

Britons and the Europe Question

25 July 2014

Summary

A Global Counsel/TNS Poll conducted between 15 and 17 July asked British adults a series of questions about the desirability and timing of a vote on Britain's membership of the EU. With Westminster convulsed by the perceived Eurosceptic challenge, British voters present a complicated picture of their own appetite for a plebiscite. They appear in favour of a referendum only by a narrow margin, with even a significant cohort of the Tory party ambivalent about the idea. Among backers of a referendum there is scepticism of a wait for 2017 and a possible renegotiation of Britain's terms of EU membership. Among critics, a very large majority are in favour of ruling out a referendum even in the event of a future transfer of powers. The full poll results are available [here](#).

A Global Counsel/TNS Poll conducted between 15 and 17 July asked British adults a series of questions about the desirability and timing of a vote on Britain's membership of the EU. The results suggest an electorate that actively supports a referendum only by a narrow margin, but which is not following the lead of the national political parties in certain important respects.

Yes, no and don't know

Support for a referendum on British membership of the EU is by no means universal. 54% of those polled endorsed the idea of a plebiscite, with 26% opposed and 20% uncertain. Almost nine in ten UK Independence Party (UKIP) voters favour a referendum, but less than half of Labour voters (45%) and just a third of Liberal Democrats (33%). Despite both party policy and a striking

shift in the Euroscepticism of the Parliamentary Conservative Party over the last decade, almost a third of Tory voters do not in fact clearly support the idea of a referendum on European membership.

Support for a referendum breaks down demographically in a very similar way to support for leaving the EU. It is weakest in the under 35s (39%), who also tend to be the least politically mobilised in general, and rises to 73% for over 65s. As on the EU question itself there is a marked difference between fixity of male and female views. A quarter of women are undecided on the desirability of a referendum - rising to a third of women under 55 or with children. Just 13% of men admit to any uncertainty of view.

Support for a referendum is fairly even spread across England, but strongest

in the North where it reaches around 60% in both the North West and the North East and Yorkshire. Scotland, however, shows a much weaker interest in a referendum - 44%. This may perhaps be linked to the referendum on independence scheduled for September 2014 - a form of referendum fatigue. Support is even across social grades, but marginally higher for those not working (59%) than working (51%).

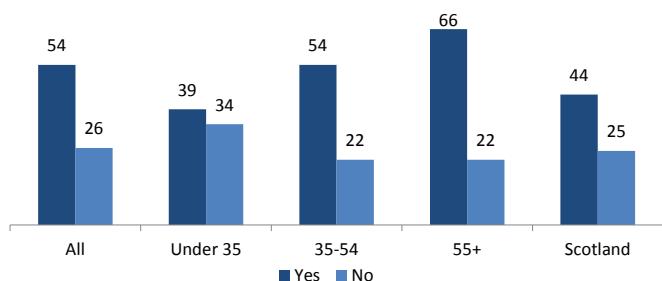


Fig 1: Do you support a referendum on UK membership of the EU? (%)

Source: TNS/Global Counsel Poll. See p4 for sample base.

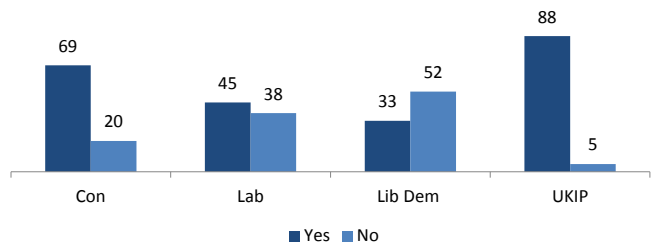


Fig 2: Do you support a referendum on UK membership of the EU (by political party)? (%)

Source: TNS/Global Counsel Poll. See p4 for sample base.

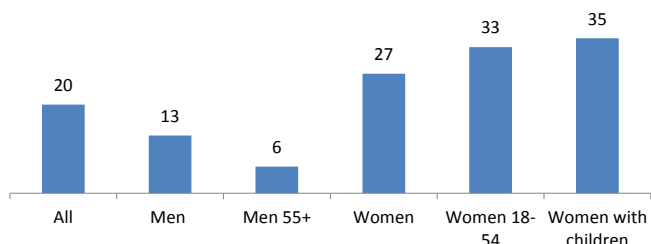


Fig 3: Undecided electorate on the need for a referendum on UK membership of the EU (%)

Source: TNS/Global Counsel Poll. See p4 for sample base.

