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Scottish Devolution: A Slippery Path towards Consensus Democracy?

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The University of Tokyo

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to show how constitutional change has come to realisation in Britain by focusing on Scottish devolution and also to point out that, in spite of many changes occurring in the British party system and structures, as well as regional government framework, the British political system will not alter until consensus on majoritarian decision-making is further eroded. This paper is divided into three parts: the first part will discuss the merits and demerits of consensus democracy. The second part will examine the progress of Scottish devolution historically and critically review conventional hypotheses about devolution. The last part will highlight one of these hypotheses that focuses on social cleavage and party system change in Britain in order to elucidate the constitutional constraint the British political system has on a much stronger impact on reforms. In this paper, Scottish devolution is focused on because it sheds light on a process of how the majoritarian system operates and has led to a constitutional change, primarily by the active roles played by the two major parties. Scottish devolution and yet unaccomplished electoral reforms for parliament in Westminster are in sharp contrast. Both arguments for fairer representation and more direct democracy started to come to political fore in the 1960s and only the latter has been seriously taken up by the Labour party, since post-war consensus between Conservative and Labour party about constitutional frameworks and economic management was broken down in the late 1970s and only when the party got back to power in 1997, devolution scheme was eventually implemented. It has taken almost twenty years to fulfill this goal. However, this still does not automatically result in consolidating the way towards consensus democracy. In conclusion, Britain still constitutes the majoritarian model even today, although there is some scope for change.

Introduction

In the work of Lijphart (1984, 1999), consensus democracy is presented as a fairer and gentler model of democracy than majoritarian democracy. As shown in Table 1 below, consensus democracy features executive power-sharing in broad multi-party coalitions, proportional representation and federal or decentralised government. On the contrary, majoritarian democracy represents a concentration of executive power, and a two-party system with unitary and centralised government. Britain is one of the best examples of the majoritarian democracy, classified along with New Zealand. Nonetheless, even in these countries, dramatic changes can be observed. In New Zealand, electoral reforms were carried out and it has since 1993 moved away from a simple plurality-rule to a German-style additional member system. In Britain, one of the big changes was devolving powers to regional governments, most remarkably seen in Scotland. Along with this devolution scheme, new and various electoral rules were introduced, although restricted only to secondary elections. With this constitutional reform, Britain may be at best regarded as a remnant of majoritarian democracy. However, will it transform itself into a ‘gentler’ type of democracy in line with many other European countries? The answer still remains to be seen.

\(^1\) I use ‘consensus’ here as a different terminology from ‘consensus’ politics in the post-World War Two Britain, as Kavanagh and Morris employ it to describe substantive agreements between the major two parties, exemplified in ‘Burkellism’.
Table 1. The ten variables that differentiate the consensus model from the majoritarian model.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Majoritarian Model</th>
<th>The Consensus Model</th>
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<tr>
<td>Concentration of executive power in single-party majority cabinets.</td>
<td>Executive power-sharing in broad multi-party coalitions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive &gt; legislative.</td>
<td>Executive-legislative balance of power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-party system.</td>
<td>Multi-party system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majoritarian and disproportionate electoral system.</td>
<td>Proportional representation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pluralist interest group systems with free-for-all competition.</td>
<td>Coordinated and “corporatist” interest group systems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The federal-unitary dimension</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Unitary and centralised government.</td>
<td>Federal and decentralised government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concentration of legislative power in a unicameral legislature.</td>
<td>Division of legislative power between two equally strong but differently constituted houses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible constitutions (simple majorities).</td>
<td>Rigid constitutions (extraordinary majorities).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systems in which legislatures have the final word on the constitutionality of their own legislation.</td>
<td>Systems in which laws are subject to a judicial review of their constitutionality by supreme or constitutional courts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central banks controlled by the executive.</td>
<td>Independent central banks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples: Britain, NZ and Barbados.</td>
<td>Examples: Switzerland, Belgium and the EU.</td>
</tr>
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(lijphart, 1999: 3-4.)

