

THE NATIONAL

THE NEWSPAPER THAT SUPPORTS AN INDEPENDENT SCOTLAND



WHY SCOTLAND'S VOICE WILL NEVER BE HEARD IN THE UK

IT'S the simplest thing in the world, just an X marked in a box.

But the act of voting is also a way to stand up and be counted, to make your voice heard.

And the result of an election is an expression of people power.

But these results also contain complexities and contradictions – with myths and misunderstandings surrounding them.

Today, as part of our ongoing Big Enough, Rich Enough, Smart Enough campaign, The National examines Scotland's place in the UK electoral system.

Over eight pages, we'll examine how your vote fits in to the Westminster picture, and what that means for our country.

Scotland does NOT get

It is an off-repeated idea – Scotland can swing the result of a UK General Election.

Over successive contests, voters here have been told that they can keep the wolves from the door of 10 Downing Street and protect the UK public from the worst a government can do.

Who those wolves are, of course, depends on which party you ask.

But the parties that make this claim tend to have one thing in common, which is support for the Union.

Labour, the Tories and the LibDems have all appealed to

Scottish voters for help in securing UK-wide majorities.

There's just one problem with that – Scotland's public does not cast the deciding vote.

This country doesn't have a veto on who enters Downing Street, or some magical ability to override UK electoral maths – if it did, do you think we'd have seen Brexit happen or let Boris Johnson unpack his bags?

The fact is that Scotland seldom gets the UK government it votes for.

As SNP support has grown



across the years, its base has been the target of much of this “lead the UK” messaging, urged by successive Labour campaigns not to let the Tories in “through the back door”.

The suggestion is that voting SNP plays into a Tory victory. (That's clearly nonsense – the SNP would not put a Tory Prime Minister into power, so the path to a majority for Boris Johnson is completely unaffected.)

Scotland has only returned SNP majorities in a UK contest twice – 2015's 56-MP landslide and the smaller sum of 35 in the snap 2017 race. However, Scots did

back Labour at every Westminster election between 1959 and 2015.

And during that near 60-year spell Labour governments were returned on only seven occasions. When that happened it wasn't the force of the Scottish vote that swung the result, it was the will of England's electorate, which accounts for 85% of the UK's total.

We've said it before – in a First-Past-The-Post Westminster system, there is nothing Scotland can do to ensure it can get the government it wants.

If it could be done, it would have been done already because we've been at this for hundreds of years.

THE SPECTRE OF

IT'S hard to look at Westminster politics and conclude anything other than that the traditional two-party system has completely broken down.

The days of a simple Labour/Tory race are gone, with other parties increasingly playing a more prominent role in determining who is in control – like the DUP deal to prop-up Theresa May's government after the 2017 election.

May needed that because of the erosion of the Conservative majority. And Brexit has pushed a clutch of Westminster heavyweights off the political cliff, with big names like Kenneth Clarke and even Churchill's grandson Nicholas Soames ejected from the Conservatives while well-known MPs others like Anna Soubry and Chuka Umunna quit Labour and the Tories to form an independent grouping which has undergone more changes than a chameleon under a disco light.

Electoral maths is key to controlling the 650-seat parliament.

Labour lost that in 1979 when Jim Callaghan's minority government was defeated in a vote of no confidence.

That happened against a backdrop of widespread social unrest, workers' strikes and a Scottish devolution referendum “rigged” by Labour's own 40% rule, which meant that at least that percentage of the eligible electorate had to vote Yes to make that outcome legal.

When polling day came, Yes won by 52% to 48% – but only 32.9% of the electorate had joined the majority and so the government refused to honour the will of the voters.

After this, the SNP's 11 MPs



withdrew their support for Callaghan and moved a no-confidence motion. It was superseded by another from Margaret Thatcher and Labour lost power by 311 votes to 310.

And when the UK went back to the ballot box, Thatcher became prime minister, beginning 18 years of Tory rule. That's often been thrown at the SNP, with the party branded “tartan Tories” and blamed for Labour's loss of power.

But Andrew Welsh, one of the

From left: Donald Dewar, George Robertson and John Home Robertson outside Edinburgh's Royal High School assembly building during the 1979 devolution campaign

SNP's 1979 11, has pointed out that Labour had “failed to deliver their promise” to the Scottish people – devolution, after all, was a Labour policy, not an SNP policy.

And it wasn't Scotland that voted Thatcher in, it was England.

Here, Thatcher's party took 22 of the available 71 seats while Labour secured twice as many. Because of the imbalance in the electoral system, Scotland voted Labour and got Tory.

Welsh later commented: “Margaret Thatcher was the rankest of rank Tories. I never like a Conservative government – but that was up to the people who voted them in.”

And on Labour's referendum let-down, he said: “Devolution was the Labour government's policy and they could and should have delivered it.”

