Democratizing Regions: Regional Alienation and the Unexpected Consequences

Allan Craigie

a.craigie@sms.ed.ac.uk

Introduction[1]

The British government has enacted broad policies of regional devolution from the time of Blair's Labour government election in 1997 to the defeat of the government's devolution proposals in the North East of England in 2004. While academic and public attention was drawn to devolution in Scotland and Wales, and the peace process in Northern Ireland, regional reform in England was a prominent part of Labour's constitutional agenda. The centralized nature of the British state is well known, but the impact that it has on the regions of England (note; not the regions of Britain), may come as a surprise to observers outside of British constitutional debates. The British state is not merely unitary; it is a union state (see Bogdanor 1999) in which a central legislature—the British Parliament—governs the constituent nations (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland). Within the Union, the minority nations have historically had widespread representation at the centre through a variety of means, most notably their respective territorial Offices and corresponding Cabinet Ministers. England, though, has no equivalent. Regional distinctiveness in England has historically been ignored by the British state, unlike Scottish distinctiveness, which has been catered to through machinery at both the central and local levels with distinct policies (Denver et al. 2000: 13), and autonomy for distinct Scottish organizations (Greer 2007: Ch 3-4). However, as England makes up nearly 85% of the British population, and an even higher share of GDP, it has become the norm upon which the British state is structured; it is what O'Leary (2001) refers to as a *staatsvolk*, the people whose norms and culture become the foundation for the institutions of state. Yet, even though the British state appears to be constituted upon English norms, 'England' itself is contested from within. London and the Home Counties form the core of England, with the rest of England peripheral to them. This has meant that many parts of England lack the institutional recognition of the minority nations, and fall outside the understanding of England as articulated by the English core. This is most apparent in regions far removed from the core, such as the North East. In fact, alienation there is further exaggerated by the nature of democratic competition. Due to the realities of Labour dominance and the First Past the Post electoral system there are clear incentives to the two major parties to bypass the region: Labour does not need to invest political resources in the region as it cannot lose there, and the Conservatives do not need to invest resources in the region as they cannot win (Byrne 1992).

The English and Canadian situations could not be more different. The Canadian staatsvolk, English-speaking Canadians, are spread throughout all ten Canadian provinces.[2] Each of the provinces is sovereign within its jurisdiction, and within Canada concurrent first order levels of government at the provincial and federal level exist. Comparing a peripheral province in Canada, Nova Scotia, to the North East of England, this paper will examine the impact the introduction of regional democracy would (or could) have had in alleviating regional alienation in the North East. The evidence

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[2] It is important to note that that linguistic reality in Canada is extremely complex and does not always map onto the geographical division of the provinces; so-called English Canada also exists within Quebec and French Canada exists outside Quebec.

presented in this paper strongly suggests a consequence that regional devolution campaigners in the North East would not have, perhaps *could* not have, anticipated— namely, that regional level democracy alone would have made little demonstrable impact upon levels of regional alienation or political efficacy within the North East.

       This paper examines the promise of regional democracy in the following manner. First, it provides an overview of regional alienation in the North East, followed by an examination of the expectations of regional campaigners in the North East, next the case of Nova Scotia is introduced against which to compare the North East in terms of regional efficacy and alienation. The final section deconstructs some of the broader issues concerning regional reform and addresses why regional level democracy alone would have failed to alleviate alienation.

Regional Alienation in England and the North East

       As the North East of England has the (mis)fortune of being located next to Scotland, its regional distinctiveness has been largely overshadowed by its larger and more powerful neighbour nation. Additionally, events in Scotland influence its southern neighbour. When Labour returned to power in 1997, the demand for some form of self-government in Scotland was too great to ignore, and Labour made it an election platform alongside regional devolution in England, devolution in Wales and the commitment to the Northern Irish peace process (Labour 1997). Within Scotland, civil society, with the notable exception of the Conservative and Unionist Party of Scotland, was very much in favour of devolution.[3] The Scottish National Party boycotted the discussions leading to devolution (the Scottish Constitutional Convention) fearing it would be "drawn into a devolutionist trap" (Mitchell 1996 in Greer 2007: 82-82), but in the end supported devolution even though 'unionist' defence mechanisms were built in to the proposed system.[4]

       As noted above, the nature of the British state has historically allowed Scotland's distinctiveness to be represented, yet Greer (2007) argues that Thatcher challenged the autonomy of Scottish institutions by ignoring Britain's union-state constitution. Accordingly, devolution was an attempt to *reintroduce* the stability and autonomy that the Conservatives had removed from Scotland. Yet post devolution, a sense of disillusionment gradually set in amongst the Scottish electorate, as the parliament did not, indeed *could not*, live up to the extremely high expectations of the Scots (Denver 2003: 31). A disconnect appeared between a liberal oriented Scottish establishment and average Scots who vote predominantly for social democratic parties, but are actually conservative in orientation (Bradbury and Mitchel 2001: 269). It is also unclear if the new system is a first or second order system (see Jones 1999, McEwen 2003 and Paterson

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[3] It should be noted that while the Conservatives are a major party United Kingdom wide, they are a minor party within Scotland.

