

Institution: University of Edinburgh		
Unit of Assessment: 19 (Politics and International Studies)		
Title of case study: Framing and Informing the Scottish Independence Referendum		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2006-2014		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Professor Charlie Jeffery	Professor of Politics; Research Co-Ordinator – ESRC Future of the UK and Scotland	2004 – 2019
Professor Nicola McEwen	Professor of Politics; Co-Director, Centre on Constitutional Change (CCC); ESRC Senior Scotland Fellow	2001 – present
Professor Ailsa Henderson	Professor of Political Science; PI ESRC Scottish Referendum Study; Fellow – ESRC CCC.	2007 – present
Professor James Mitchell	Professor of Public Policy; ESRC Senior Scotland Fellow; Co-Investigator - ESRC Scottish Referendum Study	2013 – present
Professor Juliet Kaarbo	Professor of Foreign Policy; Co-Director of the Centre for Security Research (CeSeR)	2011 – present
Dr Andrew Neal	Senior Lecturer in Politics and International Relations; Co-Director of the Centre for Security Research (CeSeR)	2007 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: August 2013-2014		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Researchers in Politics and International Relations at the University of Edinburgh played a key role in framing the 2014 Scottish independence referendum and informing vote choice. They helped voters and civil society organisations identify and understand the central issues at stake, and informed key position papers developed by officials in the UK and Scottish governments. Their empirical research underpinned claims made by both political campaigns. It also shaped journalists' understanding and assisted broadcasters in producing TV and radio documentaries. The team informed the international community – journalists, ambassadorial and consular staff – by contextualising the campaign and guiding them in preparing for the outcome. Their analyses also framed the way the result was disseminated by major UK and international broadcasters.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>The GBP5 million ESRC Future of the UK and Scotland programme (FUS) had its hub at the University of Edinburgh, affirming its status as a centre of excellence for the study of devolution and territorial politics. Jeffery played a crucial role as Research Coordinator, building a hub for the 20 researchers funded under the programme and bringing in many others. Within this programme, two members of the UoA (McEwen and Mitchell) were appointed ESRC Senior Scotland Fellows, in recognition of their research expertise and ability to inform non-academic audiences before and after the referendum vote. McEwen</p>		

and Henderson were also Co-Is in the programme's large grant investment that led to the creation of the Centre on Constitutional Change (CCC).

Mitchell's decades' long body of work on Scottish nationalism, territorial politics and devolution culminated in his monograph, *The Scottish Question* (3.1), completed while holding the ESRC Senior Scotland Fellowship. It set debates on Scotland's constitutional status in historical and policy contexts, noting the evolutionary rather than revolutionary nature of the independence referendum. It was recommended as one of the 'books of year' by the Independent's Political editor in 2014. McEwen's body of work on nationalism and territorial politics helped contextualise the politics of independence and union. Her work on welfare state nationalism (3.2) helped to explain the social democratic claims and counter claims of both the Yes Scotland and Better Together campaigns. Her research undertaken as ESRC Senior Scotland Fellow identified the necessity, challenges and opportunities of maintaining Scottish-UK inter-institutional relations in the event of independence, with comparative analysis of cross-border relations in Denmark and Ireland (3.3). Henderson's research on political behaviour demonstrated the civic nature of Scottish national identity, conditions under which it is mobilised by political actors, and the primacy of Scottish as opposed to British identity among voters. She and Jeffery led an international study of public attitudes that identified that citizens in 'stateless' nations like Scotland who shared a strong sub-state territorial identity also had stronger social and economic solidarity with the sub-state nation rather than the nation-state (3.4). Henderson also used the opportunities of the referendum to disseminate findings from survey research as it was analysed (prior to academic publication). This research, under the *Scottish Referendum Study* (with Mitchell as Co-I), the *Attitudes to Risk and Constitutional Change in Scotland*, and the *Future of England* survey (all part of the FUS programme), enabled her to chart and explain in real time how attitudes to risk were shaping choices in the referendum (later set out in 3.5).

In addition to the core territorial politics team, the programme drew upon the expertise of the UoA's IR scholars, who adapted their knowledge of sovereignty and security challenges faced by small nation states in the international community. Neal's expertise on critical security studies was adapted to identify the security challenges that would confront an independent Scotland. Kaarbo's extensive research on role theory and foreign policy has highlighted the domestic and international constraints on the foreign policy choices of nation-states, including small European states. Together, they led an ESRC Seminar Series for IR and security scholars and policy makers to examine the foreign policy and security implications of independence. The research insights this series generated were disseminated in real time, later appearing in academic publication (3.6). The team also drew in early career scholars and post-doctoral fellows to offer their research insights in the referendum campaign.

