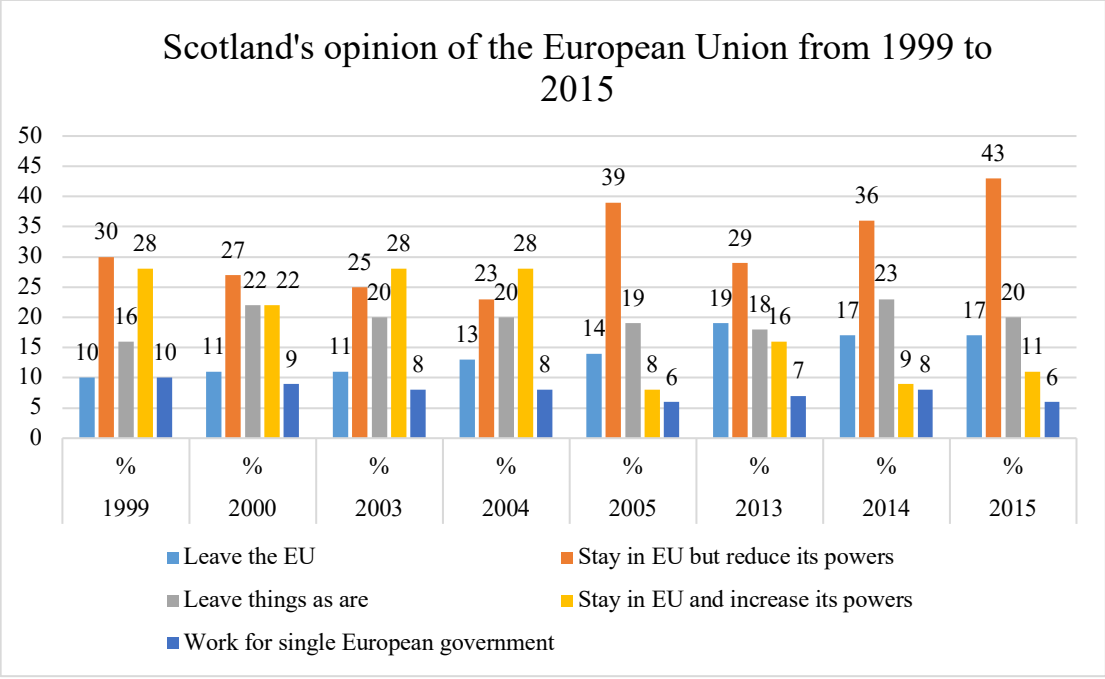
Graph 3. The EU referendum result by region in percentages (The Electoral Commission 2019)

Scotland had the highest percentage of participants who voted to stay in the European Union. According to the Electoral Commission (2019), 3,987,112 Scottish voters would have been able to participate. In total, 2,679,523 voters (67% of the electorate) participated

in the referendum. 62% of Scottish participants (1,661,191 voters) voted to remain in the European Union, and 38% (1,018,322) voted to leave.

The other UK constituent country that voted for staying in the European Union was Northern Ireland (55.70% to 44.20%). Wales voted to leave the European Union by 52.50% to 47.50%. Based on the referendum result, it is evident that Scotland had the highest percentage of voters who expressed their wish to remain in the European Union. While 16- and 17-year-olds could vote in the 2014 Scottish Independence referendum, they were not allowed to vote in the European Union referendum (Cardwell 2016). If they had been allowed to vote, the proportion of the Yes-vote might have been even higher.

The UK has had a history of negative attitude to the European Union dating back to the 18th and 19th centuries when there were struggles for power balance within Europe, making the British susceptible to a problematic relationship with the European Union (Shore 2021: 5). In the context of the 2016 EU referendum, it is essential to analyse Scotland's perspective on the European Union and determine whether Euroscepticism was prevalent in the country leading up to the referendum. As Graph 4 shows, Scotland's opinion of the European Union leading up to the EU referendum was generally positive.



Graph 4. Scotland's electorates' opinion of the European Union from 1999 to 2015 (Scottish Social Attitudes Survey in Curtice 2016: 7).