With this question in mind, this paper will begin by questioning the value-ridden term ‘consensus democracy’ as a form of fairer and gentler democracy, and then argue that the Westminster model has worked well under the British postwar ‘consensus’. Among other issues, Scottish devolution has long been contended in British politics and has always had constitutional implications, although Irish problems have been predominant and posed more serious problems. All major British parties have contested the constituency in Scotland, in contract to Northern Ireland where the Labour party renounced this in 1918. Conventional theses explaining the rise of Scottish nationalist movements have overlooked or underestimated this effect of the constitutional element. The Scottish problem is not solely about ethno-nationalism, but also about how the British state is structured.

To compare but also clarify the characteristics of the politics of constitutional reform, the case of Belgium is provided. Then, the institutional settings both for protecting distinct Scottish identity and for bringing up the Scottish issues on a national level by national parties will be focused on. Furthermore, social cleavage and Scottish identity thesis is also discussed in relation to changing party politics in Britain. Lastly, prospects for the transformation of the British political system into a more consensus model will be briefly discussed. Today, with the new set-up of asymmetrical structure of regional and local governments, it has become highly difficult for central decision-makers to predict outcomes, as institutional changes have brought about unforeseen results with more actors and new posts and channels. To tackle this situation, centralisation in the cabinet decision-making is now being reinforced under the leadership of Blair while simultaneously decentralising membership and selecting leaders in political parties (Foley, 2000; Heffernan, 2001). The mixture of trends towards centralisation and decentralisation symbolizes this wavering situation, which is peculiar to the majoritarian model in transition.

**Consensus versus Majoritarian democracies**

The term ‘democracy’ is a combined word from the Greek ‘demos’ and ‘kratos’, meaning the rule of the citizen body together. Thus, liberal democracy naturally means a representative government by majority rule, but not equal to majority tyranny (Dunleavy and O’Leary, 1987: 6). Dahl (1953) tags a regime as polyarchy, which admits comparatively high tolerance of opposition to check the government’s arbitrary orientations, and simultaneously guarantees popular responsiveness. Despite his original differentiation of polyarchy from democracy, polity in practice is closer to his definitions in its democratic forms due to the impeccability of meeting the criteria in a strict sense.
In this light, Sartori (1994) is right in claiming that government should fulfill two functions at the same time: representation and responsibility. (Sartori, 1994: 72) He also rightly contends that ‘consensus’ democracy does not constitute itself a ‘model’ to be followed by any societies, for there are a variety of degrees and qualities in ‘consensus’. Unlike his earlier work on consociational democracies, Lijphart (1999) utilises a combined statistical-institutional analysis, of which indices all seem convincing enough to differentiate the two models. Consociational democracies are displayed here as one of the best examples of consensus democracies, nonetheless with other less clear-cut examples, such as Italy and Japan. His arguments fail to prove the linkage between consensus-procurement and the quality of democracy, whilst Sartori more clearly presents the meaning of democracy, and the role of the government. He underlines the importance of sustaining the checks and balances in the system, and it should be upheld by a competitive party system.

Sartori (1994) argues that ‘grand coalitions obscure responsibility’ and that ‘dispersal of power executive and legislative easily becomes a messy and wasteful confusion of power; and a dispersal of power across several minority parties adds profusion to confusion.’ He further emphasises that ‘to admit the minority veto as a major and normal means of limiting power is to admit a shuddering principle.’ (1994: 71) For all his arguments, nevertheless, I would regard them as too constitutional and theoretical. If Lijphart overweighs the importance of representation and the right of the minority, Sartori seems to lean too much towards responsible and competitive aspects of democracy.

In fact, both types (consensus and majoritarian democracies) should be inclusive of ‘consensus’ to a certain degree to be qualified as legitimate democracies. By employing the argument of Dahl, Held (1996; 207) remarks that ‘while majorities rarely, if ever, rule, there is an important sense in which they none the less “govern”; that is, determine the framework within which policies are formulated and administered.’ Thus, the denomination of consensus democracy is somehow misleading, and should be redefined when being put to test. Through refining the concept of consensus, it becomes clearer that Sartori’s support for majoritarian democracies cannot be sustained. In the next section, the concept of ‘consensus’ is divided into two; systemic and substantive, which challenges Sartori’s attack on consensus democracies.