3. References to the research

- 3.1 Mitchell, J (2014), *The Scottish Question*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. DOI: [10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199688654.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199688654.001.0001) (Submitted in REF2)
- 3.2 McEwen, N (2006), *Nationalism and the State: Welfare and Identity in Scotland and Quebec*, Brussels: Peter Lang. DOI: [10.1017/S0047279407001791](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279407001791) (Can be supplied by HEI on request)
- 3.3 Hassan, G and J Mitchell (eds) (2013), *After Independence*, Edinburgh: Luath Press. (includes chapters by Mitchell and McEwen). ISBN: 9781908373953 (Can be supplied by HEI on request)
- 3.4 Henderson, A, C Jeffery, and D Wincott (eds) (2014), *Citizenship After the Nation State*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. [10.1057/9781137314994](https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137314994) (Can be supplied by HEI on request)
- 3.5 Liñeira, R and A Henderson (2019), 'Risk Attitudes and Independence Vote Choice', *Political Behaviour*. DOI: [10.1007/s11109-019-09560-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-019-09560-x)

3.6 Neal, A (ed) (2017), *Security in a Small Nation: Scotland, Democracy, Politics*, Cambridge (includes chapters by Neal and Kaarbo), Cambridge: Open Book Publishers. DOI: [10.11647/OBP.0078](https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0078)

4. Details of the impact

The team had extensive reach with key audiences throughout the referendum campaign. They informed and evaluated campaign claims, influenced understanding of the referendum amongst the international community and the media, and helped citizens to understand and engage with referendum debates, thus supporting their participation and vote choice.

Informing Voters Face-to-Face

The team organised public events involving over 2,500 participants in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, Inverness, Dundee and Stirlingshire. These included interactive conferences, independence negotiation simulations, events at the Edinburgh International festivals, women-focused events, and high school debates for first-time voters. Asked whether our events helped them 'understand the issues at stake in the independence referendum', 60% of participants indicated that the event '*helped a lot*', and 40% said it '*helped a little*'; 97% of attendees said they had their questions answered (5.1). To help access 'hard to reach' groups, some events were developed with key partners, including Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, the Workers Educational Association (WEA), the Carnegie Trust, Engender, the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, ACOSVO, and the Scottish Youth Parliament. The impact of these was highlighted by the Director of the WEA Scotland, when she reported: "*We could not have had a better partner in framing and informing this critical debate... Speakers brought a balance of authority and clarity to their task and both proved instrumental in helping audience members reach a decision on how to vote*" (5.2).

Impartial Guidance through Digital Outreach

In the year leading to the referendum, our online dissemination included 394 blogs; 88 briefing papers; 63 media releases; 5 infographics; and 14 videos on a dedicated FUS YouTube channel. These had extensive reach and influence (5.1):

- The FUS website attracted 135,942 unique visitors who made a total of 203,069 visits to perform 440,756 page views, the majority from Scotland.
- During August/September 2014, the FUS Twitter feed generated 2,400 impressions per day, 1,100 retweets and 2,700 link clicks.
- An independence referendum MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) delivered in the final weeks of the campaign had 9,000 participants, including journalists, diplomats and officials, as well as members of the public seeking clarity on the referendum issues.
- An e-book, *Scotland's Decision*, secured over 100,000 downloads, including 56,425 from our website, 26,000+ from the Hunter Foundation and tens of thousands via the Sunday Times and Amazon.

Qualitative user feedback demonstrated that this material influenced understanding and decision-making. One reader commented that *Scotland Decides* was "*informative and very helpful in determining which way I voted*" (5.3). Participants in the MOOC also found this material indispensable in deciding how to vote. One user stated that "*this course... really helped me to make a decision which I felt was well informed and the correct decision for me*". Another noted that "*it's excellent that this course has decreased the number of people unsure of their decision whether Scotland should be independent or not. The course has also made me see both the Yes and No arguments more clearly*" (5.4).

Shaping Parliamentary Deliberation, Government Positions and Campaigns

The team nurtured relationships with key actors on both sides of the referendum debate, earning cross-party respect as an authoritative, impartial source. The Scottish Government's Director General of Strategy and External Affairs testified that he "*particularly appreciated*

the on-going engagement the academics involved in the Programme had with both governments”, expressing hope that “this sets a new standard in how Government and the Academy engage in the future” (5.5).

Prior to the referendum, each member of the core team was invited to give expert oral evidence to four Scottish parliamentary committees exploring the potential impact of independence, as well as the House of Commons Public Affairs Select Committee and the National Assembly for Wales (5.6). Mitchell and McEwen were cited on the websites and blogs of both the *Yes Scotland* and *Better Together* campaigns (5.3). The team also set up an academic-government welfare group, to explore with officials servicing the *Scottish Government’s Expert Group on Welfare* the challenges and opportunities that independence would present to the social security system. They met with the Cabinet Office, Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), HM Treasury and Department for Energy and Climate Change to inform the UK Government’s *Scotland Analysis* policy papers, published ahead of the referendum. McEwen’s research on welfare was subsequently cited in a lengthy quotation in the DWP’s *Scotland Analysis* paper (5.7, p.79-80).