[4] In 1997 Labour's Scottish General Secretary and future First Minister of Scotland Jack McConnell stated that the German style Additional Member System was introduced to keep the SNP out of power (Bradbury and Mitchell 2001: 257). There is a certain amount of irony in the fact that he in turn lost Scotland to the SNP in the 2007 Scottish election.

et al. 2001). This calls into question whether politics is truly devolved in Scotland, or if British politics is merely being fought out at a Scottish level.

The disillusionment of Scots with the Scottish Parliament is significant as Scotland's place within the Union has remained politicized instead of being resolved. Devolution and constitutional change in Scotland failed to provide a definitive answer to Scotland's place within the Union, instead it opened up debate on England's—which is referred to as the "English Question" (Hazell 2006).

Answering the English Question: Regional Institutions in England
For all the analysis of the impact of devolution on Britain, Curtice and Heath (2006: 1) note devolution in Scotland and Wales only impacts 15% of the British population, making it easy to ignore in England. Trench (2005) states the English Question is rarely asked. While Quebecois nationalism has long dominated Canadian politics, Scottish nationalism does not influence British politics in the same manner.

In England, devolution "is neither thought to be worthy of either emulation or envy" (Curtice and Heath 2006 4-7, Curtice 2006). There is no indication that devolution leads to an urgent need for structural change in England (Sandford 2002: 791). While devolution may have led to elite discussion on the English Question, it did not resonate with the electorate. Indeed, by the end of the second term of the Scottish Parliament (Holyrood), the Labour dominated Executive[5] had yet to craft a set of policies that students of multilevel government would interpret as being substantially different from those of the British Parliament. The lack of substantive difference, though, does not mean that there was no reaction in England. Rather, as devolution in Scotland was part of Labour's larger package of constitutional reform, it was hoped that the devolution process of the 1990s would generate demands for devolution in regions which had been previously lukewarm to it (Bond and McCrone 2004: 22), helping to answer the "English Question"

Yet what, exactly, is the English Question? According to Hazell (2006: 1), "the English Question is a portmanteau heading for a whole series of questions about the government of England." He argues that opinions vary about not only the answer, but the question itself. Hazelle claims it can be divided into the following groups of sub-questions:
1.   England's place within the Union. Does England need to find its own separate political voice to rebalance the louder political voice accorded to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland? Could this be supplied by an English parliament, English votes on English matters in the British Parliament, or independence for England?
2.   Regional Devolution. Does England need devolution to break from dominance of Whitehall, either as an alternative or to supplement all-English devolution? Should this come through elected regional assemblies, functional regionalism, stronger local government or elected mayors?
3.   The Status Quo. Are English people happy with the current settlement, with no specific recognition and no share in devolution? (Hazell 2006)

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[5] The Scottish Labour Party was the senior party in coalition with the Scottish Liberal Democrats.

The first two points represent two different types of English Question. The first deals with recognition of England in relation to devolution in Scotland and Wales. The second builds upon recognition, but also deals with issues of governance (Hazell 2006: 4-8). The third acknowledges that the majority of English people may not be overly concerned with constitutional issues. It is interesting to note that the evidence presented by Curtice (2006, 2005) strongly suggests the third option, though it has little resonance either politically or academically.

Hazell (2006: 41) outlines the support for the first and second questions. The first set of questions appears to be targeted by the Conservatives, the second by Labour. The two major British political parties see the challenges of devolution along fundamentally different lines, which correspond to their competing interpretations of the state. Labour has been in government for the duration of the question's existence and pan-British solutions have been at the core of their constitutional changes. They offered devolution to the Celtic fringe, but not to England as a whole as Britain, and not the constituent nations are the primary political community. As such, England does not need to be treated the same as the other nations. Because Conservatives see the United Kingdom as a union of four nations, they advocate all English answers (see Craigie 2010 for an in-depth discussion of the pan-national and unionist interpretations of multinational states). However, the Conservatives have not had an opportunity to implement their constitutional preferences, so this paper concentrates on Labour's regional constitutional reforms.