Five questions were posed: Should the UK leave the European Union, should things stay the same, should the UK remain in the European Union but increase its powers, and should the UK cooperate with a single European government? An average of 1503,25 people were polled. In 1999, 10% of those polled believed that the UK should leave the EU; in 2015, the proportion of those was 17%. This suggests that the support for leaving the European Union had been growing. However, as the graph shows, on average, 19.75% of the respondents believed that nothing should change and that the UK should remain a member of the European Union. A smaller percentage of those polled thought that the UK should serve a single European government, lessening the impact of the European Union on the nation. In 1999, 10% of the people thought it was a good idea, but by 2015, only 6% still did. According to 30% of the respondents to the 1999 survey, the UK should remain a member of the European Union but the EU should have less power. The number of people who agreed with this idea increased, reaching 43% in 2015. The increase over 16 years was 13%, which indicated that the Scottish would probably vote to stay in the European Union in the 2016 EU referendum.

When combining the three options that all spoke for the continuing membership of the European Union (*Leave things as are*, *stay in the European Union but reduce its powers* and *remain in the European Union and increase its capabilities*), it becomes clear that Scottish people's support for the UK's membership of the European Union was always strong. In 1999, the percentage of people who supported the UK staying in the European Union was 76. Over the years, the percentage of people wishing to remain in the European Union fluctuated from 71 in 2000 to 66 in 2005 and 74 in 2015. This shows that the referendum outcome was consistent with the Scottish people's long-term opinion.

On 24 June 2016, Lord Ashcroft Polls (2016) published an opinion poll conducted on the European Union referendum day. 12,369 people were surveyed about the reasons for voting in a specific way in the referendum. The respondents were asked to place statements the poll supervisor provided in the order of importance. Lord Ashcroft Polls provided an unweighted base for all respondents based on their region. The unweighted base for the Scottish vote was 706, which entails the number of respondents based in Scotland. The following statements were given to respondents who voted to stay in the European Union in the 2016 referendum:

(1) Issues regarding the economy, jobs and prices were too highly perceived when voting to leave the European Union.

(2) There is a solid connection to the shared history, culture and traditions with the European Union.

(3) When leaving the European Union, the UK would be more isolated from its neighbours.

(4) Remaining in the European Union allows access to the European Union single market when still outside the Euro area. (Ashcroft 2016: 239)

Of the 706 Scottish respondents who voted to “remain” in the referendum, 272 respondents (38%) considered the first statement the most important. 234 respondents (33%) ranked the fourth reason as the second most important; 285 respondents (40%) ranked the third reason as the third most important; and 402 (57%) respondents ranked the second reason as the fourth in importance. This indicates that the Scottish are most interested in staying in the European Union for practical and economic reasons and least concerned about the shared history, culture and traditions with the European Union. At the same time, all the reasons provided by the polling agency were considered important to quite a large degree.

The respondents who voted to “leave” in the 2016 referendum were given the following statements to rank:

(1) It should be standard that all decisions about the UK should be decided in the UK.

(2) The thought about voting to leave the European Union provided the best chance for the UK to gain control over immigration issues and borders.

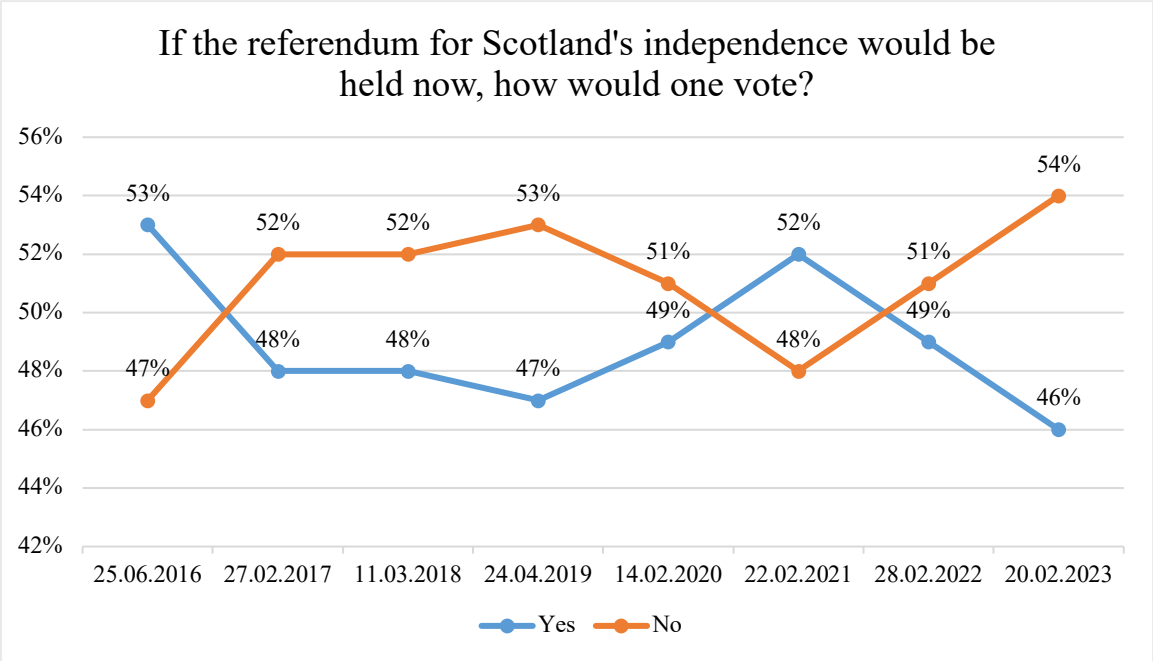
(3) An understanding that when it comes to trade and economy, it would be more beneficial for the UK to be outside the European Union rather than remain in the union.

