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Introduction

Described as Scotland's "biggest choice since 1707" (McLean *et al*, 2013, p. ix), the upcoming referendum on Scottish independence will provide a pivotal event for the current and future populations of Scotland as voters get the opportunity to decide whether or not they are to remain a part of Great Britain or become an independent nation. As McLean *et al* (2013) have referenced, 1707 was a year of major importance in Scottish history because it saw the passage of the Union with England Act by the Parliament of Scotland, thus legitimising the reciprocal Union with Scotland Act which was passed by its English counterpart the previous year (Davis, 1998). The Acts of Union have now stood for more than three centuries and, although there have been proposals to challenge it in recent years, this is the first time that the Scottish public have been given the opportunity to vote on the issue in a formal referendum. This essay will examine the issue of Scottish independence by providing an insight into the historical and political events that have led to the 2013 proposal to hold a referendum on the issue. It will also look in depth at the campaigns for and against Scottish independence in order to assess the approaches that each one has taken in order to sway voters towards their individual cause. This will ultimately facilitate the drawing of the conclusion that Scottish independence has the propensity to fundamentally alter the political landscape of the entire international community rather than being limited to a British and European context. However, although both campaigns relating to the referendum are fundamentally flawed, the choice made by the Scottish people will decide the nation's fate for the foreseeable future.

Historical Background

Although this referendum is the first in/out vote to be held in relation to Scottish independence in the 21st century, votes have previously been held over the issue of devolution. In both 1979 and 1997, Scottish devolution referendums were held with varying outcomes (Deacon, 2012). In the 1979 case, the yes vote did gain a majority but failed to attract 40% of the total electorate and therefore failed to achieve change (Dardanelli, 2006). However, in the 1997 referendum, there was clear majority support for both devolution of the Scottish Parliament, which was achieved in the Scotland Act 1998, and Parliament establishing the base rate of income tax (Dardanelli, 2006). In both instances then, there was significant support for the devolution of Scotland and important powers. As such, sovereignty has been an issue for some time, which is further reinforced by a study of cultural identity by Bechhofer and McCrone (2007). The study suggests that the Scottish people have come to feel more comfortable with the Scottish identity, with the British collective identity being weakened as a result, although it also noted that the "...relatively weak association between national identity, party support and views on constitutional change suggests that being Scottish is more cultural than political" (Bechhofer & McCrone, 2007, p. 251). According to the study, the sense of Scottishness has been growing exponentially in recent years and therefore the perceived demand for the referendum that the Scottish National Party (SNP) promised in its 2011 election manifesto (Leyland, 2013) has created a climate that is conducive to promoting and holding a vote that will decide the future of Scotland and, by extension, the UK as a whole.

The immediate events that led to the referendum are established in a House of Commons (2013) report that states that the formation of the SNP majority government following elections in 2011 led to a climate that was conducive to negotiating a referendum for independence with the UK government, thus leading to the signing of the Edinburgh Agreement. The binding referendum that was introduced in the Agreement was then introduced formally in the Scottish Independence Referendum Bill on 21st March 2013 and the date for the vote was established as 18th September 2014 (House of Commons, 2013). It was subsequently passed on 14th November 2013 after it was agreed that the question of independence would be framed as “ Should Scotland be an independent country?” (House of Commons, 2013, p. 5). Should the result ultimately be a yes vote then independence will occur on 24th March 2016 (House of Commons, 2013). Although this brief timeline is heavily fact based, it provides an outline of the process that underpins the referendum at the present time and introduces a timescale for the process of achieving independence should the outcome of the referendum be a yes vote. This is of vital importance because it provides more than a year to establish the practicalities of independence and secure political links and alliances in order to create a stable nation. However, there are no official provisions in place for independence at the present time, thus rendering the political landscape an important element for analysis in a general overview of the referendum.

