

Scottish independence: What is a de facto referendum?

First Minister Nicola Sturgeon wants the next general election to be a “de facto referendum” on independence, after the Supreme Court ruled that she does not have the power to hold an actual referendum without the UK’s government’s consent.

But what is a de facto referendum and is there any prospect of it settling the issue of independence once and for all?

Why is this happening?

The Scottish government was planning to hold an independence referendum on 19 October 2023.

But judges at the Supreme Court ruled that this can only happen if the UK government agrees, as it did in the run-up to the previous referendum in 2014.

With no realistic prospect of that happening any time soon, Ms Sturgeon was left looking for another way to put the question to the country.

She now wants to use the next UK general election - which must be held by January 2025 at the latest - as a “de facto referendum”.

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