(4) If one voted to remain in the European Union, one would have no say about how the European Union would expand its membership or its authority in the future. (Lord Ashcroft Polls 2016: 256)

There were 396 respondents from Scotland and 49% of them considered the first statement as the most important, meaning that almost half of the Scottish respondents thought that the UK should be allowed to make all the decisions related to it. The other reasons provided were ranked in the same order they are listed above.

3.4. EU referendum’s influence on the Scottish attitude towards independence

As the results of the EU referendum were disappointing for the majority of the Scottish voters who had voted to “remain” in it, discussions have started about Scotland leaving the UK and re-entering the EU. There were speculations that if a new independence referendum would be held, the majority of the Scottish people would vote for independence. Graph 5 demonstrates the Scottish electorate’s attitude towards voting in another independence referendum.



Graph 5. The voting intention from 2016-2023, if Scotland would have another independence referendum (What Scotland Thinks 2023).

After the 2016 European Union referendum, 53% of the Scottish people supported Scotland's independence but by February 2017, the support for independence had fallen to 48%. The support for Scottish independence started to increase again in 2020 and reached a high of 52% in 2021. Since then, it has dropped steadily and reached 49% in February 2023. The volatility of the Scottish attitude toward independence suggests that if another independence referendum were held, it would be met with another failure. Based on the provided graph, it is evident that after the EU referendum, the Scottish electorate's desire to gain independence from the UK started to decline.

3.5. The future of Scottish independence

Though there are those in the Scottish society who argue that, after the unacceptable-to-Scotland result of the EU referendum, the next logical step for Scotland would be to hold another independence referendum and, after gaining its independence from the UK, join the European Union, the opinion polls results as discussed above show that the outcome of such a referendum is far from certain. Salamone (2022) argues that, while Scots might accept both

the British and European unions, the pro-European Union voters would see Scotland gaining independence as a reliable way of regaining European Union membership individually after the UK's withdrawal from the European Union.

Many academics have suggested that the wish for an independent Scotland can be problematic. Mooney and Scott (2016: 249-250) point out that welfare and social inequality issues must be addressed before Scotland can hold another independence referendum. However, as stated by the Scottish Government (2013), the core aim of independence is to make life better for the Scottish. The institution argues that only the Scottish Parliament and themselves can appeal to the Scottish people's interests, which is the critical reason for wanting independence (Scottish Government 2013). Curtice (2022: 43), however, claims that Scotland's independence has always been at risk of having its democratic aspirations overturned by those with a different worldview of the English people.

The Scottish Government has voiced their opinion on the topic, concluding that outside the European Union, Scotland is worse off (Scottish Government, 2020). Douglas-Scott (2014: 2) discusses a significant polarisation in the discussion of whether it would be possible for Scotland to join the European Union once it becomes independent. The UK's Parliament argues that, when Scotland applied for the membership of the EU, it would not be admitted automatically, but would need to follow the same standard accession plan as other new countries such as Romania or Bulgaria.