Two types of ‘Consensus’

The first one is systemic, in other words, procedural consensus, which means the population of the community agrees over the framework of the decision-making and administration process. The second one is substantive consensus, in which the people within the national border share the goal of policies, and thus performance of the governing party matters more than who governs and how it is governed. If the second definition were employed to measure how consensus is widely achieved, especially in societies with a large number of clear cleavage lines, then results would be very different because different communities tend to have distinctive goals i.e. maximising their interests in terms of representation or policy outcomes. Exceptions when substantive consensus can be found in consensus countries such as Belgium are during and right after World War Two. Even among majoritarian democracies, Britain had a wartime coalition government, and sought to achieve the same goal, getting over the class conflict. Moreover, ‘consensus’ persisted in the post-war period over many issues such as welfare-providing public services and the special diplomatic relationship with the U.S. However, as far as ordinary public policies are concerned, democracy with a mechanism of encouraging and accommodating oppositional ideas is never disposed to achieve substantive consensus in any society.

With regard to the systemic consensus, if the normative theory of democracy is to be applied here, this type of consensus should not vary greatly from one polity to another, however, given the fact that nation-state system has developed along different historical paths, the degree is absolutely distinct both of necessity and in consequence of social conditions. In conflict-laden societies like Northern Ireland, the systemic consensus is hardly to be achieved in reality, as seen in recent series of critical events (The Economist, September 8th 2001: 31). Paradoxically, it can thus be explained
why many authoritarian or autocratic countries chose majoritarian forms in their transition to democracies. (Lijphart, 1999: 305; Lipset, 1994: 9-10) The political community has to go through several steps to gain systemic consensus, further fostering substantive consensus.

Consensus democracy in practice

As Belgium and Britain are the best examples that Lijphart (1999) and Sartori (1994) both acknowledge as ‘consensus’ and ‘majoritarian’ democracies, I also utilise the case of Belgium and Britain respectively as a test case. Here, I attempt to testify that ‘consensus’ democracies are not products of constitutional engineering to the tastes of the minority but outcomes of the constant and conscientious efforts of the elites, and the associational confidence-building process on the society level. Therefore the logic of the consensus democracies still entails conflicting interests and adversarial aspects between the camps.

Belgium was a unitary state until 1993, even though the constitutional reform in 1970 had introduced linguistic communities (Gemeenschap/Communauté) and regions (Gewest/Région). Regional identities were long manifested and reflected in their sub-culture groups called pillars (zuil/famille spirituelle) (Huyse, 1970; Lijphart, 1977). The process towards the federal state was left on one side, because the major political parties considered radical reform as a risky road towards separation of the Belgian nation. As Horowitz argues, federalism has a merit because it encourages intra-ethnic conflict within provinces, thus allowing for cross-cutting cleavages (1985: 598). As a single factor of consensus democracy, federalism is neither a conflict-resolvable nor centrifugal measure.

Hooghe (1991: 101) argues that the ‘struggle for resources and control within and between political actors results in a national political project, which I defined as a solidified set of central national goals, rules and institutions which prescribe relations between the national groups and between the political actors and regulate in general terms the competition for resources’. But simultaneously, she emphasises that the case of Belgian federation scheme has had more to do with identity and symbols than rational political actors’ choices. It is clearly indicated here that federalisation was based on the legacy of past politics, rules and institutions. Here this case casts a doubt upon the pure relationship between consensus and federal or decentralised structures when it comes to constitutional reforms.

The case of Britain also proves that the constitutional reform towards the consensus model is not designed for the tastes of the minority (Qvortrup, 2001). The next section will seek to present this by examining the process based on conventional theses.

