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SCOTTISH REFERENDUM 2014: NOW THAT THE DREAM IS OVER, WHAT COMES NEXT?

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a) Introduction

Following a vibrant and energetic campaign, on the 18th of September 2014, the Scots have decided to stay within the United Kingdom by a margin of 55,3% against 44,7%. Even if this referendum was not a novelty in the sense that it was the third time that Scotland was facing a referendum, this referendum has been quite distinctive for its capacity to mobilize Scottish civic society, on the one hand, and to generate a broader political debate on the constitutional future of the United

Kingdom (UK), on the other. The purpose of this paper is to bring more clarity on the political debate over Scotland 's future *before* and *after* the referendum. In order to do so, we will proceed in three moments: first, we will clarify what was at stake on each side of the campaigns; second, we will identify who voted *yes* and who voted *no*. Finally, in the last part, we will highlight major political challenges regarding the political future of Scotland and the UK.

b) Better Together versus Yes Scotland: what was at stake?

The referendum procedure was triggered by the Scottish National Party (SNP) in May 2011 as soon as they reached a majority position in government. However, the political debate has been intensified as the two opposing campaigns – Yes Scotland *versus* Better Together – came into play in May and June 2012, respectively. Therefore, whereas *Yes Scotland* campaigned for the independence of Scotland and was supported by the Scottish National Party, the Scottish Green Party and the Scottish Socialists; *Better Together* campaigned for the *No* vote and was supported by the three pro-union political parties in Scotland: the Scottish Labour; the Scottish Conservative Party and the Scottish Liberal Democrats. During the campaign, all political parties have sustained distinctive nuanced propositions for Scotland. Yet, the political debate has revolved around three major issues: fiscal competences, the welfare system (NHS, pension and healthcare) and the pound.

As for the evaluation of the campaigns, we could argue that the tone and content of the two campaigns varied greatly (Mitchell 2014). In fact, whilst support-

ers of independence have offered a much more positive and imaginative message, supporters of the Union have focused on the perils of independence, on the economic uncertainties and on the problematic state of public finance in an independent Scotland. Moreover, *Yes Scotland* has offered a vision that went well beyond dry constitutionalism and did so with verve and energy whereas *Better Together* has fought a fairly conventional campaign based on expertise drawn from party election campaigns.

Additionally, Alex Salmond (SNP) has invested in grassroots campaigns in stark comparison with his opponents who have opted for a traditional campaign that has focused on the Holyrood bubble and conventional media coverage. Very seemingly, *Yes Scotland* has been remarkably confident and consistent, in spite of the many bad moments, most notably following the first debate between Alex Salmond and Alistair Darling. Furthermore, *Yes Scotland* has not panicked to the polls. It has anticipated most of the challenges and proved to be technically prepared to answer unexpected questions.

c) Scottish referendum 2014: who voted yes and who voted no?

A couple of polls have been conducted before and after the referendum. This will enable us to paint a relatively clear picture of the demography of the *Yes* and the *No* vote (Curtice 2014a). The first poll was conducted by YouGov¹ on the 18th of September and the second

exercise was undertaken by Lord Ashcroft² on the 18th and 19th of September. Both exercises allow us to confirm the presence of four patterns that were evident in the polls throughout most of the campaigns: women, older people, those in more affluent circumstances and

those who were born elsewhere in the UK were all relatively reluctant to vote *Yes*.

According to the Ashcroft poll, 47% of men voted *Yes*, compared with 44% of women. In a similar manner, YouGov's figures are closer to those averages, with 51% of men voting yes and only 42% of women. Additionally, the two polls break down their respondents by age rather differently, but both identify a big difference between the voting preferences of older voters and the rest of the population. Indeed, just 27% of those aged 65 and over voted *Yes*, while only 53% of the 33-44 year old, 59% of 25-34 years old and 52% of those in

the 16-24 age group voted *Yes*.

Moreover, according to YouGov, only 26% of those who were born in England, Wales or Northern Ireland voted *Yes*, little more than half the equivalent figure (49%) amongst those born in Scotland. In contrast, the division of the vote amongst those who were born outside the UK was much less distinctive, with 41% saying they voted *Yes*. Finally, the level of *Yes* support was strongly correlated with the level of unemployment. Indeed, in areas with relatively high unemployment, *Yes* support averaged 51%; whereas in those with low levels of unemployment it reached 39%.

d) Now that the dream is over, what comes next?

