

2nd September 2011

PRESS RELEASE – POLL ON INDEPENDENCE IN SCOTLAND

Background

In August 2007, the SNP published a white paper on Scotland's future, containing the bill which would authorise a referendum on Scottish independence and setting out a proposed ballot paper. Using our omnibus, Scottish Opinion Survey, TNS-BMRB conducted a poll at that time to establish how the Scottish electorate would respond to the two options specified if such a referendum were to be held at that time. This poll was then repeated periodically over the next 2 years to monitor any changes in public opinion.

Some 4 years on, the debate continues and has been heightened considerably by the success of the SNP in winning an outright majority in the Scottish Parliament election in May 2011 and declaring that a referendum will be held during the course of this Parliament. Against this background, TNS-BMRB has restarted its series of independence polls, using the same question as before to maintain trend data. While it is recognised that this poll does not take into account other options relating to increased powers for the Scottish Parliament and the fact that these might be included in a future referendum in the light of latest thinking, it does provide a stark measure of how attitudes towards independence per se have moved since the SNP first came to power in 2007 and announced their intentions in this direction.

Method

A sample of 1007 adults aged 18+ was interviewed face-to-face in-home in 69 constituencies across Scotland over the period 24th – 31st August 2011. To ensure the sample was representative of the adult population of Scotland, it was weighted to match population profile estimates in the analysis.

Respondents were asked:

The SNP have outlined their plans for a possible referendum on Scottish independence in future. If such a referendum were to be held tomorrow, how would you vote?

SHOW SCREEN

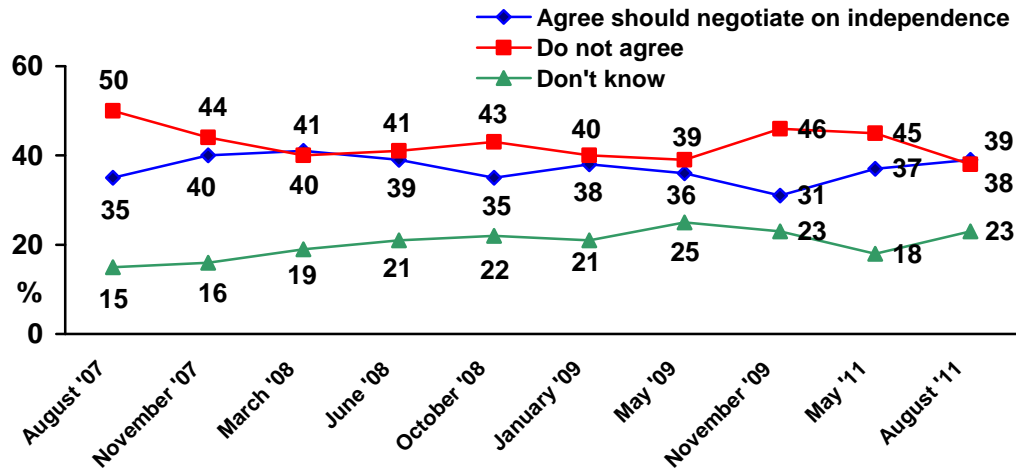
I AGREE that the Scottish Government should negotiate a settlement with the Government of the United Kingdom so that Scotland becomes an independent state.

I DO NOT AGREE that the Scottish Government should negotiate a settlement with the Government of the United Kingdom so that Scotland becomes an independent state.

(Don't know) – not shown on screen

Findings

Data tabulations have been supplied separately. The main findings are outlined below.



Overall, the latest findings indicate a nation evenly divided over the political future of Scotland – 39% supporting the independence option, 38% opposing this and a significant 23% remaining undecided. However it is the recent trend which will bring greater heart to the pro-independence campaign. From a low point of 31% in November 2009, the recovery to 37% immediately following the SNP's dramatic victory in May's election has continued upwards to 39%. This lies close to the peak for support recorded in 2007-8. At the same time, opposition to independence has dropped significantly since May and is now at its lowest level since this series of polls began in August 2007.

It is interesting that the decline in opposition is reflected more in a shift to 'undecided' than to 'support', which is perhaps not surprising. It would be a major step change to move from opposing to supporting independence over a short period. What this does suggest is that resistance is being challenged and more people are being encouraged to reconsider their opposition to independence. With the SNP now forming a majority government and being seen to do so with some credibility in performance to date, this may be eroding the fear factor for some previously unconvinced that Scotland could manage its own affairs. While perhaps not yet converted to the cause, they are now more open to persuasion.

These findings clearly endorse the First Minister's strategy to delay the referendum until the latter half of the SNP's term of office, in the belief that they can use this time to demonstrate the viability of Scottish self-government and, through their performance in power, win over a majority of the population to independence. With 23% undecided, the next few years will see a major struggle for hearts and minds in Scotland. Recent poll trends suggest that, for now, the ball is rolling in favour of the SNP and independence. However a lot can change over the next 2-3 years.