‘Devolution is a process, not an event.’ (Davies, 1999)

Since 1999, Scotland has been officially, although limitedly, governed through its own ‘parliament’ with tax-varying power, that has more control compared to the ‘assembly’ in Wales. Within the structure of the British constitution, ‘parliamentary’ democracy is the backbone, and thus the term ‘parliament’ itself is of great importance. Devolution also marks its special feature that distinguishes itself from the process of decentralisation. Those two keywords indicate what significance the scheme has had, not only for Scotland but also for the United Kingdom as a whole. Looking back on the history of Scottish nationalism, it becomes clear that there were almost a hundred years of continual movements and gradual developments towards the regional government. In this sense, nationalists would argue that the Blair administration simply put it into effect and re-erected the parliament.

This part is intended to analyse and evaluate three main hypotheses for explaining why Scotland has long wanted to have its own parliament, and why devolution movements gained momentum since the 1960s. The first explanation is based on economic underdevelopment theory, that is to say, internal colonialism hypothesis. The second hypothesis emphasises the effect of the long...
Conservative era under the Thatcher administration. Thirdly, it has been interpreted through political party and social cleavage hypothesis, which is to be tested through the concept of consensus/majoritarian democracy provided by Lijphart (1984). Britain has been considered as a classic case of the two-party majoritarian system, where the oppositional power cannot easily maximise their influence even when democratic deficits are detected and called for. Indeed, although the Liberals as the third party have long carried the banner of the party of constitutional change including the introduction of proportional representation electoral rule, it could not implement them.

These three hypotheses have explanatory powers respectively, but should be critically examined from comparative perspectives to fully understand the causes and differences from other nationalism movements, especially in advanced capitalist democracies. Lastly, I would argue that Scottish identity has been juxtaposed closely with the development of its own institutions, and thereby is highly embedded in the majoritarian British system, even the emergence of the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP). In sum, one of the two major parties, the Labour party, was the key to devolution within the British majoritarian system.

**Scottish nationalism and internal colonialism theory**

To begin with, it should be necessary to demarcate the origin of Scottish nationalism movements. Since the closure of the Scottish parliament in 1707, despite several tumults and riots over the sovereignty and the throne, there had been a relatively tranquil period until the end of the nineteenth century. In 1886, the Irish Home Rule Bill raised by the then Liberal leader Gladstone caused the party split, bringing forth the Liberal Unionist Party. One year before in 1885, the Scottish Home Rule Association (SHRA) was established, being spurred by its counterpart in Ireland. Around those times, Scottish Secretary and Scottish Office were set up to appease all. Political parties in Scotland can also be discovered in the foundation of Scottish Labour and Land Leagues, the British Socialist Party, and one remarkable example is the Scottish Labour Party, formed by one of the founding fathers of the Labour party, Keir Hardie. The party later moved into the south of the border, to reorganise the Independent Labour Party (ILP) in Bradford. ILP lead the Scottish labour union movement, which developed independently in Scotland until its merger with the Labour Representation Committee in 1908. (Morgan, 1989: 32; Marquand, 1977: 87) Therefore, the end of the nineteenth century unfolded with the dawn of Scottish nationalism movements.

The second big wave came during and after World War One. Nonetheless, when the Irish problems were ended unilaterally with its separation from the British constituency and constitutional agenda, the complex mixture of labour and Scottish home rule movements were left unattended and the issue was shelved as far less significant than the Irish one. In the 1920s, a new form of political party was formed in Scotland. Together with defectors from the Independent Labour Party, Scottish Home Rule Association, and some minor organisations, the National Party of Scotland came into being in 1928, later transforming itself into a more moderate party, SNP in 1934. (Finlay, 1994: 4; Brand, 1978: 302)

In the post World War Two period, ‘consensus’ politics was designed to unify Great Britain as one political entity, including the devolved Northern Ireland, on the basis of strong external ties with the Commonwealth and the United States on one hand, and internally nationalised welfare policies under the centralised majority rule on the other (Kavanagh and Morris, 1989; Mishra, 1984; Le Grand, 1985). However, the third wave rushed in when the regional economy faced difficulties and could not remedied by the nationalisation of declining heavy industries in the mid-1960s (Surrey, 1987: 249-68).

