



Written by [Charles Scaliger](#) on May 10, 2015

Electoral Earthquake in the British Isles

In the wake of the United Kingdom's recent elections, pollsters and pundits alike are wondering how they failed to see this one coming. An election that pollsters predicted to be a very close win for Prime Minister David Cameron and his Conservative Party turned into something of a rout, in which the Labour Party — Britain's version of the Democrats — lost a massive number of seats, including many party veterans thought to be immune to electoral defeat. The final count shows the Tories with 331 seats in Parliament to Labour's 232. Cameron's Conservatives appear to have something approaching a bona fide mandate.



But what, exactly, does this mean for the United Kingdom? The Tories are the UK's answer to our GOP, and like the Republican Party, are typically characterized as "center-right." Most of its policies mirror those of the GOP, and American Republicans have typically had a strong kinship with British Tories, as evidenced by the strong relationship between Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher in the years leading up to the end of the Cold War.

Like the GOP, the Tories are "Conservatives" rather than principled opponents of Big Government. It was the Tories, for example, who supported socialized medicine in the U.K. as far back as the 1940s, and the Conservatives likewise who supported early efforts to create a unified Europe (the Labour Party was initially strongly opposed to membership in the Common Market). Moreover, despite Conservative pledges to reduce the U.K.'s ruinous income tax rates, the top rate remains near 50 percent. Conservatives are in lockstep with U.S. interventionist foreign policy, and can be depended upon to participate in any foreign military adventure the United States chooses to get involved in.

All of this is a very familiar narrative to principled American constitutionalists and libertarians who continue to hope that somehow, some way, the American GOP will morph into the party of Ron Paul. After all, the GOP has been emitting soothing rhetorical frequencies for decades about limiting government and reining in spending.

In one respect, though, the resounding victory for Conservatives could be significant. In recent years, the Tories have become strong "Euroskeptics," opposing membership in the EU and fearing further compromises of national sovereignty in the interest of creating a "United States of Europe." They opposed the 2009 Treaty of Lisbon, which strengthened and consolidated many powers of the EU far beyond those provided for in the original Maastricht Treaty, but being then the minority party, the Tories were unable to prevent Britain from ratifying it. Under the new treaty, the EU has — among many other things — a "High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security"; that is, it is now engaging in unified foreign policy, one of the cardinal characteristics of a sovereign state. Its parliament now has considerably more power, and its "Charter of Fundamental Rights" has been made



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legally binding for all member nations.

In other words, concerns about lost sovereignty, once pooh-pooed as theoretical sensationalism, are now obvious to all but the most purblind observer. There can be no reasonable remaining doubt that “eurocrats” intend to eradicate the sovereignty of European countries and set up a single, continent-wide government in their place.

Accordingly, the Tories promised, prior to these elections, that if they received a majority for the parliamentary term of 2015-2020, they would bring up membership in the EU for a referendum, possibly as soon as 2017. There remains to be seen whether there is any substance to this promise; but at this juncture, the only political force in Europe that appears to have the power to oppose the EU’s relentless march toward continental domination is Britain’s Tories.

Given the accommodationist instincts of both Britain’s Tories and their American GOP confreres, this writer isn’t holding his breath expecting principled pushback against the EU — but British popular sentiment could force them to take action.

The most significant consequence of the elections, however, was not the Conservative landslide but the spectacular rise to relevance of the Scottish National Party. For some years, rumblings have been coming from Edinburgh about regaining independence after three centuries of political union with the U.K. A referendum for Scottish independence — staunchly opposed by Conservatives and Labour alike — failed just seven months ago by a margin of 55 to 45 percent.

But having staved off Scotland’s bid for independence, the British ruling elites proved less than amenable to making good on promises given to Scotland in return for remaining a part of the U.K. The Scots vented their anger at the polls, resulting in the SNP’s taking 56 of a total of 59 parliamentary seats and becoming overnight a political force to be reckoned with. Many of the seats lost had been controlled by Labour Party stalwarts. The leader of the Labour Party in Scotland, Jim Murphy, was ousted after a 20-year incumbency by political novice Kirsten Oswald, a human resources professional who has been a member of the SNP for less than a year.

The most surprising upset was by SNP novice Mhairi Black, a 20-year-old college student who was not old enough to vote the last time elections were held. Black, who has yet to finish her college degree, managed to knock off longtime Labour incumbent Douglas Alexander, who has been in Parliament since the late ‘90s and was a member of Labour’s “Shadow government.” She is now Britain’s youngest MP in more than three centuries. Following her extraordinary victory, Black said, “The people of Scotland are speaking, and it is time for their voice to be heard at Westminster.” With 56 seats in Westminster, the SNP has become the U.K.’s third-largest party, and has the clout to ensure that the debate over Scottish independence continues.

The status of Scotland promises to be the most important issue that the new British government will face. The outcome of this week’s elections all but guarantees that Scotland, if it can be coaxed to stay within the U.K. at all, will receive significant new autonomy in the fairly near term — without doubt against the liking of Cameron and his Conservatives.

As for the rest of the Conservatives’ new agenda, don’t expect things to change significantly. For as with the American GOP, where “walking the walk” of limited government and lower taxes are concerned, the more things change, the more they stay the same.



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