THE 2014 SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE REFERENDUM IN THE MEDIA

UNIVERSITY OF STIRLING

SCHOOL OF
ARTS & HUMANITIES

Paper Abstracts

Key note speech: Referenda and media framing

Professor Claes de Vreese, University of Amsterdam
The keynote will focus on the particular challenges for media, politics, and citizens in referendum campaigns. It will also dive into the question of who supports the referendum as a decision making tool given these particular challenges.

Panel 1: The 2014 referendum in Scotland

Television framing of the 2014 Scottish independence referendum.
Marina Dekavalla, University of Stirling
This paper presents findings from the *Television framing of the 2014 Scottish independence referendum* research project, supported by the ESRC Future Research Leaders Scheme. It explores how television in Scotland framed the 2014 independence referendum and what contributed to this representation. It identifies and presents a range of frames derived from detailed analysis of 64 hours of news and current affairs coverage during the final month of the campaign on BBC Scotland and STV, the two television channels that cater specifically for audiences in Scotland. It also discusses how these frames emerged based on interviews with broadcasters and their sources. It proposes a set of factors that may influence more broadly the way that news and public affairs coverage frames referendum campaigns, which relate to professional routines and values broadcasting organisations adhere to.

Broadcast and press coverage of the independence White Paper launch.
David Hutchison, Glasgow Caledonian University
This paper examines the coverage of the Scottish Government's White Paper, which was published in November 2013. It considers ten television news/current affairs programmes transmitted on a UK-wide basis and in Scotland on the day the White Paper appeared, and all of the newspapers published the following morning, including Scottish only titles, Scottish versions of English titles and London editions of English titles.
The objective was to consider how the issues surrounding Scottish independence were presented and commented on. British broadcasting is obliged to report matters of public controversy in a fair and balanced fashion and the paper considers whether the coverage examined did just that. Newspapers are under no such obligation and not all of them abide by the dictum 'facts are sacred, comment is free'. The differing approaches to reporting what was in the White Paper are examined.
Some tentative conclusions are offered about the impact of the broadcast and press coverage on the referendum debate.

Scottish civil society and the referendum campaign.
Will Dinan, University of Stirling
This paper presents an analysis of how the Scottish press reported on the role of civil society during the Scottish referendum campaign. The argument presented in this paper is organised as follows. How Scottish civil society has evolved since devolution and the contemporary contours of Scottish civil society are explored. Attention is devoted to how the media reported on both grassroots and umbrella organisations in the Scottish referendum campaign. The paper also draws on interviews with communications and public affairs professionals in Scottish civil society, and examines how their communication and

influencing strategies evolved as the referendum campaign unfolded. The analysis suggests that the press have an uneven relationship with Scottish civil society, with particular civil society groups enjoying preferential access to Scottish press outlets.

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Panel 2: Perspectives from outside Scotland

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The Scottish referendum on English television.
Andrew Tolson, University of Leicester
This paper analyses coverage of the Scottish referendum on English television. It concentrates on the so-called serious or 'quality' end of the TV news spectrum, where the coverage has an explicit 'public service' remit. Given that one key principle of this remit is geographical 'universality' (that programming should cover and be available in the whole of the UK) the question of its 'Englishness' becomes an interesting debating point. In the event the BBC was accused of bias against the Yes campaign, both by official spokespersons and by street protesters; however my analysis of what I term 'deliberative' editorial strategies, such as the construction of news agendas and the focus of commentary, suggests that the approach was reasonably balanced. Certainly critical questions were asked about the consequences of a Yes vote; but equally there was criticism of the No campaign with a growing focus on the disconnect in Scotland from the political establishment in Westminster. (This was of course highlighted by the SNP and confirmed by the results of this year's General Election).
So returning to the question of 'Englishness' I prefer to focus less on these deliberate decisions and more on what I see as possibly less conscious, but more interesting, approaches to questions of presentation. In part this is about a hierarchy of presenters, in which Scottish voices were generally less prevalent; but it was also to do with the selections of locations for reports and vox pops. Here the coverage frequently reproduced a kind of 'tourist gaze' which reproduced clichéd (and much criticised) representations of Scotland. Further work on some of the coverage of the 2014 European (EEC) election suggests that this approach is commonly used to make 'foreign' politics palatable to UK (English) audiences.