The Political Landscape

The political complexities that are attached to the referendum and indeed Scottish independence should the majority of the electorate vote yes to the

established question are extensive. For example, Maxwell (2012, p. 13) raised the following political issues that would, by necessity, be asked of the government: “ How could Scotland’s credit rating absorb the weight of Scotland’s debt legacy from the United Kingdom? How could Scotland be sure it would be admitted to the European Union? How could Scotland afford to start an Oil Fund when its budget would be in net fiscal deficit?” Of course, asking such questions immediately after the SNP was able to gain a majority government made it virtually impossible to offer coherent and accurate answers to these issues. However, there are certainly major concerns with the political implications of a complete Scottish divorce from Great Britain: “ The Scottish vote is of almost equal importance to people in the rest of the UK and to the UK’s trading and treaty partners including the European Union (EU), the Council of Europe and NATO” (McLean *et al* , 2013, p. ix). Although there is no suggestion that Scotland will not seek to move forward without treaties in place with any of these wider political entities, the issue is one of sovereignty and somewhat ironically mirrors the UK’s wider struggle for British sovereignty with the European Union (Gifford, 2010). As such, it may provide an opportunity to negotiate and redefine boundaries with the EU but, regardless of whether that opportunity does present itself, ministers will negotiate for an independent Scotland and therefore will be doing so with a view to achieving the best agreement for the individual country.

Leading on from the issue of sovereignty, there have been political moves towards preparing for an independent political nation within Scotland. For example, on 16th June 2014 a draft Constitution has been released by the SNP so as to establish the parameters of sovereignty. The drafting of a

Constitution for an independent Scotland has also gone some way to addressing some of the political issues that surround the referendum. For example, upon its release to the media, ministers highlighted its nationalist sentiment: “ Sturgeon said enshrining the sovereign will of the people gave legal meaning to the nationalists’ major complaint about the structure of the UK, where parties without a mandate from Scottish voters could make laws which affected them” (Carrell, 2014). However, the draft Constitution also stressed its adherence to both European and international law (Carrell, 2014), thus suggesting that the SNP are committed to ensuring that political links are formed with the European Union in order to prevent its isolation in the wake of independence from the Westminster political structures. Indeed, the Yes Campaign has addressed this issue on its website, stating that “ Scotland already is part of the EU – so there is no doubt that we meet all the requirements for membership, and with our energy and fishing resources it is clearly common sense, and in the interests of the EU, that Scotland’s place in the EU continues seamlessly” (Yes Scotland, 2013). This anticipated seamless transition into an independent member state of the EU is highly complex with further facets addressed by the Yes Campaign in its white paper for an independent Scotland. As such, it is necessary to take a closer look at the campaign and the arguments made within it.

The Yes Campaign

The Yes Campaign, which is also known as Yes Scotland, is the campaign established to project the side of the argument in favour of independence and is therefore promoting issues that suggest that Scotland would be better off as a sovereign nation. For example, a recent article that appeared on the

campaign's website stressed the importance of Scottish sovereignty for the future of the nation. Gilmartin (2014) stated that " Scotland's young people want to secure the best possible prospects for the future, but we don't yet have the powers we need in Scotland to create more jobs and opportunities for the younger generation here." This taps into the general belief that the Westminster government is removed from the people of Scotland, is unelected by them and therefore does not represent their best interests (McLean *et al* , 2013). In establishing a statement of need, this is designed to appeal to the generation of voters who would essentially have to endure the consequences of the outcome and would therefore underscore the need to cater for their own futures. The campaign is not just limited to targeting specific groups of voters who are likely to turn out though. Instead, it provides a multifaceted appeal that covers a whole range of interests and specifically Scottish issues. For example, the draft Constitution incorporates environmental protection issues, the needs of the Scottish islands, the safeguarding of children and the determination of income tax levels (Carrell, 2014). As such, it has been founded upon issues that are important to the Scottish people and therefore stresses the best interests of the nation.

However, the Yes Campaign has been the target of extensive criticism as a direct result of its links to the SNP, with Jacobs (2012) highlighting fears within other Scottish political parties that suggested that the Yes Campaign would be an SNP vehicle and therefore a political tool to secure power.