Now that the *no* vote has won, all three UK parties have pledged to strengthen devolution, and are now committed to doing so through a cross-party process under the auspices of the Smith Commission³. That process includes the SNP, and involves engagement with civic Scotland. For the time being, the political parties in Scotland have begun to submit their proposals on further devolution. In terms of what the SNP have proposed, there are no surprises: although the party has accepted Scotland's place in the UK (at least for now), the party still wishes to see the devolution of almost all taxation and welfare powers to the Scottish Parliament. On the other hand, Labour and the Conservatives have come to an agreement over income tax and welfare devolution. Furthermore, reports suggest that Labour have accepted the full devolution of income tax, a red line for the Conservatives, in return for concessions on welfare.

Meanwhile, the SNP has witnessed a dramatic upsurge in party membership – from 25,642 on referendum day to 75,000 (and rising) within two weeks – far higher than all other Scottish parties put together (Cairney 2014). In the coming months, the SNP will seek to redefine the terms of the 'devo max' debate (McEwen 2014), and try to push their competitors further than they have been willing to go. Going forward, we can expect the SNP to revert to the gradualist strategy that has dominated the party's recent history, pursuing a more incremental path towards greater Scottish

self-government, with independence remaining the medium to long term goal.

When it comes to Scottish public opinion, a recent panel base poll (Curtice 2014b; McAngus 2014) commissioned by the SNP found that 66% of respondents wanted the commission to produce 'devo max' and thus something very similar to the SNP's submitted proposals. The poll also found 75% in favor of Scotland having control over welfare and 71% in favor of Scotland controlling all taxation. Very seemingly, the 2013 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey (Scottish Government Social Research 2014) corroborate these findings, which means that Scottish voters want Scotland to retain its membership of the Union, but to have almost complete ownership of its revenue and welfare system. Ironically, this is not that far from the version of independence that the SNP has offered in 2007-2009 as part of the National Conversation.

On the political side, some would argue that federalism is the political solution for the UK but for Michael Keating (2014), federalism is a constitutional recipe that is quite difficult to map onto the United Kingdom for three main reasons: first, federalism requires two orders of governments, the federal government and the federated units that should have entrenched powers guaranteed by a written constitution (which is not the case in the UK); second, the federated units should be represented at the center through a second chamber or senate as it happens in the United States, and to some degree,

in Germany; third, there should be a fiscal mechanism for sharing money – a fiscal equalization principle, as it happens in Belgium - that should be agreed among all federated entities (which is far from being the case in the UK where the current fiscal solution implemented with devolution - the Barnett formula - is highly contested by England and Wales).

To put it differently, federalism would imply a radical reform of British political system. In other words, it would mean entrenching the Scottish Parliament, finding similar arrangements in Wales and Northern

Ireland as well as listening to people in England, that is, addressing the West Lothian question. Finally, on top of these arguments, according to Michael Keating, there is no federation in the world in which one unit - England - has 85% of the population and wealth. To conclude, we could argue that even if federalism will not accommodate Scotland within the UK, it should be used as a guide to inspire British and Scottish governments to solve the complicated and overlapping problems in the United Kingdom.

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2. Official documents

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Endnotes

1. For further information, see the following link: <http://yougov.co.uk/publicopinion/archive/10934/> consulted on the 20th of September 2014.
2. For further information, see the following link: <http://lordashcroftpolls.com/2014/09/scotland-voted/> consulted on the 20th of September 2014.
3. David Cameron has decided to set up the Smith Commission on the 19th of September 2014, on the aftermath of the referendum. Lord Smith of Kelvin was given the task to convene cross-party talks and facilitate an inclusive engagement process across Scotland to produce, by 30 November 2014, Heads of Agreement with recommendations for further devolution of powers to the Scottish Parliament. The recommendations will deliver more financial, welfare and taxation powers and will strengthen the Scottish Parliament within the United Kingdom.