

DIRECTION

A REALISTIC STRATEGY FOR ACHIEVING SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE

SHORT SUMMARY

All campaigns require a unified strategy; we must push in the same direction. This paper is a framework for what direction to push. The structure of this framework is based on the best available evidence; the detail contained in it is the author's best effort to flesh it out and is up for debate.

What are we trying to do?

Scotland is a modern nation so for us independence means international recognition. This is political, not legal. To gain international recognition, by far our best option is to gain a recognition agreement from the UK Government – it is that which is the gold standard. Our ultimate task is to drag the UK to the negotiating table. That's the goal, it is that straightforward. Everything else is a means for getting there, and a referendum may or may not be part of that. First, we need to achieve the Settled Will of the Scottish people.

Learn from the best

Through years and years of advanced research we have a very good understanding of how people make decisions and how to influence those decisions. That is our goal; to change people's decisions until we have achieved a Settled Will. We have not been using the body of knowledge on how to change minds in our campaigning. Unless we start learning how to do it better, we won't make progress. *Direction* explains the ways humans make their decisions and the ways in which we must learn to influence them.

Pay attention!

We win or lose by persuading people who don't currently support independence to change their mind. We must pay attention to what they think and feel. The best evidence on this provides a clear answer as to our biggest tasks. There is 30 per cent of the population we cannot win over, but there is more than another 20 per cent we could – and they are not one category of people (old, young, rich, poor, urban, rural), they are really diverse. They are our target audience. They are telling us that we need to make independence represent a positive change in their lives as those lives are lived now if they are to be motivated to change their view. But even more, they are telling us that they broadly like the 'better Scotland' we talk about but they don't think we're prepared to create it. They think we're bluffing. They do not have sufficient confidence in us. We cannot increase this confidence with slogans or by making independence 'less exciting', we can only do it by putting in the work to persuade them we actually are ready to create an independent nation.

Hope and fear

If you combine what we know about how people make decisions with what our target audience is telling us, we see that the problem is the hope-fear balance. This creates three options for rebalancing that relationship; we can make not changing your mind scarier (increasing the fear in the status quo), we can improve the benefits of changing opinion (persuade them they gain more from making the change) or we can reduce the fear of change by reducing the risk (persuading them the change will be well-managed). We need to do all of these, but particularly incentivising change and above all reducing the perceived risk of change. When this is then also combined with what we already know, it makes clear that we must create a set of positive stories about independence and what it can mean for individuals which inspire hope, focussing on their lives as lived and what difference independence can make to that. But that must go hand in hand with explaining the problems with the UK that independence is solving for them and providing strong, reassuring information to people that helps them answer their questions in ways that builds their confidence in change. What we can't do is bark instructions at them or think that by exuding our own over-confidence they'll change their mind.

Building confidence

Basically, our target audience doesn't believe that we know properly how to sort out a currency, how to manage borders, how to defend the nation, how to manage our finances in the transition year and so on. We must be seen to provide them clear answers. A National Commission should be set up to do all of this work, both to get Scotland genuinely fully ready for independence but also *to be seen* to be getting ready. This will be a very big project with a project management approach which should be converted into a single external indicator of 'readiness'. This will help the public gain confidence that, gradually, we actually are making sure we know what we're doing. This is absolutely crucial.

How to change minds

People used to make their minds up based on what authority figures told them but this has changed a lot and now it is more likely that people will form their opinions based on the conversations they have with people they know. This is helpful for the independence campaign; it means that we can build on those relationships using what is known as peer-to-peer campaigning. This is a new model which is now used a lot in the US and it involves recruiting people and training them on how to use their own social networks carefully and judiciously to change minds. The goal is to persuade people we are recruiting that it is really easy – no more than 20 minutes a month, never asked to speak to someone they don't know or would be uncomfortable with. A pairing process would then link them to someone in the target audience that they know or are close to. That relationship would then become the main route through which campaign messages were sent. A team would support those involved, sending them messages and talking points to use with their paired member of the target audience (it must absolutely be consensual and agreed) and in their wider conversations. The key is that the individual tailors the message to the language that they would normally use and is able to take any questions their pair asks and quickly provide them with a simple answer. This requires a lot more explanation than is possible here – but this works. In fact research on this model of campaigning has shown that it is three times more effective than knocking on people's doors and nearly 30 times more effective than Facebook advertising. But it needs to be done at scale – to get to 60 per cent in the polls we'd need about 100,000 people or more recruited, each paired three or four target voters. We cannot win if we think small.

Getting it done

We need to show 'settled will'. The best proxy for 'will' is to overtake the total number of votes the No side got in 2023, the further over that the better. The No side got 2.01 million votes so a good target would be 2.1 million independence supporters, which would take us to 60 per cent in the polls. That would mean 400,000 people need to change their minds, which is why we would need 100,000 people volunteering for the peer-to-peer campaigning. Once we get there – enough people for enough time – we reach the trigger point at which we need a mechanism for forcing the UK to the negotiating table. Many options are discussed, but a new one suggested. Rather than using a referendum to prove support through a 'contested proposition', do it using an 'uncontested proposition' – a petition. So long as a way is available to verify every name, it demonstrates a settled will every bit as reliably as a referendum. How to verify all the signatories and turn it into a big political event is explained in the paper. If that is achieved then we can contact Westminster directly and demand negotiations start (with those numbers they couldn't beat us in a referendum even if we had one). If that didn't work, we would escalate (carefully) to non-violent direct action.

Getting our heads straight

The independence movement has got stuck up a series of blind alleys because we didn't start at the beginning and work out properly what we need to do to become independent and then design what it might look like in practice. This paper is a comprehensive strategy for independence based on what it looks like if you do start at the beginning. It is a genuinely, workable route to making Scotland independent.