Hechter (1975) employed the term ‘internal colonialism’ to describe the position of Scotland in parallel with Ireland, and to explain the rise of its nationalism movements. This theory posits that Scotland has long been exploited economically and the structure is fixed into the internal system. But only a few facts reveal that this is not true. Scottish people were not unified as one nation...
originally and were divided into two ethnically and geographically different groups, Lowlanders and Highlanders. The internal system was administered not by the English, but the Lowlanders themselves (Harvie, 1977: 50). A recent issue of the Economist carried an article about how the Scottish parliament is seeking and failing to ‘mobilize the 5.4m Americans who claim Scottish descent’ (The Economist, October 20th 2001: 37). It explains the differences between Scottish and Irish emigrants, by remarking that the Irish tend to perceive themselves as forced into exile by the English, whilst the Scots left voluntarily, and positively participated in the overseas expansion of the British state (Gamble, 1981: 47). Despite the external lukewarm support, the internal voice for devolution never ceased. The tables below call into question the sole explanation in terms of economic exploitation and underdevelopment. The reason why Scotland has a higher devolution desire index with a relatively lower score on unemployment rate than the North and Wales is not clear. The figure of GDP per capita also shows that the economic standard of the North East is worse than that of Scotland. (See the figures below on the next page.)

**The effect of the Thatcher administration**

The second hypothesis is widely supported by many scholars (Ashford, 1984; Rhodes, 1994; Butcher, 1990). Under the banner of ‘small state and strong state’, Thatcher aimed at rolling back welfare services and cutting down on local spending. Being put together with increasingly disparate voting behaviour between the borders, unpopularity with Thatcherite reforms culminated in protests against the introduction of the poll tax in Scotland. In the 1980s, the series of events triggered the joint political schemes, one of which was the Scottish Constitutional Convention, initiated by Labour and the Liberal Democrats, which finally led to the agreement upon proportional representation (additional member system; AMS) in a devolved parliament. However pervasive the effect of the long Conservative rule under Thatcher might have been, the principal effect was to dismantle the consensus over many issues including the unitary-majoritarian state structure.

**Fig 1. Correlational map of unemployment rate and devolution index**

(X: Unemployment rate, Y: Desire for devolution %)

![Map](Miller et al., 1977: 87.)
Social cleavage thesis and party politics

The Third hypothesis is closely related to social cleavages and party politics. As mentioned earlier, the SNP emerged as a consolidator of peripheral, ethnical cleavages of British politics (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). In this theory, the success of the 1997 referendum, compared to the failed one in 1979, can be attributed to the resonance of class and centre-periphery cleavages (Denver et al., 2000). For all these seemingly persuasive accounts, the core feature of Scottish nationalism and devolution movements is absent due to the fact that its emphasis is not so much on political actors and the political structure as on social conditions, especially when the attachment of party identity and cleavage seems to be remotely connected.

Nonetheless, as party politics is considered to be the key factor in reopening the Scottish parliament, it is necessary to reserve room for defining the relationship between cleavage and party change. In general terms, party systems in West European countries can no longer be seen as stable. This statement has been widely supported by a number of scholars such as Inglehart (1984), and Flanagan and Dalton (1984), although interpretations of this trend and its cause vary greatly from one to another. There are two generally accepted strands for understanding this phenomenon. One is to argue that cleavage structure, which has formed the basis of the traditional party system, is unfrozen, and thus the system itself is naturally realigned (Franklin et al. 1992). The extreme case against the original freezing hypothesis is given by Shamir, claiming that ‘party systems cannot be regarded as stable and surely not as frozen’. (1984: 70) The other strand is to contend that the post-materialist values have started taking a new shape, realigning the party constellation. Inglehart (1971) first introduced the concept of new politics underpinned by post-materialist values. Although it is clear that this new politics results in the decline of old cleavages, scholars such as Smith (1976) emphasise that old cleavages are not so much wiped away as the new materialist/post-materialist cleavage is superimposed upon them.
In sharp contrast with these interpretations, Mair (1983), later in collaboration with Bartolini (1990), argues that even today there is a strong cleavage structure, which decides voting behaviours and thus party system as a whole, especially in the long term. Whether or not their argument is more persuasive, it can be seen that both party and party system have indeed gone through a destabilising period and to acknowledge the need to further analyse the linkage between social cleavage and party system. However, the difficulty of not just measuring but specifying both cleavage and party change remains persistent. In this respect, Mair (1997) succinctly explains how difficult it is to define what the ‘essence’ or ‘identity’ of a given political party is the very core of which makes the problem intractable. He asserts that it is inevitable to ‘restrict ourselves to a discussion of change in certain aspects of the party rather than of change in the party “tout court”, whilst in terms of party system change, we can ‘identify an essence of what constitutes any given party system and thereby to determine whether that system has changed’ (Mair, 1997: 51). Nevertheless, if the puzzle of the linkage is to be unraveled, it is hardly possible to avoid touching upon this problem of party change per se.