According to Mawson (1998: 162), the 1980s highlighted the need to improve management at the regional level in England.[6] One North East academic, David Byrne (1992: 35), likened the relationship between the North East and the central government under Thatcher as "semi-colonial." While there had been a decline of the concept of 'region' in London during the Thatcher years, the idea did not disappear in the regions and re-emerged in the 1990s, with the revival of English regionalism initiated by the debates surrounding the place of Scotland and Wales in Britain (Sharpe 1997: 134-5, Stewart 1997: 137-8, Mawson and Spencer 1997: 160).

Though Labour championed the English regional movement, it was the Conservatives who laid the foundation with the Government Office Regions (GORs). This presented a radical change in the nature of administration in Britain (Mawson and Spencer 1997: 174). By creating a territorial model of service coordination, England began to move away from a purely departmentalized system of administration. The mission of the GORs is "to achieve high and stable levels of growth and employment, and to build an inclusive and prosperous society that can develop in a sustainable way" (Tomaney 2002: 228). The history of the North/South divide has always been that the South is a 'have' and the North a 'have not' region (Jewell 1994: 2-4). The creation of Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) within the boundaries of the GORs was an attempt to overcome this divide and "transform England's regions through sustainable economic development." (www.onenortheast.co.uk/page/onene/index.cfm). Regional Chambers, made up of 70% councillors and 30% stakeholders (unions, businesses, etc.), came into being to scrutinize RDAs (which coordinate strategic planning at a regional

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[6] The role of the European Union cannot be ignored; in order to receive EU structural funds, proposals had to be made within a regional context (Stewart 1997: 140-1), one reason for the creation of the GORs.

level) and now refer to themselves as Regional Assemblies (RAs) (Tomaney and Hetherington 2003: 66). Tomaney (2001: 116) argued that by the end of the 20th century these new Chambers were beginning to assert themselves as political actors in their respective regions by: 1) holding RDAs to account, 2) representing regions in conflicts with central government, and 3) overseeing policy integration. However, it is unclear whether they were creating any sort of institutional legitimacy. Though regional institutions may have a substantial impact upon the lives of the citizenry in the regions of England, the people appear unaware of the extent of regional administration in England (Parks and Elcock 2006: 12). Accordingly, the institutional penetration of these organizations is questionable.[7] The RAs are indirectly elected and lack the clear line of responsibility to a politically engaged electorate, which, for example, the indirectly elected Cabinet and Prime Minister has. The lack of clear lines of responsibility combined with a weak, and largely invisible, policy portfolio (not to mention the GOs are accountable to the central government, not any regional body), means that while *administration* may happen at a regional level, *politics* does not.

2004 Referendum

Regional institutions may improve the governance of the regions, but they do not address the asymmetrical nature of Labour's constitutional reforms. To address this, referenda were to be held in the North to determine whether the assemblies should become directly elected. Though originally planning to hold referenda in all three of the Northern GORs, in the end the government proceeded only in the North East, a region the government felt was electorally safe (Hazell 2006: 9, Tickel, John and Musson 2005: 3).

This paper does not dwell on the 2004 Referendum and the powers of elected regional assemblies. Though it notes that the powers the Cabinet champion of regional devolution, Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott, was able to secure were extremely minimal. However, Prescott's ability to achieve what he did is remarkable given four mutually reinforcing factors working against him:

1. The Prime Minister was lukewarm to the idea of regional devolution (Parks and Elcock 2006: 9). If the Prime Minister had been strongly in favour of the concept, he could have used his authority to devolve power away from ministers and Whitehall.
2. Politicians are power maximizers. As Hopkins (1996) notes, by maximizing the power of their offices politicians can increase their ability to forward their agenda. The longer one has been in a particular office, the less likely one may be to cede power from it, and Labour was no longer an 'outsider' looking in on government, it *was* government.
3. The nature of the Labour Party. Devolution as a policy is a challenge to the centralist socialist history of Labour in the post war period. If one of Labour's goals is (or was) to craft a socialist British state, then devolution of decision making can be seen as a challenge to some of the principles of uniformity and British wide standards that Labour historically endorsed. While devolution in

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[7] In July 2007 the government announced it was planning to phase out the Regional Assemblies (HM Treasury 2007). However, in the North East, the organic association of regional authorities would still exist.

