

Forum: The United Nations Membership Council (UNMC)

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TOPIC 2: The Membership of Scotland

I. Introduction to the Topic

Scotland is the northernmost part of the United Kingdom. It merged with England in 1707 to form Great Britain however, the union has faced several tensions in the past. This led to the formation of the Scottish parliament in 1999, giving Scotland power over its internal affairs. The first referendum of Scottish independence was held in September 2014 where Scottish people were asked to vote on the question 'Should Scotland be an independent country?'. 55% voted 'no' and 45% voted 'yes'. In the EU referendum that followed, 62% of Scottish voters voted to remain. This paved the way for a second referendum to be proposed which Boris Johnson rejected since the pro-independence politicians had said that the first referendum was a 'once in a generation opportunity'. When Scottish leaders proposed this to the Supreme Court, the court denied permission without the UK government's approval. The criticality of this matter lies in the several consequences that can follow if Scotland were to secede from the UK. This could lead to dramatic impacts for nations worldwide including needing resources for negotiating with an independent Scotland, foreign policy and a domino effect for further independence movements elsewhere. Countries' perspectives on Scottish sovereignty are very much divided. Catalan president, Arthur Mas has been a great supporter of the movement hoping that it will also inspire acceptance for Catalonia's separation from Spain. Whereas, President Barack Obama invited Scottish citizens to vote 'no' in the first referendum since he believed that the UK had done a commendable job in keeping the two states together. An independent Scotland can gain UN membership as the charter clearly states in Article 4, 'Membership in the United Nations is open to all other peace-loving states ...'

Scotland accounts for 8% of the UK's population and even more importantly, one-third of its land area. Separating Scotland would not only mean losing the natural resources, talent and cultural significance it has long offered however, it will also come with other serious impacts. The UK's nuclear weapons are stored north of Glasgow. In case of a separation, the UK plans on relocating Trident, their nuclear deterrent, although military analysts don't think there is an alternate location. Internationally, the UK might be viewed as becoming weaker which would affect its soft power. Supporters of the reform security council might also see this as an opportunity of campaigning to remove the UK from the Security Council. This is because Scotland's separation will be a symbol of change since when the Security Council was first established in 1945. If Scotland joins the EU then it would have to follow their energy policies which can make trade

with the UK more complex and costly. When English people are asked about the division of their country, 46% want Scotland to stay, 13% would like to see a secession, however 34% feel that this is Scotland's internal matter. In the 2014 referendum, anger grew amongst British citizens outside of Scotland on their limited influence over the topic. They argued that since Scotland is part of the union, all other constituencies should get equal say on its future. Even Scottish expats were denied the vote.

Concerning regional significance, it is possible that Scotland's independence can start a chain reaction of other secessions, leaving the United Kingdom divided. After talks of Scottish independence, evidence has shown that 25-30% of Welsh voters are likely to vote for Wales' independence with a high level of support from younger voters who voted 'remain' during Brexit. Such an event could also increase the protest for Northern Ireland's independence from Irish nationalists as well.

Regarding local opinions, the voting polls usually have the 'no' side winning by very narrow percentages. However, more Scottish people voted for independence following Brexit and there was a rise in pro-independence support during COVID-19 because it was believed that the Scottish National Party (SNP) had handled the pandemic better than the UK government. Nonetheless, in the first referendum, the voter turnout was at 84.6% which was the highest in Scotland since 1918, underlining the public's seriousness on the issue. Meanwhile, the Scottish government has set several policies in place for what an independent Scotland would look like. A successful referendum, if it happens in the future, will be followed by negotiations on the separation and how the UK and Scotland would want to continue their relationships. The SNP intends for an independent Scotland to join the European Union with the 27 members' consent. They also wish to introduce a new currency in place as soon as possible despite the SNP Sustainable Growth Commission's recommendation of continuing the Sterling to allow more time for transition. Although this can make trade easier between Scotland and the UK, the Scottish government will not be able to set interest rates or quantitative easing in case of an economic recession.

II. Definition of Key Terms & Concepts

TOPIC 2: The membership of Scotland

Definition of Key Terms

Referendum: It is a direct vote by the constituency on a proposal due to legislative referrals or initiatives. Referendums are very similar to elections because the general public votes on the

issue instead of a representative. Referendums can have lasting importance leading to new policies and laws or may be only advisory.