Furthermore, before the EU referendum, Thorp and Thompson (2011: 3) explained three possibilities that fall under international law should Scotland become independent. The first possibility would be continuation and secession, which suggests that the UK would maintain obligations and memberships in international organisations after Scotland becomes an independent new state. Meanwhile, Scotland would not. The second possibility is separation, meaning that both countries would maintain membership in international

organisations (Thorp and Thompson 2011: 1). The third possibility entails dissolution, which implies that Scotland and the UK would need to apply for memberships of international organisations (Thorp and Thompson 2011: 3).

The topic of Scotland's independence is multifaceted, and the country's future status remains unclear. Based on recent events that have happened in Scotland and the UK, the resignation of Nicola Sturgeon, a former leader of the SNP and the First Minister of Scotland and the change of the Monarch in the UK, it is impossible to tell whether a new Scottish independence referendum will take place any time soon.

CONCLUSION

The question of Scottish independence stemmed from the historical context of Scotland joining the UK in 1707 through the Act of Union. In recent history, there have been two main referendums in Scotland that have influenced the Scottish attitude towards independence: the 2014 Scottish independence referendum and the 2016 EU referendum. This thesis examines and analyses how the Scottish electorate participated in these referendums and how the EU referendum influenced Scotland's attitude towards independence.

Section One gives an overview of how voters can participate in constitution-making processes and distinguishes three main processes (specific constitutional reform, general constitutional reform and a new constitutional design) that are then applied to referendums held in the UK. Voters are an essential part of constitution-making processes, and the thesis discusses what can influence voter behaviour in referendums. By providing a clear choice, referendums allow electorates to make a decision. However, voting in referendums is unusual for the electorate because it happens irregularly and deals with a single issue.

Section Two gives an overview of the independence movement in Scotland in the 20th century and discusses the complexity of the Scottish national identity. An overview of the 2014 Scottish independence referendum is given. The independence movement in Scotland started to gain momentum in the 20th century with the establishment of the SNP. Throughout the century, Scotland saw two devolution referendums, the first of which in 1979 did not lead to devolution. The second devolution referendum held in 1997 resulted in the establishment of the Scottish Parliament. Over the past three decades, the link between Scottish national identity and the support for Scottish independence has grown. Those who identify as Scottish rather than British are more likely to favour independence. The 2014

Scottish independence referendum, however, was won by those who wanted Scotland to remain in the UK.

Section Three analyses two referendums that happened in the 2010s and how the EU referendum influenced the Scottish attitude towards independence as well as possible future developments concerning Scotland's independence. The 2014 Scottish independence referendum had a high turnout - 84.6% of the electorate participated indicating that the issue of independence is vital for Scottish voters. The attitudes exhibited by the Scottish electorate showcased a polarisation about independence claiming that independence from the UK would provide the Scottish Government to make decisions for Scotland in Scotland or that independence from the UK would result in the issue of currency and the uncertainty of being a part of the European Union. The 2014 Scottish independence referendum allowed 16-year-olds and 17-year-olds to participate, which was unprecedented in Scotland's history. This demonstrated a willingness to include as many voices in the conversation about independence as possible, making a decision about Scotland's future more personal than ever before.

The 2016 EU referendum was held in the whole of the UK, and Scotland exhibited the highest desire to remain in the European Union with 62% of the voters supporting "remain". Scottish people have long supported the EU, and the Scottish electorate's participation in the EU referendum reflected it. The reasons for voting in the referendum exhibit polarisation, as demonstrated by the Lord Ashcroft Polls survey results. The Scottish respondents who voted to "remain" in the EU felt that economic issues were the highest priority. The Scottish participants who voted to "leave" the EU found that UK-related decisions should all be made in the UK and not elsewhere.

The UK's leaving the European Union influenced the Scottish attitude towards independence. In the same month as the EU referendum happened, 57% of the voters who

had participated in an opinion poll would have voted for independence from the UK. As time passed, the percentage of the supporters for independence dropped. Most recently, the opinion polls show that Scottish voters are not enthusiastic about Scotland's freedom from the UK.

Section Three also discusses how likely it is that there will be another independence referendum in Scotland soon. The topic of independence can be problematic and might be difficult to achieve. On the other hand, the Scottish Parliament has taken a stance regarding the country's independence and has expressed the need for an independent Scotland.

Considering the recent political events in Scotland and the changes in the monarchy in the UK, it is unclear whether the Scottish Government will hold another independence-related referendum. The subject of Scotland's independence is multifaceted and complex and requires further investigation. Future research on the topic should delve into economic aspects, analyse political stances made in the following years and further develop the topic of national identity in the context of referendums. The author of this thesis thinks that this topic needs to be approached in more depth, and this current thesis will form the basis for works on Scottish independence to follow.