1997 can be interpreted as a strategic policy aimed at keeping Scotland within Britain (see Denver et al. 2000: 74, Lynch 2002: 123), there was no similar concern with regard to the English regions.

4.   There is no equivalent to the SNP in England. Prior to 1997, Labour had historically relied upon Scotland to deliver its majority governments, and losing Scotland could have meant Labour would be relegated to permanent opposition (Bogdanor 1999).

While the proposals on offer for the Referendum of 2004 were weak, it can be argued that if successful they would have been more radical than Scottish and Welsh devolution as they represented a more "fundamental challenge … to the dominance of Whitehall over all aspects of English life" (Tomaney and Hetherington 2003: 57). Opposition to the referendum went beyond opposition to multi- level governance or the powers on offer, it presented the proposals for elected regional assemblies as an attack on the very nature of the English nation, a nation centred upon England's 'historic counties' (Tomaney 2003: 55).

The 2004 Referendum provides an excellent case study for how not to conduct a referendum. This is not to say that either side was particularly ineffective, rather that the government could not have chosen a worse time to conduct it. The results of the referendum were overwhelmingly against the proposals by a margin of nearly four to one, with those with the most knowledge of the proposals being most likely to vote against them (Bond and McCrone 2004 : 13). This indicates that opposition to the proposals was much more than a knee jerk reaction (see Dion (1996: 272) who claims voters behave conservatively during referenda). In addition to the quality of the proposals, a host of other issues was involved in the electorate's decision making, including a general dislike of politics and politicians, lack of powers for the assembly, a weak 'yes' campaign, concern about Tyneside dominance and the opportunity to give the government a 'bloody nose' (Shaw et al. 2006: 9-10). During the referendum, 77.9% of the electorate, on a turnout of 48%, voted against the devolution proposals. When compared to the polling data from 2004 in the North East, Figure 1, one sees that the results in favour of the devolution package were broadly similar to support for devolution in principle. It also suggests those who favoured all-England devolution, preferred the status quo to regional level devolution.

Figure 1: Best method to govern England[8]

	As it is now		Regional Assemblies		English Parliament	
	NE*	ROE**	NE	ROE	NE	ROE
1999	56.4	62.8	20	14.8	18.1	17.9
2000	46.3	54.8	24.9	17.9	21.5	19.5
2001	57.6	56.7	28.8	22.4	10	16.2
2002	50.8	56.5	30.4	19	13	17.3
2003	56.9	54.5	25	23.7	12.9	16.5
2004	42.8	53.5	23.6	21.3	24.6	20.2
2005	53.5	54.4	20.9	20	14.3	17.9

* North East ** Rest of England
Source: BSA 1999, 2000.2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005

The referendum's failure eliminated the regional answer to the English Question by 'killing off' demands for elected assemblies for the foreseeable future, leaving the place of England within the Union unaddressed. While leaving the all-English option available, a federal or quasi-federal system based on the nations of Britain may not work because of the size of England compared to the devolved nations (Tomaney 2000: 119). As Sandford (2002: 795) notes, devolution in Scotland and Wales was the answer to a specific desire from both nations, which has no direct equivalent in England.

Following the referendum the legitimacy of the assembly itself came into question. People in the region wanted to know why there was still an assembly when the question had been voted down. According to Cllr. Ian Mearns of Gateshead Council and the North East Assembly, the impact of the referendum on the assembly was to paralyze it; it was "struggling to find its feet" (Interview 2006). The referendum robbed the unelected assembly of political legitimacy and forced it to retreat into its narrowly defined core functions. In this sense, the 'no' vote may have actually *decreased* what little effectiveness the RA had to act as a voice for the North East.

Regional Devolution Campaigners' Expectations

The above paints a picture of a regional movement, which not only failed in its objectives, but weakened the region's position vis-à-vis the central state. The previous section outlined what regional campaigners achieved, this section outlines what regional campaigners had hoped to achieve.

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[8] The exact wording of the question was:
"With all the changes going on in the way the different parts of Great Britain are run, which of the following do you think would be best for England
1 for England to be governed as it is now, with laws made by the UK parliament,
2 for each region of England to have its own assembly that runs services like health,
3 or, for England as a whole to have its own new parliament with lawmaking powers?"
4 (None of these) (BSA 2003)

Recognition

As stated by Hearn (2007) and Cohen (1996), individuals experience their nations in different ways. As such they will also interpret their nation or region differently. This may be problematic for ensuring strong bonds of national solidarity, but it is even more problematic when those who hold the reigns of power within the state fail to recognize differing, yet equally legitimate, interpretations of the state and nation.