The team helped contextualise the referendum and its potential outcomes for government and parliamentary representatives from across the globe. Jeffery and McEwen informed EU parliamentarians and officials through stakeholder workshops and a partnership with the Brussels-based European Policy Centre, and McEwen addressed the Canadian federal government on referendum campaign dynamics and potential outcomes. The team briefed visiting ambassadors and consular staff and engaged extensively with the local consular community. The then Irish Consul General to Scotland noted that:

“... I have no doubt that the quality of my contribution to the important internal policy processes within the Irish system would not have been anywhere near as substantial or effective had it not been informed by the excellent work and outputs of the Centre for Constitutional Change team” (5.8).

Informing the Informers and Framing the Result

The team worked closely with journalists, providing 63 media releases and at least 219 interviews to the domestic and international media, reaching 38 countries (5.1). Highlights included (5.9): the BBC’s *Our Friends in the North* documentary, featuring Mitchell and broadcast ahead of the launch of the Independence White Paper; helping to design and deliver the BBC’s *Scotland’s Top Ten Battlegrounds*, in which McEwen and Jeffery featured prominently; Scottish Television’s (STV) schools’ debate *Referendum – The Next Generation*, for which Mitchell acted as key adviser and chaired the judges’ panel; a co-designed feature on BBC1’s *The One Show* (audience c.5 million) featuring McEwen; interviews on all main UK network news channels in the UK, and major international networks including CNN and Xinhua. International journalists noted the value of this input in helping to enhance understanding of the debate on Scottish independence. For example, the news agency Asahi Shimbun, whose London correspondents are run out of Tokyo, noted:

“...the challenge for a foreign media organisation is to convey to its readers all the pertinent information both historic and current as concisely and clearly while doing so to a tight deadline. Our correspondents simply could not have done this without the help on many levels – interviews, briefings, releases etc. – which the team provided.”

Assistant London Correspondent, Asahi Shimbun (5.1)

The team also played a leading role in framing coverage of the Referendum count on BBC1, BBC Radio 4, BBC Radio 5 Live, ITV, Al Jazeera, CNN and BBC World. Jeffery, McEwen, Mitchell and Henderson served as presenters’ friends throughout the night on BBC1, Radio 4/5 Live, BBC World Service, ITV and Scottish Television (5.9). Our team of early career researchers also featured prominently in the real-time media coverage and early interpretation of the results. The team was the first to identify the fact that, although the SNP was on the losing side in the referendum, the party and the independence movement had been strengthened by the campaign, and that the result had triggered a constitutional chain

reaction, destabilising constitutional settlements in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. On the 17 and 18 September, the CCC team averaged an interview request every 15 seconds (5.1).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1 Impact Data: ESRC Future of the UK and Scotland Project, including: (a) event participation data; (b) website hits and downloads; (c) social media dissemination and engagement statistics; and (d) audience and stakeholder feedback

5.2 Testimonial: Director, Workers Educational Association (WEA) Scotland, 2015.

5.3 Website Screenshots: *Scotland Decides* ebook – Amazon user reviews; *Better Together* and *Yes Scotland* campaign social media pages, citing CCC research

5.4 Qualitative Feedback: Independence Referendum MOOC - User Comments

5.5 Testimonial: Director-General for Strategy and External Affairs, Scottish Government, 6 January 2015

5.6 Parliamentary Committee Transcripts:

- a) McEwen Evidence to House of Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, 16 October 2014
- b) McEwen Evidence to Scottish Parliament Devolution Committee, 11 December 2014
- c) McEwen Evidence to Scottish Parliament Welfare Reform Committee, 11 November 2014
- d) McEwen Evidence to Scottish Parliament Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee, 30 April 2014
- e) Kaarbo Evidence to Scottish Parliament European and External Relations Committee, 12 June 2014

5.7 Department for Work and Pensions (2014) 'Scotland Analysis: Work and Pensions' (p.79-80).

5.8 Testimonial: Irish Consul General to Scotland, Government of Ireland, 15 May 2019.

5.9 Radio and TV Broadcasts:

- a) BBC, *Our Friends in the North*. Broadcast BBC 2, 25th November 2013; BBC Parliament, 30th November 2013; BBC One (Scotland) 13th August 2014
- b) BBC, *Scotland's Top Ten Battlegrounds*. Broadcast BBC 2, 11th & 12th February 2014; BBC News 15th February 2014
- c) STV, *Referendum: The Next Generation*. Broadcast 12th April 2014
- d) BBC1, *The One Show*. Broadcast 28th January 2014
- e) BBC1/BBC News 24 (18.09.2014), *Scotland Decides*.
- f) BBC Radio 4 & 5 Live (18.09.2014), *Scotland Decides*.