

The impact of political institutions

[History](#)



Devolved decision making in Scotland The United Kingdom has for centuries been controlled by the Parliament at Westminster (Calman Commission, 2009, p. 4). From 1707 until 1999, Scotland did not make decisions on its own, unlike the states in the USA. Scottish members of Parliament were accountable to the British Parliament. However, since the devolution of power in 1999, Scottish Parliament makes independent decisions with regard to legislation and execution of domestic policies concerning Scotland and requiring Scottish expertise, resembling the US political structure.

The Scottish Parliament has power to make laws, and Scottish Executive to execute them (Raco, 2003, p. 75). The Scottish Parliament is composed of 129 members of Parliament (MPs), directly elected by Scottish voters, who make laws regarding domestic issues such as crime and justice, education, health, agriculture, environment, transport, economic development and local government (Calman Commission, 2009, p. 4). The Parliament at Westminster, with 59 Scottish MPs, makes laws regarding security, foreign affairs and social security (Calman Commission, 2009, p. 4). The Scottish Executive is then in charge of enforcing these laws.

Whereas the Scottish Parliament benefits financially from the central government's money, it has no real power over its taxes. Scotland receives 60% of its spending from the British tax income (Calman Commission, 2009, p. 4). However, with regard to economic independence, Scotland is allowed to vary the basic income tax by up to 3 pence in the pound taxed (Calman Commission, 2009, p. 4). Thus, though politically independent, Scottish Treasury has no economic independence from the rest of the UK.

This dependence is historical. Scotland has always had economic ties to the rest of the country, but has constitutionally been independent (Calman

Commission, 2009, p. 5 - 6). Due to the 1707 Act of Union, Scotland was allowed to retain its own judicial and educational system. However, economy and legislature, as well as the executive branches became subject to the Parliament at Westminster (Raco, 2003, p. 80). The devolution of power is only a symmetrical copy of the historical structure of the UK before 1707. The US has a federalist system, unlike the UK. The UK is still an overwhelmingly unitary nation - state, where the central government controls everything (Vile, 2007, p. 3). The US has a federalist system with separation of power between the judiciary, legislative and executive branches (Vile, 2007, p. 3). Unlike the British system of central government, the US states only wished to share a limited amount of sovereignty with other states (Vile, 2007, p. 3).

In the US, the devolution of power that occurred in Scotland would not involve new structures, because they have always existed. Initially, the US Constitution allocated power over the issues regarding defense, foreign affairs, the control of the currency and the control over commerce among the states to the federal government (Vile, 2007, p. 4). However, state power became limited over time. Nowadays the states decide over family law, criminal law, traffic law and civil law. Though also independent to tax, federal government has higher revenues, making the states dependent on federal programs (Vile, 2007, p. 5). If the states were again to be given the same authority they had in the 18th century, when the US Constitution was created, structures would not change. Due to the federalist system, the structure of state control is quite independent of the federal system, thus not demanding many changes if the type of reform that the UK underwent were to be enacted in the US as well.

In short, the Scottish Parliament is old news to the US states. The US preserved a political system the UK had until 1707. Though the power of states has diminished significantly in the US, the institutions are still in place. Unlike the US, the UK is returning to the 18th century level of local governance. So far, the UK is only at the level it was in 1707, just before it entered the Union: Independent Scottish political system and an economy dependent on the British. It is to be seen how the Scottish economy will evolve and if it will manage to collect enough taxes to become economically independent of the Union.

References

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