Given the concern here, this section is only to show that cleavage and party system change have to be separately examined. In doing so, the process towards the flux of the party system since the 1970s, exactly when the distinct Scottish political system started to emerge (see Fig. 3 below), is analysed by recapitulating the definition of party change and cleavage change. Then, the emergence of new parties and party structure are briefly mentioned in describing the changing nature of political parties. It is contended that as the definition of cleavage shows, cleavage change is highly constrained by the constitutional framework, including electoral systems and corresponding reactions of the electorate. Therefore, a gradual change of cleavage could be observed, yet party system change has more to do with institutional mechanism and inter-party competitions over votes and their recognition as a legitimate office-holder. Until dramatic institutional change is brought about, or at least institutions are called into question at critical junctures, the direct influence from cleavage change is merely subtle, while the size of the void that the political system creates determines the party system change and its direction. Thus, the realisation of devolution schemes clearly shows that the procedural consensus in Britain (i.e. Westminster model) is indeed called into question, but at the same time it is designed to contain the effects of different working mechanisms by diversifying and effectuating various electoral systems only within each territory.

Fig 3. General election result comparison between England and Scotland (1945-2001)
The gap between cleavage and party system

Cleavage is defined as ‘the criteria which divide the members of a community or subcommunity into groups, and the relevant cleavages are those which divide into groups with important political differences at specific times and places’ (Rae and Taylor, 1970: 1). Following their definition, political cleavages cover a wide range from ethnic traits to behavioural characteristics such as voting and organisational membership. As Bartolini (2000) asserts, cleavage is in itself unorganised but closed and stable because of its entailment of the organisational dimension. Here is a paradox when the concept of cleavage is used to analyse the unfreezing process and the party system change. Firstly, the essential problem here rests with the concept of cleavage presented by Lipset and Rokkan (1967), for it is only applicable to explain the complex processes (i.e. mobilisation, politicisation, democratisation) of the formation of political parties, and the emergence of a static political stability, but has never sufficiently explained the formation and consolidation of party systems. Thus, the linkage is unclear even at the stage of freezing. Secondly, once the cleavage is enshrined within the political system, institutions acquire their own dynamics and inertia. Therefore, cleavage should be distinguished from identity or a sense of class, which could lead to cleavage formation but not necessarily when the society is fluid. It can thus be maintained that it is of less relevance to employ this comprehensive concept of cleavage to look at systemic and relational change of cleavage and political party under relatively stable constitutional arrangements. On this standpoint, the cleavage in this paper is considered to be closely and indivisibly related to the established political system by the 1960s. For further analysis, more basic units such as values and attitudes, which are generally composed of party loyalty, should be taken into account.

With regards to the definition of political party and party system, a political party features two characteristics in the terminology of Ware (1996). It is ‘an institution that seeks influence in a state, often through maintenance of representation in government, and usually consists of more than a single interest in the society’ (Ware 1996:5). Thus, parties are ideally regarded as groupings of people with similar beliefs, attitudes and values. Party system is defined by Sartori (1976) as the “system of interaction resulting from inter-party competition” (1976:44). The relationship between political parties and party system in each country is normally observed and calculated through the results of a series of elections and party behaviours in government-formation.