“The 40% rule was a deliberate ruse to sabotage it.”

“The Scottish Parliament and

what it votes for

And even if the entire electorate of Scotland and Wales combined to vote Labour as one – taking Northern Ireland out of the equation because the party doesn't stand there – the total seats secured would be just 99. It doesn't take Carol Vorderman to work out that's a fair few less than England's 533-strong seat share.

Whatever factors are at play in other constituent nations, England is where the leadership of the UK is decided.

That's easily demonstrated if we look at recent results. Tony Blair's New Labour would still have triumphed with a near-140 seat



majority in 1997 if Scotland had backed other horses. In 2005, his party would still have been 43 constituencies clear without Scotland's support.

Every vote cast in Scotland is important, and never more so than now – after all, our future is at stake. But as we've shown, England has a far bigger sway. Inevitably, it is England's priorities that dominate and direct both political campaigning and decision-making for the UK-wide parties.

After all, they can't win without England's support. And time and again that has left Scotland's voice unheard in that London Parliament.

DID YOU KNOW?

We may have already seen the last Scottish Prime Minister

MPS from Scottish constituencies are effectively excluded from becoming prime minister under changes brought in after 2014.

David Cameron announced English Votes for English Laws (EVEL) as an answer to the so-called West Lothian Question, which refers to an issue which arose under devolution.

It allowed Scots MPs to vote on issues like education and health in England, even though England's MPs lost the right to have sway over those matters in Scotland when they transferred over to the Scottish Parliament.

Cameron said EVEL, which also covers Wales and Northern Ireland, would mean a fairer deal for England but Labour's Chris Bryant warned it would “undermine the Union” and lock non-English MPs out of senior positions, including those of speaker and prime minister.

The rule also limits appointments for Cabinet positions – there'd be no point in making an Aberdeen MP the education secretary, for instance, because they wouldn't be able to take place in votes on that subject.

EVEL doesn't explicitly bar Scots politicians from becoming PM, but it makes it very difficult.

And it's hard to say how legitimate such a PM would be seen as by the voting public.

So it may not be against the law, but it's less likely than Nessie packing a briefcase and taking the Jubilee line on the tube to do the job herself.



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greater powers for Scotland came out of what happened. Without it, we would not have had our own parliament.”

And since then, Scotland has flexed its electoral muscle like never before, with more and more voters backing full democratic powers for the people.

To get that, we need all the help we can get – which means more independence-supporting Scottish MPs at Westminster to raise Scotland's voice, hold the prime



Indyref2 must not be thwarted by London



SO, what gives a government its legitimacy? In our system, it's a democratic mandate, a clear authorisation from the public to deliver on pledges contained within an election manifesto.

If you're a UK government, this could mean delivering Brexit – after all, the UK public voted to leave the EU and voted you into power.

But it may not mean allowing devolved administrations to make their words into actions.

The SNP-led Scottish Government and its Green allies wants to hold another vote on Scotland's future due to the "material change of circumstances" since the 2014 indyref caused by Brexit.

But it can't do that legally unless Westminster grants permission.

According to London politicians, the Scottish Government needs a mandate to call the ballot.

But apparently winning an election on a manifesto which promised to hold another indyref doesn't count, as all the UK-wide parties have either outright refused

or given a string of ifs, buts and maybes over granting legal permission for such a vote.

So it looks like a mandate is what Westminster says it is.

That's the democratic deficit in action.

And it stymies the progress of our nation – remember when Holyrood had to petition and prod Westminster for the ability to legislate against air guns?

A major campaign was launched in 2005 but it took another seven years for the UK Government to devolve the relevant powers to the Scottish Parliament.

That's a totally different issue than the constitution, but it does go to show just how tightly Scotland's own elected parliament has its hands tied.

Defence, foreign policy, monetary policy, they're all crucial to our future and they're all areas on which only MPs can act.

And of course, there's the constitution and that all-important Section 30 Order, the legislative roadblock to indyref2.

If it's not granted, any ballot on Scottish independence could be functionally illegal – and that means a Yes result is unlikely to be recognised by the international

community. But despite repeated pro-independence majorities in Edinburgh, Westminster party leaders fall over themselves to deny that there's a democratic basis for calling such a referendum.

At times it feels like the vehemence of their opposition to upholding democratic principles pertaining to Scotland is almost like a leadership test for UK party bosses – "how strongly will you oppose it, how many times will you say no, how many votes will you ignore?"

Why that is seen in London-centric circles as a legitimate position for a prime minister, or a would-be prime minister, is unclear.

Some people back it though,



A Yes vote isn't about parties or personalities, it's about restoring power to the parliament

saying a Yes majority in indyref2 would herald a new era of SNP dominance.

The SNP has been the dominant force in Scottish politics since 2007, when it became the largest party in the Scottish Parliament and hasn't been out of power since.