In England, this was most apparent when elites at the centre dismissed the importance of issues of regional identity for some of their citizens. For example, Eric Pickles, anti-regional devolution Conservative Member of Parliament, argued that the people of England do not live in regions; they "live in counties, towns, and villages" (HC 26 Nov 2002 C268). Yet when one examines Figure 2, one sees that while in the majority of England people only have a weak attachment to their region and pride in it, in the North East there is a high degree of pride and attachment to the region.

Figure 2: Attached to GOR and Pride in Region (%)
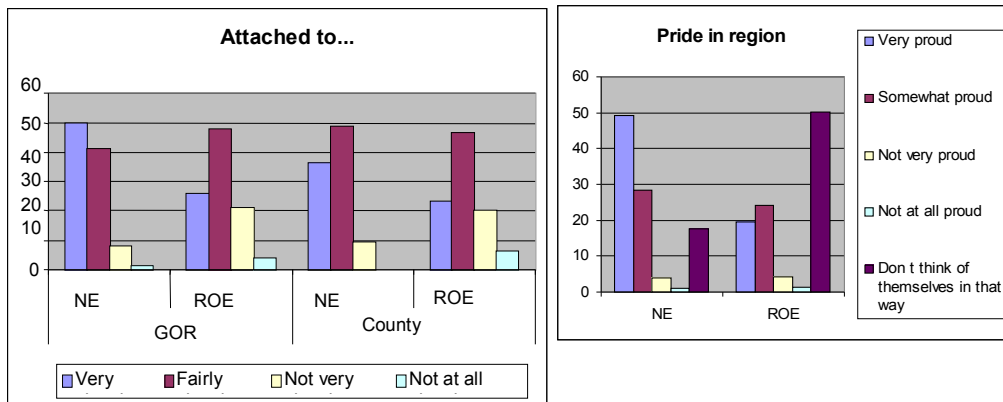
Source: BSA 2003

So the first step regional campaigners had to take was to convince elites at the centre that people in their region people generally interpreted both England and Britain differently than in the Home Counties. This understanding of the nature of the English nation was exacerbated by a lack of awareness about how England was governed. Discussion on democratizing regional government led to fears of additional bureaucracy and cost, yet as Joyce Quin, a prominent former North Eastern MP wrote in the *Northern Echo*:

> [T]he objectors to regional government often say that they don't want yet another bureaucratic tier. However we already have a Government Office for the region, and the administration of many central government policies at regional level… We want to add democracy not bureaucracy (Quin 2001)

So as can be seen, a crucial first step for regional campaigners was securing recognition for their region from the central state. The importance of recognition, however, is not merely to harness greater resources from the state. According to Taylor (1992: 99), recognition is a vital human need. As such, the centre was inadvertently denying the legitimacy of the view held by the majority of people in the North East.

Self Government

It appears clear in debates on devolution in the North East (and in Scotland as well), that devolution supporters interpreted multi-level government as a division of state power into separate, water tight, compartments. Indeed, some would argue that to do otherwise would be in violation of the spirit of multi-level governance (Lajoie 2006: 162). This is especially apparent with regard to the comment by North East Member of Parliament, Dari Taylor, who argued:

> It is important that local people are able to take robust, focused and principled decisions, because they know best what is needed. I never want a Westminster Tory Government to have that influence on my region again. We have a level of unemployment that was second to none… Our history is bitter, and we will never forget it. We will never trust a Westminster Tory Government again ever. (Dari Taylor (Lab) HC 21 July 2004 C419)

The demand for greater local control was made by both supporters and opponents of devolution.[9] Indeed, grouping people as 'supporters' or 'opponents' of regional devolution in the North East is difficult. As Bond and McCrone (2004) observe, the 'Yes' campaign had a difficult time getting those supporting regional devolution in theory to support the proposals in practice. This is exemplified by Liberal Democrat Councillor Jerry Keating (interview 2006), long-time devolution supporter in the North East, who maintained that the proposed assembly lacked any real powers and, against the directions of his party, sided with the 'no' campaign. Yet, regardless of how elites were classified, the demand for power in the North East was not new, as this 1986 excerpt from the *Journal* indicates;

> Labour MEP Joyce Quin and Roland Boyes MP for Houghton and Washington wrote in the Labour Weekly newspaper that there is a feeling of powerlessness in the North. "Most Britons feel a loyalty to their own areas as well as to Britain as a whole and there is a strong feeling that many political decisions taken at national level could be taken closer to home." (Craig 1986)