Scotland held its first independence referendum in 2014 where 55% of the electorate voted against independence. In 2022, the Scottish government proposed a draft bill for a second referendum planned on 19th October 2023 to the Supreme Court, asking for permission without the UK government's approval. According to the Scotland Act 1998, the Scottish government does not have the power to pass legislation on reserved matters. In 2014, the Scottish government was only allowed to hold a referendum because the UK passed a 'section 30 order'. The Supreme Court later decided that holding a second referendum is related to 'reserved matters' and requires the UK government's consent. The SNP plans on using the UK general election as an unofficial referendum.

Brexit: Brexit was when the UK left the European Union on 31st January 2020.

As a result, trade between the UK and the European Union requires checks on goods which means that commerce is not as straightforward. The EU referendum was organized in 2016 where the general public was allowed to vote 'remain' or 'stay'. The remain side won with 51.9% of the majority. It is believed that Brexit only happened due to strong support in England. If Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland had voted separately, Brexit was expected to gain less than 45% of votes. The Scottish population voted to remain by 62% which led to the SNP arguing that 'Scotland being taken out of the EU against our will'. This clash of opinions is what led to the proposition of a second referendum.

European Union: The EU is an economic and political alliance between 27 European countries. It was created after World War II to prevent conflict because countries that trade with each other become interdependent. It began as the European Economic Community in 1958. Countries in the EU participate in the European Single Market which is an agreement that allows the free movement of people and goods across member countries by removing any restrictions.

During the EU referendum in 2016, Scotland had the highest percentage of 'remain' votes of any UK constituency at 62%. EU member states including France, Germany, Italy and Spain have shown support for an independent Scotland to join the union. Moreover, more than 170 cultural figures from all over Europe including novelists, writers and philosophers wrote a letter

to the EU, expressing their support for Scotland. Scotland plans to join the European Union after independence and gain access to a market 7 times larger than the UK.

Secession: It is when a member withdraws from a union, military alliance or just a larger organization.

If Scotland becomes independent, it will be seceding from the United Kingdom's union which also comprises of England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Scotland's secession is likely to start public debate on whether Wales and Northern Ireland should also become sovereign. Wales was conquered by Anglo-Norman kings of England in the 13th century. Scotland merged with England in 1707 since the country was in debt and wanted to secure its future in a Protestant state. In 1801, Great Britain merged with Ireland; however, the Irish War of Independence left only Northern Ireland. After World War II, nationalist protests increased dramatically from Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland which took forms of new political parties being established, activism and violence. This was because the British government took the decision to enter the war on behalf of these constituencies.

Devolution: It is the transfer of power and authority from a central government to a local government.

The UK has different legislatures and parliaments for all of its constituents that control devolved powers. The UK government and parliament retains reserved powers. In 1999, power was devolved to Scotland and the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Executive were established under the Scotland Act 1998. This agreement is why Scotland needs to seek the central government's approval for a second referendum since it is a reserved matter.

III. Key Stakeholders

The Scottish National Party (SNP): The SNP was formed in 1934 and has been the key driver of Scottish Independence. After World War II, the SNP spread petitions for a Scottish Parliament however until the 1960s, their victories were very small-scale such as moving the Stone of Scone, a Scottish cultural symbol, to Edinburgh from London. Although the SNP was always second to the Labour Party in Scotland, the two organizations worked together for a second referendum on establishing a Scottish Parliament in 1997. The referendum was successful and

Scotland gained devolved power in 1999. In 2007, SNP became the largest political party in Scotland, dominating over Labour's 50 years of influence. In 2012, party leader, Alex Salmond signed an agreement to hold the first independence referendum. Today, with its new leader, Nicola Sturgeon, the SNP is at the forefront of promoting sovereignty by taking the initiative of a second referendum.

The Scottish Green Party: This political party began in the mid-1970s. It supported the devolution referendum in 1997. In 2007, the SNP and the Scottish Green Party signed an agreement to support Alex Salmond and Patrick Harvie in their desired positions in the elections. In the 2021 Scottish parliament elections, the SNP and Scottish Greens which are both pro-independence parties, won 72 seats out of 129, making them the majority. This plays a crucial role because the Scottish Green party has supported independence since its formation and holds a green vision of the new Scotland which differs from the SNP's vision. Being a green party, it wants to work with the UN to make an independent Scotland a zero-carbon country.