Here the gap between cleavage and party system can be found, and changes in both elements have to be separately dealt with. Hereafter, the discrepancy between one’s political orientation and social group is investigated since the 1970s. Where detachment is on the increase, social cleavage can be judged to be realigned, and have lost its retaining power. As the linkage is severed with the emergence of new parties, it is demonstrated that parties are now in crisis and obliged to entrench their position on the electoral arena. This explains the unseen reason why Scottish devolution came...
to become a political agenda once again and this time with so much enthusiasm.

**Party system change in Britain**

Having seen this rather unsettling situation for political parties, the party system and the cleavage structure in Britain have been considered to be highly stable and robust, particularly in terms of seats in parliament (Marshall, 1988; Hames, 1998). Given the plurality rule as the major backbone, both the parties and the electorate (i.e. strategic voting) have maintained the two-and-a-half party system for over fifty years. This was the hallmark even after latent regional conflicts emerged in the periphery in the late 1960s. Consequently, both the two major parties and the electorate have nurtured this traditional anomaly in Europe and the Commonwealth countries. Even though in 1997 the majority of ICM poll respondents were in favour of electoral reform to achieve higher proportionality in the government, the independent commission (chaired by Lord Jenkins) is the only product the government has so far provided (Dunleavy and Margetts, 1997: 240). Nevertheless, it might be the case that neither social cleavage changes nor the electoral system was responsible for the stability of altering the two-bloc party system.

Fig 4. Britain: General Election Results (1966-2001)

Thus, the hypothesis that cleavage structure is still strong enough to underlay the party system is doubtful, especially as various dramatic changes can be identified in such areas as party membership, volatility and class voting at the advent of new parties. Mair (1990: 185) himself also admitted a declining sense of partisan solidarity. Put differently, the overall stability of party system can be explained by the system itself equipped with its own dynamics under the constitutional settings, as long as parties retain ‘its monopoly of parliamentary representation, and through this, of majority building on issues of high salience to the voter.’ (Borre, 1984: 362)

On the societal level, the steady decline of party membership as a percentage of the electorate is recorded. This fact clearly reveals a tendency of losing or dwindling of traditional linkage function between the society and the parties, although in Britain it is never evidently reflected in the votes and the seats in parliament because of the electoral rule. All three nation-wide parties have suffered from party membership loss, and the example of Labour illustrates this situation very well. Individual membership ‘has fallen by two-thirds with respect to 1960 levels, and corporate and total membership by 16 per cent and 22 per cent respectively’ (Webb, 1994: 114). For both Labour and Conservative parties, the downward trend poses a serious problem, given it has brought about detachment of the partisan allegiance. Although the partisan identity on the whole has scarcely dwindled since the 1960s, strong allegiance has radically declined from 44 per cent to 16 per cent (Webb, 2000: 151). Class is no longer seen as a reliable predictor of any individual’s party preference (Norris, 1990: 127; Hames, 1998: 24). Within the context of the British constitutional
framework, it can be pointed out that the two major parties have still wider room for adaptation. Nonetheless, inside the parties cohesiveness is being eroded (Strøm, 1990; Laver, 1999). The organisational reforms in both parties portray their conscientious endeavours to adapt themselves to unstable situations (Norton and Wood, 1990; McSweeney, 1999). Indeed the introduction of plebiscitarian internal decision-making combined with electoral-professional party (Panebianco, 1988: 262) is symbolic of Labour’s strategy (Seyd, 1999: 385). Lipow and Seyd (1996) assert that the Labour Party has been successful in directly putting forward options to mass members in order to bypass the conventional formal decision-making process, although it failed in the sense that the decentralising trend (i.e. devolution) has started to evade central control. The candidate selection of Ken Livingston as Mayor of London, the resignation of Scottish First Minister, Henry McLeish and the new appointee Jack McConnell are only a few examples.

The emergence of new parties has been an issue although it does not necessarily signify destabilisation of the party system. Yet it implies not solely potential cleavages or the rise of new issues, but also the height of the threshold for electoral arena and the cost of formation, which is to illustrate a representation problem. Table 3 shows the number of emerging new parties among 15 democracies.