And since 2007, the SNP has picked up more council seats, more Holyrood seats and more Westminster seats, with the latter rising to a historic 56 in 2016 before falling back to 35 last time around.

But it is no more guaranteed of success than any other party – because it's all down to the electorate to return the candidates and parties they want.

A Yes vote isn't about parties or personalities, it's about restoring that power to the parliament and the electorate, putting control over what happens in Scotland into the hands of the Scottish people.

If, having achieved this, they no longer want an SNP government, then they won't elect one.

But the fundamental truth remains – the Scottish Parliament should have the power to call one, on the wishes of the people.

And no Westminster PM or MPs should stand in the way.



TRIDENT:

WHAT would you spend £167 billion on? New schools, upgraded hospitals, better housing? What if it was £31bn? Or £100bn? How about £205bn? One of those figures might be the cost of replacing Trident, but who really knows – the UK Government's certainly had trouble giving us the answer.

It decided to splash the considerable cash on the nuclear "deterrent" system anyway, regardless of the economic hit and public opinion in Scotland, where the nukes are based.

Campaigners have been camped out near HM Naval Base Clyde for decades now and the site is regularly the scene of peace protests.

Opposition to Trident in Scotland comes from many voices and takes many forms – its cost, its immorality, the danger it could pose to Scotland.

From its Clydeside location, this system of mass destruction sits close to the country's most populated city.

Before the 2014 independence referendum, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) ruled out the possibility of moving the missiles to its Devonport base in Plymouth because that would be too dangerous.

Around 166,000 people live within a 5km radius of that base, compared with around 5200 near HMNB Clyde. An MoD report on a potential major accident at the Argyll and Bute base revealed the "societal contamination" there would be "close to the tolerability criterion level".

Other modelling suggests that winds would sweep fallout from a detonation there across Greater Glasgow, into north east England and over the coast.

UK ministers have suggested the cost of four new submarines will be £31bn, but have been less forthcoming about the system's full lifetime costs.

The independent Trident Commission thinks this will be £100bn but other analysis has suggested the total will be double that sum.

Whatever the price, the Scottish Parliament doesn't want to pay it – it voted to oppose Trident renewal.

Scots MPs in Westminster have done the same.

But because of the democratic deficit, a proportion of your taxes will be spent on this anyway.



DRUG DEATHS:

DRUG-related deaths hit a record high last year and there is consensus that things have to change.

Authorities in Glasgow want to set up a supervised legal drug consumption room to save lives there and help people into treatment – something that has been done successfully in other countries.

The Scottish Government backs it, as does the local NHS board and expert groups.

But the Home Office, which retains power over drug laws, has refused to allow it.

And that means efforts to save Scottish lives – parents, children and siblings – are being blocked by Westminster.

THE RAPE CLAUSE:

A POLICY which requires mothers to report that their children were conceived in rape to avoid losing child tax credits, this has been criticised by domestic violence charities, children's organisations and anti-poverty groups.

David Cameron's government was so proud of this one that it buried it within Budget papers presented by George Osborne, now the editor of London's Evening Standard newspaper.

The same cash plan introduced the two-child cap, which prevents larger families from claiming child tax credits for third or subsequent children, except in cases of multiple births.

The rape clause was presented as a "protection" for mothers whose pregnancies resulted from sexual attack and around 50 women in Scotland have applied for exemptions under the rule since it was brought in.

Each of those had to tell a stranger about their rape just to make ends meet and a UN committee has called for its repeal.

The rape clause was not only opposed by Scottish politicians, it was uncovered by one – Alison Thewliss of the SNP.

MSPs have also condemned it, with the exception of the Tories.

And while there have been calls for the Scottish Government to mitigate the two-child cap and effectively cancel the rape clause, neither that administration nor the Scottish Parliament as a whole can force the UK Government's hand and scrap it completely.



Scots ignored on Brexit over and over again

THIS is perhaps the most glaring example of the democratic deficit, where Scotland does not get what it wants because that is not the will of Westminster.

The result of the 2016 referendum on membership of the European Union – a vote that was largely unwanted here – saw a rousing majority for Remain.

More than 60% of voters backed the status quo and every single part of the country delivered a Remain majority.

The strength of feeling was even more pronounced than in Northern Ireland, which was the only UK constituent nation to vote Remain but still saw Leave win out in some localities.

But while the map of Scotland turned yellow from Shetland to the Borders, England was mostly blue.

That, together with Leave votes from Wales and Northern Ireland, delivered an overall Leave majority – 52% to 48%.

And so Article 50 was triggered, beginning the bitter and protracted withdrawal process which is still to conclude, three years later.

Over that period, the Scottish Parliament has voted against Brexit several times, refusing to consent to the UK Government's Brexit deal.

But that Legislative Consent Motion (LCM) is not legally binding, and so went unheard.