The UK Government: The central government of the UK is opposed to granting a second referendum for Scottish independence. Scotland was allowed to hold the first referendum because the central government passed a 'section 30 order'. When a second referendum was requested, Boris Johnson declined since it was supposed to be a 'once in a generation opportunity'. The Supreme Court has also made it clear that since it is a reserved matter, Westminster's consent is non-negotiable. Prime minister Rishi Sunak has said that he respects the ruling and that politicians should focus on working together to improve national services because the Scottish people want a better future.

IV. Key Issues including Background Information

Rejection of a second referendum: The UK government and the Supreme Court have clearly denied permission. To this, Nicola Sturgeon has said that the UK is not considering Scotland as a partner and reinforcing non-democratic values. She cited that the Royal Commission on Scottish Affairs in 1950 states that 'Scotland is a nation and voluntarily entered into the Union as a partner.' This was reiterated in 2014 in the Smith Commission, 'nothing in its report prevented Scotland becoming an independent country should the people of Scotland so choose.' The SNP

complains that the rejection is unfair because the UK is preventing Scotland from choosing its own future.

The economic loss caused by Brexit: One of the strongest arguments made by the SNP is that Scotland was forced to quit the EU due to the 2016 referendum. It is true that Brexit has brought with it several economic disadvantages that the SNP all blames the central government for. Low-income households have become 21 to 22% poorer compared to France and Germany. Brexit will also cause a 4% decline in the national income for the UK compared to if it had stayed in the EU. The expenditure cuts experienced in Scotland are 3.2 billion pounds. Moreover, it is now more difficult for the British youth to study and live in European countries.

Support for Scottish independence is not very evident in poll results : The trends in poll data have always been changing however, most polls conducted close to the 2021 Scottish Elections have had the 'no' vote win by a very narrow percentage. If the Scottish public does not have any strong opinions, it undermines the struggle for independence and raises questions as to if the second referendum is even needed. Another poll conducted by Our Scottish Future revealed that 48% of voters opted for the SNP however, 73% wanted to see more cooperation between Scotland and the UK.

V. Timeline of Resolutions, Treaties, and Events

Timeline of Resolutions, Treaties, and Events

Date	Description of event
1707	Scotland merges with England to form Great Britain under the Union with Scotland Act 1706.
1934	The Scottish National Party is formed.

1998	The Scotland Act 1998 is created and power is devolved to Scotland. The Scottish parliament was started in 1999.
2012	Campaigns are formed for either side for the 2014 Independence Referendum. 'Yes Scotland' was the campaign for the 'yes' side and 'Better Together' was the campaign for the 'no' side.
18th September 2014	The first Independence referendum is held.
28th June 2022	Nicola Sturgeon proposes a plan to hold a second referendum on 13th October 2023. A draft independence referendum bill was sent to the Supreme Court.
23rd November 2022	The Supreme Court announces that holding a second referendum is related to 'reserved matters' and requires the UK government's consent.

VI. Possible Challenges & Solutions

Rejection of a second referendum: As a solution, after being denied a second referendum, the SNP plans to negotiate with the Prime Minister to modify the Devolution Settlement to allow Scotland to hold its own referendum. If Westminster still continues to resist, the UK general election will serve as a de facto referendum. Sturgeon will ask the National Executive Committee to create a special party conference that will organize the details of such an event.

The economic loss caused by Brexit: If Scotland becomes independent, they believe that they will be able to cope better by joining the EU and according to GDP per capita, they are richer than countries like Japan and New Zealand. In order to combat this issue, the United Kingdom should put forth strategies and create a route through which the UK can still flourish without the EU and maximize benefits of not being a EU member state.

Support for Scottish independence is not very evident in poll results: As a solution and alternative to Scottish separation, the central government can commission a constitutional

inquiry to reconstruct its relations and unite the nation together. Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak has similar views as he remarks, 'For all of these reasons, my Government will do anything and everything to protect, sustain and strengthen it.' He has expressed plans to reform relations by sending ministers to Scotland more often and increasing funding to Scottish Tories.