The North Eastern media painted a picture in which MPs from the region were unable to advocate in the region's interests. All MPs are theoretically equal, yet they do not all have the resources to call upon that MPs from the minority nations have. For example, the role of English and Scottish MPs has differed over the years. While both English and Scottish MPs represent their party as well as their individual constituencies, Scottish MPs are also able to represent Scotland in a way in which English MPs are unable to represent England or English regions as England lacks regional or all English institutions for MPs to work with (Harvie 1991: 107). Additionally, Scottish MPs have been known to use the threat the Scottish National Party poses to the integrity of the British state to secure greater resources for Scotland—a threat that has no parallel in England. Devolution supporters aspired to express regional voice through the Cabinet and devolved institutions;

> Scotland and Wales not only have their own democratic governments but their own Cabinet ministers to make the case for continued preferential funding

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[9] The difference being how 'local' was interpreted; devolution supporters wanted regional powers, anti-devolution supporters wanted increased powers for local councils.

arrangements and public investment. The fact that the North East has neither is one of the main reasons why, under the iniquitous Barnett Formula, public spending per head is still higher in Scotland than in this region (The Journal Nov 13 2002)

The Barnett Formula is the funding formula by which government spending in the different regions and nations of the United Kingdom is determined. Per capita Scotland receives a greater amount of funding than the English average, which was interpreted by many as being unfair and in need of rectification.

Fairness

The funding formula for Scotland drew a great deal of ire in the North East. In elite discourse The Barnett Formula existed on two levels; 1) administratively where the funding of certain territorial functions of state administration (i.e. health care, education, transport, etc.) is divided between the constituent nations of Britain, and 2) symbolically as representing the unequal treatment of the different parts of Britain. In England, and the North East in particular, it was seen as a way for Scotland to receive more funding than its per capita population allegedly deserved. As noted by *The Journal*;

> Campaign for the English Regions against unfair funding formula that benefits Scotland against the North East, and the post of Scottish Secretary. They claim funding should be based on need, not nationality. (The Journal Jan 14 2002)

It is interesting that while constitutional issues were at the forefront in the North East, political actors did not appear to believe that constitutional issues were what mattered most to the electorate. Rather, they appeared to view political discussions with a view to their impact on the regional economy.

Discussing the Barnett Formula could not be avoided when discussions of 'fair' allocations of state resources were had;

> Liberal Democrat leader Cllr Nigel Martin said, "the North East is not getting its fair share as far as things like the Barnett Formula are concerned. It is only by binding together that we will get a fairer deal." (Northern Echo 2005)

It is of particular interest that to political actors differences in per capita spending were seen as simply wrong, leaving little room in the debate for factors that might justify or indicate a region's greater *need*. In the North East complicated issues surrounding resource allocation were never discussed in detail; instead differences were highlighted and presented as wrong because they were different;

> Health Secretary Alan Milburn publicly called into question funding rules which ensure public spending in Scotland is higher than in the North, which is one of the key issues in The Journal's Case for the North (The Journal Apr 17 2002)

The funding rules, formally known as the 'Barnett Formula,' appeared to be used as code for special treatment by opponents of devolution. They never explaining *why* Scotland should or should not receive more funding per capita (for example, the geographical impact on costs), or how service delivery north of the Border could be more efficient, resulting in greater services for the same cost. With devolution, there was

greater scrutiny of money spent in Scotland than in the North East as there was no North East equivalent to Audit Scotland or the Scottish Parliament Audit Committee, which makes it striking that devolution campaigners never seemed to equate efficiency benefits with accountability in Scotland.[10]

Similar complaints between Nova Scotia and the North East

Using the province of Nova Scotia and the logic of the Most Similar System Design (Przeworski and Teune 1979) to guide the comparison, this section hypothesizes the impact that regional devolution in the North East of England would have had on issues of political alienation and efficacy. Deutsch (1996) outlines four key areas in which political networks form: 1) the economy, 2) population, 3) geography, and 4) language. Accordingly, to understand the impact regional level democracy may have had in the North East, required the selection of a region similar to the North East along these points. In addition, in keeping with the logic of experimental design, regions with administrative institutions were required, with one possessing and one lacking democratic legitimacy.

