

On a scale of 100% democracy to 100% autocracy, Britain must rank as one of the least democratic countries, an autocratic country excepting an occasional change in the ruling elite. The key element of British democracy is that two parties compete for absolute power: two autocrats take turns at imposing their world view. The first-past-the-post electoral system prevents other parties from competing, which would surely be a breach of competition law if that law applied to politics as regards monopolies and duopolies. Differences compared to North Korea are a matter of degree (isolation, falling living standards, dislike of foreigners, loss of rights, and restricted travel are common to both countries) although North Korea is many decades behind the UK in terms of living standards. The reason Britain is so undemocratic is that the supposedly flexible unwritten British constitution slowly removes power from the people and hands it to the elite. Governments with control of the Commons can pass any legislation they like. When they legislate to fix a constitutional problem only two situations can result:

1. The fix becomes a nuisance after a time, in which case they legislate again to overturn it. Hence fixed-term parliaments, to bind the 2010 coalition together, overturned by the 2019 government. Likewise, the 2011 law to prevent transfer of more power to the EU, overturned when it obstructed the arrangements for leaving. Both of these examples originated during the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition and were reversed by later Conservative governments.
2. The fix reduces democratic accountability, in which case it becomes permanent and not open to challenge. Lloyd George stripped the Lords of power to block the Commons indefinitely, and even Gordon Brown did not dare to propose restoring such power to his intended assembly of the nations and regions.

Britain is not alone. The West faces a collective problem of rising autocracy. China is slowly forming a grouping of autocratic client states. Russia is now a Chinese client state, dependent on sales of oil and gas, through a new pipeline (not yet complete), to offset Western sanctions. India and South Africa chose not to condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine and have participated in naval exercises with China. Iran and Saudi Arabia, long bitter opponents in the Shia-Sunni divide, restored diplomatic relations following Chinese intervention. The future world order will be autocratic states led by China, versus democratic states. If a future American president loses interest in the world of free democratic nations, who will lead the democracies? ...

The key benefits of federalism would be:

1. Decisions would be closer to the people, who could contribute ideas.
2. Nations and regions could follow policies suited to their own best interests.
3. Many existing politicians could move from the UK level to one of the nations.
4. The existing career path for politicians would shorten, and good people would be more likely to come forward.
5. The honours system of patronage could wither.
6. A simple cash transfer mechanism could replace all funding formulae, allowing nations to achieve more equality in personal living standards.

7. More time could be spent scrutinising legislation (the Commons does not do this⁵⁰).

There is one overarching benefit of federalism. The need for a strong person to hold everything together at the centre disappears. Recent times have shown that prime ministers are human, can make mistakes, and can be dominated by factions in their own parties. Why then do we allow one person to have absolute power? Why do we allow a change of person at the top to cause a complete change of policies? *Without* democratic consent? The person at the centre should represent the entire UK on the international stage, rather than being preoccupied with manoeuvres for domestic advantage ...

A hung parliament arising out of public disaffection with our political system might just be open to a deal between several smaller parties and more thoughtful large party backbenchers to avoid a further election by insisting on policies that the party leaders would rather avoid. It all depends on how strongly the people say "We want democratic reform instead of this slide to autocracy." ... Adopting the concepts in this book would be one way a future government could serve the people. ... This is the only way to reverse the damage of multiple failed policies that culminated in the United Kingdom imposing trade sanctions on itself.

(extracted from *Reinventing Democracy: Improving British political governance* by David Kauders, chapters 1, 4 and 7. See published book for footnotes.)