VII. Recommendations for Resolution Writing including Research

During the 2014 referendum, countries such as the USA, China, Australia, Canada and India were opposed to Scottish independence and encouraged the UK to stay prosperous and united. Thus, it is likely that countries that are close allies of the UK such as commonwealth nations and those with little tolerance of secessions would bolster their support to the UK. On the other hand, other unofficial states and conflicted regions are expected to stand with the SNP since Scotland's separation can increase international pressure and awareness in their respective countries. Interestingly, North Korea was in support of Scottish independence as it is eager to begin trade relationships which suggests that countries that might benefit from trade relations with an independent Scotland should be most interested, this includes the EU.

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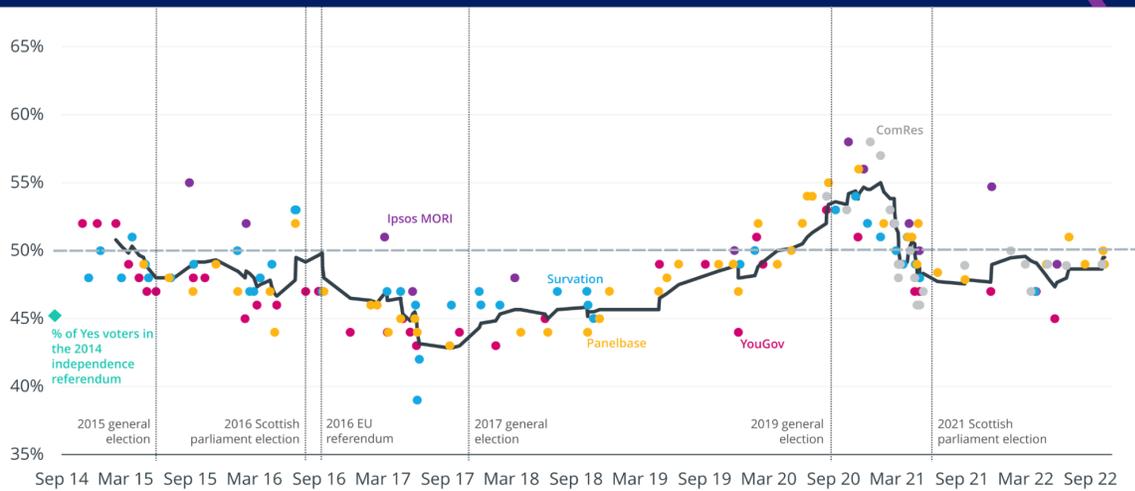
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IX: Additional Resources



Source: Institute for Government analysis of What Scotland Thinks summary of polls, Survation, YouGov, Panelbase, ComRes and Ipsos MORI poll results. Notes: Some of the polls shown on this chart included 16 and 17 year olds in the sample. Don't Know/Wouldn't Answer are excluded from results. Polls with non-standard questions are excluded.

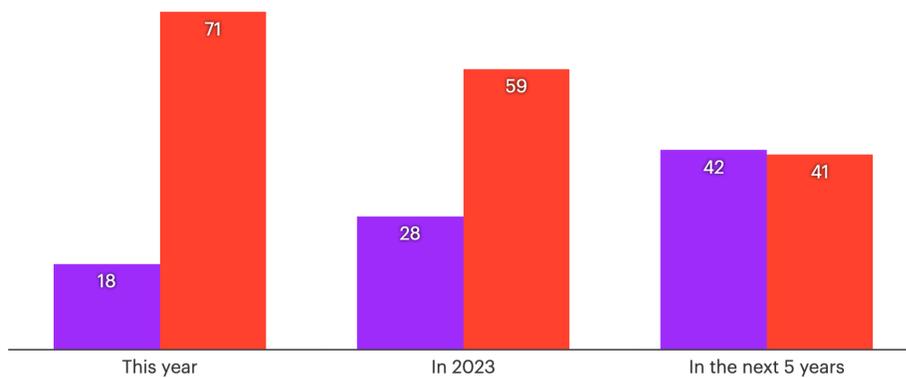


[Source](#)

Most Scots would oppose another Scottish independence referendum before the end of 2023

In principle, do you think there should or should not be a referendum on Scottish independence....? %

Should be a referendum (purple) Should not be a referendum (red)



YouGov

18 - 23 May 2022

[Source](#)

[Devolution Factsheet](#)