Although this is based upon speculation and perception rather than fact, the SNP rhetoric is inextricably linked to the campaign as a direct result of its 2011 manifesto and commitment to holding the referendum so as to achieve

Scottish independence. As such, this criticism has remained salient throughout. In addition, there has been criticism of some of the claims made by the campaign and politicians who support it. For example, Riley-Smith (2014) drew attention to criticism of the claims that Scotland would be wealthier than the UK after independence:

Prof John Kay, formerly on the First Minister's Council of Economic Advisers, said it was a "mistake" for voters to think claims of an independent Scotland being one of the world's wealthiest nations would mean more cash in their pockets. He warned that using GDP as a measure fails to reveal how much money bypasses locals by going straight to foreign companies...

Such sweeping statements are misleading and would provide a false premise for economic conditions after independence should the electorate choose to favour the yes vote. It also provides an inaccurate view of the state of the Scottish economy at the present time and how it would benefit the population. However, this is one of many issues that have been addressed by the No Campaign.

The No Campaign

The No Campaign, which is also known as the Better Together campaign, has largely been based upon the premise that Scotland enjoys major advantages because it is a part of the UK and it is likely to lose them should it choose independence. For example, the campaign points to the UK's rebate, which is worth £135 per household, as a major benefit of membership of the UK that would be lost should it seek to renegotiate with the EU's leadership in the wake of the referendum (Better Together, 2013). It has also raised questions

about the principles behind the Yes Campaign, such as its determination to retain Sterling as the currency of choice rather than joining the Euro (Scottish Government, 2013). For example, it has pointed out that there is no guarantee that Scotland will be able to remain a member of the EU if independent and neither can the government guarantee that it would not have to adopt the Euro should negotiations prove successful (Darling, 2014). As such, it challenges the hypothetical measures that the Yes Campaign has drawn attention to. It also questions the assertion that Scotland would be economically better off alone, with notable pro-UK figures highlighting that Scotland is still in economic recovery and is ill-equipped to compete in global markets on an equal footing with the UK let alone other nations (Scotland Now, 2014). However, Maxwell (2012) undermines the credibility of the figures used to draw such conclusions, stating that the data on which the No Campaign has assessed the prospects for the Scottish economy is fundamentally flawed. He states that the GERS (Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland) reports on which figures are based often utilise data that is two years old and therefore carries a warning about its accuracy in order to highlight the fact that major discrepancies may exist. Similarly, the Better Together campaign has been accused of failing to appeal to working people, who are now switching their votes to the Yes Campaign, in recent months (McAngus, 2014) and so will need to strategically rethink their appeal if it is to succeed in ensuring that Scotland remains a part of the UK.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this detailed but general overview of the Scottish independence referendum that is to be held in September 2014 effectively

highlights the historical and political background to the vote, the political implications that could arise from a vote for independence and the nature of the campaigns that have been launched for both sides of the argument. Taking the political landscape first, the analysis does identify significant issues that must be resolved if there is ultimately a yes vote, particularly the nation's membership of the European Union and international organisations like NATO. However, it is impossible for the government to be able to answer all questions related to these issues while the advent of independence is still hypothetical. No agreements can be put in place until after the referendum and so, although these problems must be considered in advance and proposals and contingency plans put forward, no negotiations can take place until afterwards. This also goes some way to explaining why the campaigns for and against Scottish independence are flawed to a degree. The debate is currently based upon perceptions, opinions and data that is several years old so it is no wonder that the issues being discussed are so contentious and spark strong feelings from both sides. Both campaigns are well organised and offer salient points but their ability to influence the vote will only be measured following the referendum. In short, the general overview of the referendum for Scottish independence to date is multifaceted and highly complex but it is also able to conclude that it will alter the political landscape of the entire international community rather than being limited to a British and European context. Relations with Scotland will change based on its own sovereignty rather than its dependence on Westminster if the electorate votes for independence. However, no matter what the outcome, the likelihood is it will be this generation's final opportunity to determine Scotland's future and so no vote should be taken lightly.

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