Regionalism and regional identity are difficult to define and measure (Tomaney and Ward 2001: 8-9), however, in Canada regional identity is easier to recognize as the regions exist in tandem with existing power structures: the provinces (Preston 1985: 5). In England, though regions lack democratic institutions, regional identities exist, which may act as triggers for regionalism (Lanigan 2001: 104-5). Both regions under study have similar economic histories and, with the creation of the RDAs in England, institutions charged with addressing the regional economy. In addition to the economic similarities, both have relatively stable populations with relatively low levels of immigration but a fair amount of economic emigration to richer parts of the state. Both are distant from central decision-making. While Nova Scotia would be cut off from Canada by Quebec secession, the North East's position as a periphery of England would be exacerbated if Scotland gained independence from the rest of Britain. Finally, in both cases there is a common language, English, which not only functions as a common means of communication, but each region has a unique dialect and way of life. As such, Nova Scotia was chosen due to its similarities to the North East based on Deutsch's (1966) four points.

It has been well documented that political mobilization stems from *grievance* (see Hutchinson 1999: 399 Chaterjee 1993: 203, Fidler 1991: 6-7). Indeed, it is difficult to conceptualize regionalism without a core belief that the region somehow lacks power, voice, or both. It seems unlikely that mobilization would occur when the people are satisfied with the status quo and there is no threat to it. As such, the argument advanced by Hirschman (1970) in *Exit, Voice and Loyalty* is instructive. Regions such as Nova Scotia and the North East were 'loyal' to their states and therefore lacked the 'exit' option that was available to minority nations. 'Voice' is interpreted to mean citizens' sense of having political efficacy within the political process. The *regions* could not exit Canada

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[10] Between 2005 and 2007 this author worked in the Scottish Parliament as the Parliamentary researcher for the Deputy Convenor of the Scottish Parliament Audit Committee and personally witnessed both the Audit Committee and Audit Scotland hold public spending to account in Scotland.

or Britain, but *individual* citizens could exit through a lack of participation in, and alienation from, the system. As both regions are so similar along Deutsch's (1966a) four points, and the key difference between them is the fact that Nova Scotia has an elected level of regional government, similar levels of political alienation would suggest that regional democracy may not play a singular role in alleviating said alienation.

Figure 3: People like me have no say in government
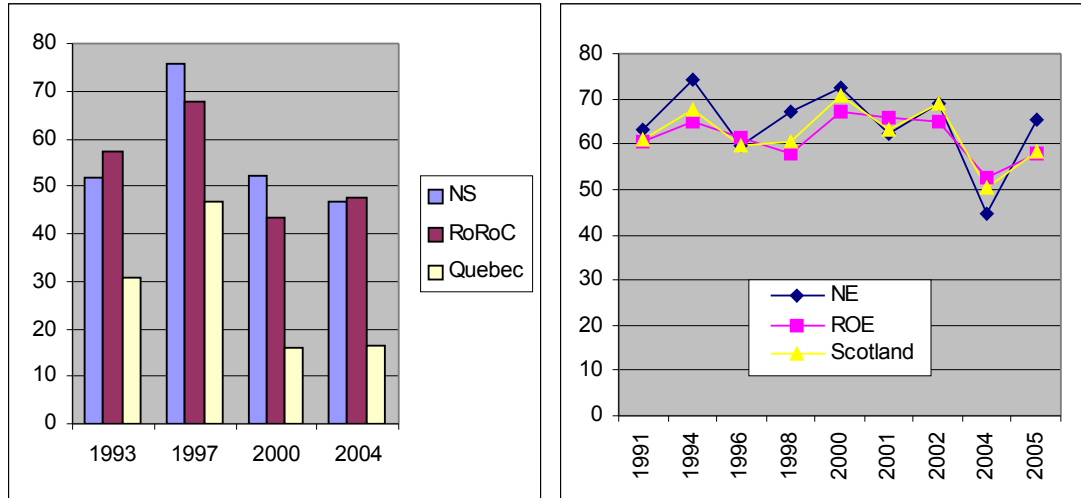
RoRoC: Rest of Rest of Canada (Canada minus Quebec and Nova Scotia)
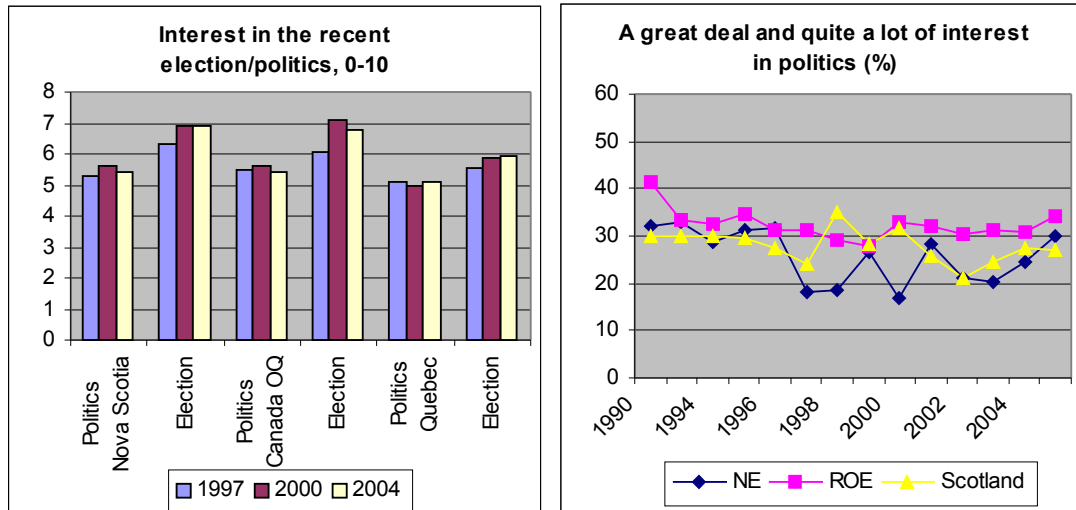Source: CES 1993, 1997, 2000, 2004, BSA 1991, 1994, 1996, 200-2002, 2004, 2005

