

Campaign? What campaign?

President of YouGov Peter Kellner looks at our results on the Alternative Vote and explains why this campaign has been a less than glorious advertisement for the referendum process

YouGov's prediction for today's referendum is that 'No' will win comfortably, with 60% of the vote, compared with 40% for 'Yes'. Surveys by other companies indicate a wider margin; but we all agree that the campaign has seen a shift in recent weeks, mainly from 'don't knows' to 'No'; as a result reformers are heading for a heavy defeat.

The impact this result will have on the coalition will unfold over the coming weeks and months. One thing that can be said with confidence is that few politicians will want to spend political capital in the next few years reopening the issue of holding a referendum on changing our voting system. A narrow defeat – say 55-45% or closer – would have left open the possibility of a new push for reform after the next election. But if the margin of defeat is 20 points or more, I suspect the issue will be dead for a generation.

Meanwhile, YouGov's final poll for the Sun throws light on the campaign and why the 'Yes' camp has done so badly. The clinching arguments were that the present first-past-the-post system is simple and has stood the test of time. Some switchers – people who previously said they would vote Yes, or didn't know – were also swayed by the 'No' campaign argument that switching to AV would cost public money (something the 'Yes' campaign fiercely denied).

In general, the 'No' campaign was regarded as more effective. Here are the key figures

	% saying 'Yes' campaign effective	% saying 'No' campaign effective
All adults	14	33
'Yes' voters	28	27
'No' voters	7	45

Voters felt the 'No' campaign was less honest than the 'Yes' campaign, but the difference was only marginal. The 'Yes' campaign's assault on the 'No' campaign's 'lies' had only a smaller effect.

We also asked how interesting voters considered the campaign to be. Most, 54%, thought it was very or fairly boring, while just 38% said it was very or fairly interesting. The difference between voters on the two sides was vast: by 58% to 37%, 'Yes' voters found the campaign interesting, while 'No' voters divided: interesting 30%, 66% boring. If only those interested in the campaign voted today, 'Yes' would win. And that, perhaps, holds the key to the failure of the 'Yes' campaign: it failed to drum up enough excitement about the prospect of reforming the way we elect MPs.

This is confirmed by a battery of questions we asked about leading politicians and celebrities who campaigned on both sides. Even though the final stages of the campaign were

overshadowed by the Royal wedding and, this week, the capture of Osama bin Laden, there has been plenty of coverage on TV and in the press about the views of the party leaders, other leading MPs and celebrity campaigners.

Much of the public seems to have not noticed. As the table below shows, As many as four out of ten adults are unaware that David Cameron wants a 'No' victory, while Nick Clegg wants 'Yes'.

	% who think they have been campaigning for...		% who are not sure which side they are on	Total % who know which side they are on	Total % who do not know which side they are on
	Yes	No			
David Cameron	8	60	32	60	40
Nick Clegg	59	7	34	59	41
Ed Miliband	41	10	49	41	59
William Hague	5	37	59	37	63
Eddie Izzard	25	4	72	25	75
Chris Huhne	23	4	73	23	77
John Reid	4	22	74	22	78
David Blunkett	5	19	76	19	81
Colin Firth	10	2	88	10	90
Joanna Lumley	10	3	87	10	90
David Gower	1	4	95	4	96
Darren Gough	2	4	94	4	96

In each case around three million adults get it wrong – thinking Cameron wants a 'Yes' majority and Clegg a 'No' majority. And they are the politicians with the BEST known views. Most people (59%) are unaware that Ed Miliband has spoken out for a change to our voting system. The stances of William Hague and Chris Huhne – who have both banged the drum on TV for their respective causes – are even less well-known,

As for the celebrities, Eddie Izzard's pro-reform stance is the best known – but even so, only 25% know he backs the 'Yes' campaign. He can at least comfort himself with the thought that even fewer people know that John Reid or David Blunkett supported the 'No' campaign, even though they received considerable exposure for their views in the past ten days.

Referendums are meant to be occasions when a whole nation comes together to debate and decide a matter of constitutional importance. Judged by that standard, and whatever the final result tomorrow night, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that this has been a less than glorious advertisement for the referendum process.