

SCOTLAND ON THE EVE OF THE INDEPENDENCE REFERENDUM

EVENT SUMMARY

On September 3, 2014, the Wilson Center's Global Europe Program hosted **Jan Eichhorn**, Chancellor's Fellow in Social Policy at the University of Edinburgh's School of Social and Political Science. Mr. Eichhorn discussed the results of recent public opinion polls and their importance in light of the upcoming vote. The conversation and subsequent question and answer session were moderated by **Samuel Wells**, a Senior Scholar at the Wilson Center.

On September 3, 2014, the Wilson Center's Global Europe Program hosted **Jan Eichhorn**, Chancellor's Fellow in Social Policy at the University of Edinburgh's School of Social and Political Science. Mr. Eichhorn is the principal investigator on two Economic and Social Research Council funded projects in the "Future of the UK and Scotland" programme, through which he has investigated the attitudes of Scots in relation to the referendum on independence. Mr. Eichhorn discussed the results of recent public opinion polls and their importance in light of the upcoming vote. The conversation and subsequent question and answer session were moderated by **Samuel Wells**, a Senior Scholar at the Wilson Center.

According to Mr. Eichhorn, the most recent data (from September 2, 2014) showed a narrowing gap between the two sides, with 53% in the anti-independence or "Better Together camp" and 47% in the pro-independence or "Yes Scotland" camp. Recent polls have consistently shown an anti-independence majority, but have yielded some significant variation in the actual statistics. Mr. Eichhorn attributed the discrepancies to the polling organizations' differing methodologies and, perhaps more importantly, to the participation in this referendum of groups that typically do not turn out to vote.

Using two publically funded, politically neutral, and comprehensive studies—the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey and the Attitudes of Young People Survey—Mr. Eichhorn provided insight into Scottish public sentiment and cleared up some common misconceptions about Scottish voters and their views on independence and international affairs. One of the main findings of the analysis was that the most influential factor for voters had to do with expectations of independence; expectations about the economy was the most important to voters, followed by expectations about Scotland's voice in the world, Scottish pride, and inequality in Scotland. Less significant factors included national identity, political and financial capabilities, and demographic indicators such as gender, age, and political affiliation.

Mr. Eichhorn's presentation also delved into issues of importance if Scotland does indeed vote for independence, specifically European Union membership, use of the pound as a currency, and possession of nuclear weapons. The data showed that none of the issues proved to be decisive factors in swaying voting intention.

The independence referendum is expected to yield unprecedented voter turnout, with just under 90% of the eligible population likely to participate. That turnout will include groups that typically do not vote. Mr. Eichhorn noted that one group in which we will likely see a spike in participation is youth voters: a 50% increase is expected in the youth turnout, in part due to the lowering of the voting age to 16. Of all eligible voters expected to vote, about 12% are fully undecided. Because of these factors, it is challenging to make an accurate prediction of the outcome.

Mr. Eichhorn concluded by emphasizing that all eyes will be on Scotland on September 18. The referendum has brought many issues to the forefront, and regardless of which way the September 18 vote goes, there will likely be changes in Scotland and in the greater United Kingdom.