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Resümee

TARTU ÜLIKOOL
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Roberta-Grethel Agu

Scotland’s Voting Behaviour and Attitude Towards Independence In the Light of Governmental Referendums in the 2010s

Šotimaa hääletamiskäitumine ja suhtumine iseseisvumisse 2010. aastate valitsuse referendumite valguses

bakalaureusetöö

2023

Lehekülgede arv: 35

Annotatsioon:

Šotimaa on korraldanud rahvahääletusi detsentraliseerimise ja iseseisvuse kohta, kuid riik on siiani osa Ühendkuningriikidest. Käesoleva bakalaureusetöö eesmärk on anda ülevaade sellest, kuidas Šotimaa valijad hääletasid 2014. aasta iseseisvusreferendumil ja 2016. aasta Euroopa Liidu referendumil, miks tehti just need valikud ning kuidas Ühendkuningriikide lahkumine Euroopa Liidust mõjutas Šotimaa valijate suhtumist iseseisvumisse.

Käesolev bakalaureusetöö koosneb sissejuhatusest, kolmest põhiosast ja kokkuvõttest. Sissejuhatuses kirjeldatakse referendumeid ja nende seost Šotimaaga ning kirjeldatakse käesoleva bakalaureusetöö eesmärke. Esimeses osas antakse ülevaade sellest, kuidas valijad saavad osaleda põhiseaduse kujundamise protsessis ning kuidas need kehtivad Ühendkuningriigis korraldatud referendumite puhul. Samuti antakse ülevaade sellest, mis mõjutab hääletamiskäitumist referendumitel. Teises osas kirjeldatakse Šotimaa rahvusidentiteeti ja 20. sajandi iseseisvusliikumist, mis lõppkokkuvõttes viis Šotimaa 2014. aasta iseseisvusreferendumi korraldamiseni. Teises osas antakse ka ülevaade 2014. aasta Šotimaa iseseisvusreferendumist ja 2016. aastal Ühendkuningriigis toimunud Euroopa Liidu referendumist. Viimaseks kirjeldatakse selles osas seda, mis on antud olukorras Šotimaa väljavaated uueks iseseisvumisreferendumiks. Kolmas osa koosneb sekundaaranalüüsist, mis käsitleb Šotimaa valijate hääletuskäitumist kahel referendumil. Analüüsis käsitletakse, kui palju hääletajaid osales referendumitel ja millised olid nende põhjused, mis põhinevad Lord Ashcroft Polls'i poolt läbi viidud arvamusküsitlustel. Samuti käsitletakse analüüsis, kuidas mõjutas Euroopa Liidu referendum Šotimaa arvamust iseseisvumisest ning järgmise iseseisvusreferendumi tõenäosust. Kokkuvõttes võetakse kokku peamised järeldused.

2014. aasta iseseisvusreferendumi tulemusel jäi Šotimaa Ühendkuningriigi osaks. Sekundaarses analüüsis selgus, et Šotimaa valijaskonna väljendatud hoiakud näitasid iseseisvuse suhtes polariseerumist, väites, et iseseisvus Ühendkuningriigist annaks Šotimaa valitsusele võimaluse teha otsuseid Šotimaa jaoks Šotimaal või, et iseseisvus Ühendkuningriigist tooks kaasa valuutaküsimuse ja Euroopa Liidu osaks olemise ebakindluse. Šotimaa valijate ülekaalukas osalemine näitas, et Šotimaa iseseisvuse teema on

oluline. Ühendkuningriigi lahkumine Euroopa Liidust mõjutas otseselt Šotimaa suhtumist iseseisvumisse. Viimastel aegadel on Šotimaa valijate suhtumine iseseisvumisse kajastanud soovi Ühendkuningriikidest mitte eralduda.

Šotimaa iseseisvuse teema on mitmetahuline ja keeruline ning vajab edasist arendamist. Tulevased uuringud sel teemal peaksid süvenema majanduslikesse aspektidesse, analüüsima järgnevatel aastatel võetud poliitilisi seisukohti ning käsitlema Šotimaa rahvuslikku identiteeti.

Märksõnad: Šotimaa, iseseisvus, referendumid, Euroopa Liit, valjate arvamus.

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