The Scottish referendum in Slovenian media.
Alenka Jelen-Sanchez, University of Stirling
The 2014 Scottish independence referendum represented one of the central political events in Europe and generated substantial media coverage, including in Slovenia, which declared its independence from Yugoslavia in 1991. Several parallels can be drawn between Slovenia and Scotland: both represent relatively small countries, whose nations were subject to assimilation pressures by bigger nations. These in combination with ideological-political differences, centralisation tendencies and a sense of economic exploitation within a larger state led to the rise of independence movements, resulting in both cases in a referendum, but with a different outcome. While, at the Scottish independence referendum, 55% of voters rejected independence, an overwhelming 89% of the Slovenian electorate voted for independence in 1990. Independence brought democratisation and a rapid political, economic and cultural development in Slovenia, as well as inclusion in the UN, EU and NATO. As one of the most successful new democracies, Slovenia was often described as "a success story". In this context, this paper examines how Slovenian media covered the Scottish independence referendum. Framing analysis of 65 articles and 21 television news published and broadcasted in most influential media between 18 August and 24 September 2014, obtained through Kliping service and online TV archives was conducted. The results indicate that Slovenian media portrayed Scottish referendum in complex and dynamic frames, evolving from predominantly emotional and socio-historical to strong politico-economic frames. Rather than a result of nationalism, the referendum was represented as a reaction to failing political and economic systems, ideologies, neoliberalism and welfare state. Somewhat surprisingly, comparisons with the Slovenian fight for independence were

rarely drawn. If they were, they – in line with current political and economic crisis – reflected national pessimism, referring to Slovenia as a failed national project, lacking the vision, ideals, civic engagement and imagination strongly present in pre-referendum Scotland.

The referendum and the Scottish constitutional issue in Catalan media.
Enric Castelló and Marta Montagut, Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Tarragona
The day before the Scottish referendum, Spanish president Mariano Rajoy suggested that such processes were "torpedoes in the waterline of the European spirit," while after the result, Catalan President Artur Mas interpreted the process as a true "lesson of democracy" and the "only path to solve conflicts." News reports and opinion pieces were loaded with metaphors and representations during this historic political event, which was followed with special interest by the media in Catalonia.

In this paper, the authors offer an analysis of these representations, metaphors and dominant frames in the Catalan media during the week of the Scottish referendum. After conducting a close reading of reports in the main daily newspapers and public television, the authors discuss the way in which journalism built a story about how to address the conflict between the Spanish state and the Catalan claim for a referendum, which criticised the failure to replicate this democratic event at home. This paper is part of the project "The role of metaphor in the definition and social perception of conflict. Institutions, media and citizens" (CSO2013-41661-P), supported by the Spanish Department of Economic Affairs and Competitiveness.

Panel 3: Social media and citizen engagement

Twits on Twitter? Twitter's Ability to be Deliberative?
Mark Shephard, Strathclyde University
This paper explores the calibre of the debate on social media during the referendum campaign, looking at moderated versus unmoderated forums. It also examines the extent to which comments had an impact on voting preferences and reports on the aggregate social media support trends of the two main campaigns (Yes Scotland and Better Together).

Twitter in the Scottish Independence Referendum Campaign
Michael Comerford, Ana Ines Langer and Des McNulty, University of Glasgow
This paper explores the use of digital communication technologies (DCTs), and more specifically social media, during the 2014 Scottish independence referendum. The very high turnout achieved in the referendum (84.5%) and the extent to which voters became engaged in political discussion and debate in the run up to the vote has been widely hailed as an invigorating example of democracy in action. Our paper focuses on the contribution of DCTs to that democratic process. The campaigns, (both official and unofficial) used social media extensively and over a much longer period than in a 'normal' election. There was an explosion in the number of citizens using social media to express their opinions on the issues and personalities, leading to very extensive digital conversations using #indyref for example. The way in which technologies were used and the role they played in political mobilisation, even though voters rejected independence (55% No, 45% Yes), were important factors in creating conditions for a longer term political reconfiguration in Scotland with huge implications for the 2015 General Election.