Table 3. Number of new parties in 15 democracies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Total number</th>
<th>Mean number</th>
<th>Number of elections</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>13 (1949-90)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.07</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>29</td>
<td>2.42</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>14</td>
<td>0.74</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>12</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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</tr>
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<td>24</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>11 (1951-88)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>21</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>11 (1953-90)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>6 (1977-90)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1.23</td>
<td>13 (1951-89)</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>14 (1952-91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>10 (1952-88)</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*New parties include both genuinely new parties and fissions (Hug, 2001: 86)

Hug (2001) classifies the credible and non-credible challengers, denying the correlation between post-materialism and the emergence of new political parties. In Britain, since the 1970s, new parties are all counted among credible challengers. Once the plurality rule is replaced, the whole constellation will undoubtedly be changed.

**Institution-based nationalism in Scotland**

In comparing consensus and majoritarian systems and finding similarities between processes taken towards decentralisation in Belgium and Britain in the first part, it can be pointed out that however strong Thatcher’s effects were, or however furious the opposing group grew, the initiatives of one of the major two-parties were inevitable and highly essential in implementing this constitutional change. As a result, Scottish devolution is neither a product of direct response to Scottish electorates nor was intended to favour the minority.

So the question arises as to why the Labour Party took up the issue as one of its main agenda in the 1997 manifesto. It can be clarified by looking at the election results in Fig. 3. The Scottish electorate
had become more and more supportive of Labour even before Thatcher came to power. However, as I mentioned earlier, this does not solely explain contradicting trend towards decentralisation taken under the New Labour government, which is apt to centralise the executive power.

The Labour party chose the devolution agenda to distinguish itself from the Conservatives, because otherwise, their neo-liberal policies looked indiscernible to the electorate. Thus, a degree of political strategy can be found here, nonetheless if the Scottish issue, as one distinct problem, has not been long contested, there was no need to risk the break-up of Britain, as Nairn (1977) suggests. Aforementioned arguments and history in the second part of this paper present how the Scottish devolution movement itself was enmeshed into the British political system. Its own legal system, great philosophers from the Enlightenment era, Calvinist church, and educational system have been intact and used as tokens of the Scottish identity. However, the rise and fall of identity-assertiveness is highly dependent on the fate of Britain as a whole. This captured institution-based identity quite paradoxically makes it robust and resilient to this date and differentiates it from cultural-linguistic based Welsh nationalism, which could explain the variation of measures taken in both regions.

Still the majoritarian model?

Other constitutional issues, most remarkably the single members plurality (SMP) system, have been contested and scrutinised but not yet to come to fruition. This issue has more direct impact on the constitutional and political system as a whole, involving inter-and intra-party politics. It is no puzzle why the first-past-the-post electoral system has been maintained throughout years, despite repeatedly manifested criticism against it (Fine, 1975, 1980; Marquand, 1988; Reeve and Ware, 1992; Anckar, 1997; Gallagher, Laver and Mair, 2001).

However, since the 1990s, the process became more complex and offers more opportunities with new channels opened up for negotiation and more participation from so-called social partners (e.g. EC Council Regulation) Yet, in conclusion, the breakaway from ‘consensus’ back to ‘adversarial’ politics in Britain has marked the new era for Scottish devolution. It still remains to be seen if this devolutionary scheme will lead the British system to a federally structured ‘consensus’ model in the long term, or rather push Scotland out of the union in the end. In any case, since the entry of Britain into European Community in 1973 Britain has undergone gradual political and constitutional changes and its political parties have sought to adapt themselves to new situations in the era of withering partisanship. By highlighting the linkage between regional governance change and constitutional reform, it becomes clearer that regardless of the quality of democracy, constitutional issues are divisive as much as those on European integration now that Thatcherite thinking has dominated the two major parties’ economic ideas. This new ‘consensus’ has in turn undermined the old constitutional ‘consensus’ between the two parties, but still left the core of majoritarian rule of the game intact. All this indicates that making and breaking consensus has pushed Britain a way forward to being a consensus democracy, but rather reluctantly and not completely.

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