



NO vote spells major change

In the aftermath of Scotland's vote to remain in the union, **Ian Richards** considers the political changes likely to result

The Scottish referendum had a spectacular 85% turnout, with vigorous campaigning on both sides. In the lead-up to the referendum most of the speculation concerned what would happen in the event of a YES vote. But in the days following the result it became clear that a NO vote was far from being a vote for the status quo. In fact, a few weeks on from the vote the NO result looks like it may usher in profound constitutional change of its own.

A broken political system

The campaign generated a growing tide of opinion in Scotland that the Westminster political system is broken. As Helena Kennedy argued following the

vote, 'the old democratic structures no longer work'. The YES campaign benefited from an angry reaction against Westminster politics and politicians of all types. There was a clear sense in Scotland that a vote for independence was a vote for a more socially just country and the rejection of the detached and distant elites of London. In this way, the debate in Scotland was a continuation of the political reaction against Westminster seen elsewhere in the UK in recent years.

What next?

Far from calming the political storms of the campaign, the NO vote has generated widespread debate about the future shape of the UK political system.

Devo-max

In the near future new powers will be introduced for the Scottish Parliament. In the final week of the campaign the NO leadership announced that enhanced powers for the Parliament would be assured if the Scots voted NO. In what looked like a desperate last-minute attempt to scupper a YES vote Gordon Brown was dispatched to reveal wide-ranging new powers with a draft Commons Bill to be published on Burns Night (25 January 2015). Although it was kept off the referendum ballot paper 'devo-max' (maximum devolution) is firmly back on the agenda.

The West Lothian question

A famously thorny issue in Westminster, the West Lothian question confronts the issue of the role and powers of Scottish MPs in the House of Commons. As the Scottish Parliament achieves ever greater devolved powers, Westminster MPs want to look again at the voting rights of Scottish MPs in London. At present Scottish MPs can vote to influence laws that affect only England and Wales and not their own constituents in Scotland.

The day after the result David Cameron was quick to raise the prospect of removing voting rights from Scottish MPs on England-only issues. Apart from the constitutional impact, this change would adversely affect the Labour party's ability to govern if it wins the general election in 2015. A future Labour government could face having several dozen of its MPs unable to vote on key legislative issues.

An English Parliament?

With devo-max and the West Lothian question creating difficult constitutional issues, the additional prospect of political reform across the UK, and in England in particular, is suddenly very real. The Scottish debate revealed the extent of disaffection and cynicism felt by many people towards the political process. Until a few weeks ago ideas such as additional English regional government, further devolution, votes for 16-year-olds and, in particular, an English Parliament, were fanciful, even laughable.

A new era of democracy?

Increased Scottish devolution seems certain, but beyond this it is difficult to predict what further reforms will come about as a result of the independence debate. Nick Pearce in the *New Statesman* has called for a 'rolling democratic debate' and the ex-attorney general, Dominic Grieve MP, has argued that we need to 'look at our constitution as a whole'. The NO vote may usher in a new era of constitutional reform across Britain.

Activity

Research the possible constitutional changes that might follow the referendum and fill out your own version of the table below.

Area	Possible changes?	How likely? (out of 10)
Scotland		
Westminster		
English regions		
Wales and Northern Ireland		
Voting rights		
Other?		

Weblinks to follow up

Andrew Black of the BBC and Patrick Wintour of the *Guardian* consider the issues discussed in this e-review:

<http://tinyurl.com/ltbr29n>

<http://tinyurl.com/q8bnrah>

Find out more about our full range of magazines and online archives of back issues at www.hoddereducation.co.uk/magazines

Did you like this article?
Tell us what you think