If, then and when

Interestingly, those opposed to a referendum do not substantially shift their view if asked to imagine a future shift of powers from the UK to the EU. 28% of those opposed to a referendum on the current relationship shift their view to support a referendum in the circumstance of a future transfer of sovereignty. 63% remain opposed to a vote. Instinctively Eurosceptic Conservative voters

make up the largest part of this “if, then” cohort (39% shifting to support a referendum), with Labour voters most hostile to a referendum, even

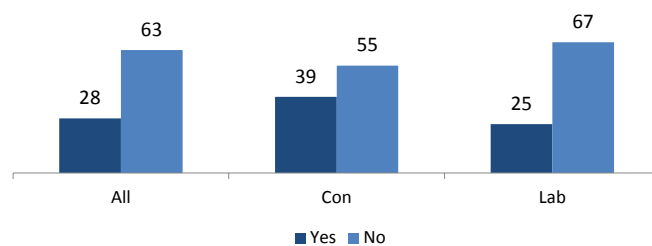


Fig 4: You don't support a referendum now, but would you support one in the event of a future transfer of UK sovereignty to the EU? (%)

Source: TNS/Global Counsel Poll. See p4 for sample base.

on a future shift of sovereignty (67% against). The current party political debate is also a poor predictor of voter preferences on the timing of a referendum. The strongest support is for a referendum combined with the 2015 General Election (51%), with 38% supporting the strategy of the UK government in holding a referendum 2017 after an attempted renegotiation of Britain's position in the EU. Increasingly small sample sizes require caution in interpretation, but these results suggest that although Conservative voters may have a greater appetite for a referendum, many are loyal enough to their Prime Minister to be willing to wait until 2017 for a vote (54%). However, the generally tepid support for a referendum in 2017 after an attempt at renegotiation suggests limited confidence in the Prime Minister's ability to bring back a substantive deal - or a conviction that renegotiation is beside the point.

The same caveats about sample size apply, but Labour supporters who favour a referendum also appear to favour combining it with the 2015 election by a large margin (54% to 34%). This is most likely driven by a desire to have a referendum sooner rather than later, although there may be tactical calculation among some very politically-minded pro-EU labour voters that it is better to have a referendum with the Conservatives in power and compelled to some degree - and at least at the level of the Prime Minister - to campaign for continued membership.

The overall picture on an in-out EU referendum is one that maps onto the political debate at Westminster somewhat uncomfortably. A referendum is unquestionably a popular idea, but perhaps not to the extent that the clear shift to supporting one among the political parties

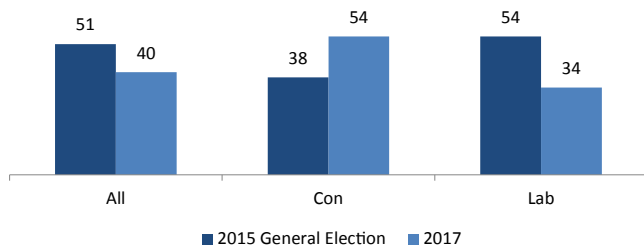


Fig 5: You support a referendum on the status quo, when do you think it should be held? (%)

Source: TNS/Global Counsel Poll. See p4 for sample base.

would suggest. Even though Labour’s position on a referendum is uneasy and ambiguous, they have been careful to present to the media a commitment to a vote at some point.

This is a mark of how powerfully UKIP have reset the terms of the political debate on Europe in the UK. Almost half of voters - including a third of Tory voters - and particularly a large group of female voters, see the idea of a referendum with a combination of suspicion, uncertainty or distaste. The Scots, after six months of intense referendum campaigning on independence appear to have limited appetite for repeating the exercise, even notwithstanding the fact that they are slightly more pro-European than the rest of the UK.

To some extent opposition to a referendum will reflect the underlying concern among pro-Europeans that a referendum on membership of the EU runs a serious risk of being lost, with extraordinary consequences for the UK. But support for a referendum remains higher than support for EU exit by a varying margin of between 15 and 20 percentage points, which suggests that there are some pro-Europeans who think the debate can be won and some pro-Europeans who think the debate needs to be engaged on principle.

The full Global Counsel/TNS poll can be seen here.

Sample Base

Figure 1 - Total sample: 1,191, Under 35 (342), 35-54 (456), 55+ (393), Scotland (87)

Figure 2 - Total sample: 1,191, Con (253), Lab (287), Lib Dem (50), UKIP (188)

Figure 3 - Total sample: 1,191, men (573), women (618), men 55+ (182), women 18-54 (407), women with children (148)

Figure 4 - Total sample: 290, Con (46), Lab (106)

Figure 5 - Total sample: 692, Con (181), Lab (134)

TNS Omnibus interview a representative sample of 1,191 adults in Great Britain between 15 and 17 July 2014. All interviews were conducted as online self-completion. The data is weighted to match population totals for age, sex, social grade, working status, presence of children, 2010 voting patterns and region.

About TNS

TNS UK advises clients on specific growth strategies around new market entry, innovation, brand switching and stakeholder management, based on long-established expertise and market-leading solutions. With a presence in over 80 countries, TNS has more conversations with the world's consumers than anyone else and understands individual human behaviours and attitudes across every cultural, economic and political region of the world. TNS is part of Kantar, one of the world's largest insight, information and consultancy groups.

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TNS UK was awarded the Market Research Society's (MRS) Agency of the Year 2013.

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