The Scottish Government has championed a deal for Scotland that recognises the will of the Scottish people and protects our interests in business, academia and even the movement of people.

That's because our universities object to being cut off from research networks, funding and opportunities – like the multi-million euro, cross-continent Stardust Reloaded satellite science programme which is being led by Strathclyde University – not to mention the broad pool of European students who begin their courses here every year.

And it's because business bodies fear a new tariff regime will make the country uncompetitive, hitting smaller enterprises first, while



limiting the labour pool will lead to skills shortages.

And it's also because communities don't want to lose valued friends and family members.

But that's not happening because the Leave win is being treated as a UK-wide result.

It doesn't matter that Scotland has different trade and demographic needs than England, with Aberdeen expected to take one of the hardest economic hits and our population growth being based entirely on inward migration over recent years.

Cut that off and it threatens the health service, agriculture, food processing, hospitality and more.

Holyrood has also moved to resist a "power grab" which will see Westminster take charge of powers over fisheries, farming and food standards – all areas of

responsibility devolved to the Scottish Parliament – when Britain cuts ties with Brussels.

Scotland had been promised more powers, not fewer.

It's also worth noting that Tory attempts to force a withdrawal agreement through the Commons left no time for proper scrutiny of the terms by devolved administrations.

The Scottish and Welsh first ministers sent a joint letter to Boris Johnson to that effect, saying the Government's action was making it impossible for their administrations to fulfill their "constitutional responsibilities" – which shows how the democratic deficit doesn't just impede the will of devolved parliaments, but also the carrying out of their basic functions.

And time and again devolved governments have told how they have been cut out of the Brexit process on timing, negotiations and more, meaning the UK Government has denied them the chance to represent the people who voted for them.

The message from Westminster is clear – all votes, and all voters, are not equal.

The only voters they're serving on EU withdrawal are those who voted for it, and most of them are concentrated in England, not Scotland.

As of October 2019, Brexit had already cost Scotland £3 billion in investment, according to the respected Fraser of Allander think tank.

And we haven't left yet.

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Communities don't want to lose valued friends and family members



Distrust and dysfunction undermine devolution

OUTDATED UK Government structures are holding politics back and the Scotland Office should be scrapped altogether.

That's not our view, it's the conclusion of a major Westminster investigation which published its report earlier this year.

Twenty years on from devolution, Westminster's cross-party Scottish Affairs Committee (SAC) said the UK Government should consider replacing the Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland offices with a new department in charge of managing constitutional affairs and relationships between the governments – because the current set-up is not working.

The SAC – which took evidence from former First Minister Jack McConnell and then-Scotland Secretary David Mundell amongst others – also raised concerns about "deteriorating levels of trust"

between London and Edinburgh and said urgent work is needed to repair relationships "at a time when goodwill and co-operation are needed most".

If cross-party Scottish MPs don't believe in the system of which they're a part, why should voters?

Downing Street flatly denied the claims of distrust and dysfunction, saying: "Scotland's two governments enjoy a close working relationship, as the Secretary of State's evidence to the committee showed. We are pleased the committee acknowledged our joint efforts to develop common frameworks in areas such as agriculture when we leave the EU, which will strengthen the UK's internal market."

"It is simply untrue to say that relations between the two governments have broken down."

That certainly doesn't suggest they're open to listening to Scottish MPs, much less that they're willing to change to make the running of our daily

affairs smoother and more effective. But the SAC said things have to change.

According to the report, this means provide a "robust" forum to help governments get over disagreements on fundamental issues, devolution training for London-based civil servants and the publication of special impact assessments to show how policies will effect devolved governments – all things that, incredibly, are not in place now.

During evidence sessions, the SAC's enquiry heard the "polarised politics" of the UK and Scottish governments "became particularly evident" during the 2014 independence.

The testimonies heard pointed to a serious divergence in priorities.

The report stated: "This trend of strained personal relations and lost trust between political leaders appears to have been exacerbated by Brexit where, as with the Scottish independence referendum, the two governments have diametrically opposed political goals."

At the time, SAC chair Pete Wishart commented: "It's been 20 years since devolution and the political landscape of the UK is now totally unrecognisable; the Scottish independence referendum, Brexit and the diverging political views of the UK's four governments have all placed strain on a delicate devolution system."

"The relationship between the UK and Scottish governments has broken down and there is a palpable lack of trust between the two governments."

"Although the relationship is far from ideal, it is not beyond repair. We are calling on the Scottish and UK governments to make fundamental changes in their approach to devolution to restore trust."

"We've also heard evidence questioning the effectiveness of the Scotland Office in Whitehall, so we are pressing for a review of the role of the Scotland Office and the Secretary of State for Scotland to ensure intergovernmental processes adapt to the changing nature of devolution."

At the time of publication, there's nothing to suggest any of this has been taken on board.



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