  Regional elites in the North East claimed their region lacked 'voice,' that it was ignored in the political process, and advocated an elected assembly. It must be emphasized that the powers contained within the proposed devolved assembly in the North East were insignificant compared to the powers exercised by the Nova Scotian government. As such, Figure 3 examines people's perception of how much voice they have within the system by asking respondents in both Canada and Britain if they felt that they had a say in government. It is logical to assume that a higher sense of efficacy would equate with an increase in people feeling they had a say in government. Accordingly, the higher the numbers in Figure 3, the lower the efficacy. The left hand graph suggests a common lack of efficacy throughout Canada (outside Quebec), even though it did improve marginally during this period. It does not, however, provide a sense of Nova Scotian distinctiveness. What *does* appear distinctive are the comparably *high* levels of political efficacy in Quebec—hypothesized to be the result of Quebec's ability to make its concerns heard within the statewide arena.   In the North East, the pattern was similar.   Apart from a drop in 2004,[11] the numbers were consistently high, with people in the North East and England generally not displaying a strong sense that they had a say in what government did.

  As efficacy was interpreted as people's perception of how much influence they have over the political process, alienation shall be interpreted as how much interest people have or how involved they are in the political process. Though the regions lacked the 'exit' option, analyzing alienation allows for an examination of political disengagement. The right hand graph in Figure 4 examines levels of interest in politics in

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[11] It should be noted that the drop appears to have occurred throughout Britain, suggesting there is no relation in the North East between increased efficacy in 2004 and the referendum.

Britain, showing the total responses of those who answered that they had "a great deal of interest" or "quite a lot of interest" in politics. The Canadian Election Study asked people to rate their interest in politics on a scale of 0-10. A similar question was asked about the election for which the study was conducted. Looking at the Canadian figure, interest in politics was by and large the same in Nova Scotia as in the rest of Canada (outside Quebec) and was only slightly lower in Quebec. A similar pattern is shown with regard to interest in the election in Nova Scotia and the rest of Canada (outside Quebec), although here Quebec generally displayed lower interest in the election. What is striking in Figure 4 is that while the rate of interest in politics in the North East was similar to that found in the rest of England prior to 1997, after this time interest was markedly lower in most years. This is significant given the temporal parameter of this study. It was during the period in which the North East was relatively *less* interested in politics than the rest of England that regional institutions were created and an elected regional assembly entered the realm of possibility. This suggests not only a lack of connection between elites and the masses in the North East, but that they were moving in opposite directions. Between 2003 and 2005 there was a slow increase in interest so that by 2005 the North East had almost returned to pre 1997 levels. Yet in 2004, the year of the referendum, overall interest in politics in the region was still below the English average. This suggests that the post 1997 period may have been an aberration, but one which coincided with a high level of elite regional identity mobilization in the North East.

Figure 4: Interest in…

Source: BSA 1990, 1991, 1994 – 2005, CES 1997, 2000, 2004

The findings above are particularly noteworthy with regard to the role of regional democracy in alleviating a sense of regional alienation. The evidence presented above implies two very important points. First, citizens of Nova Scotia, a region with powerful democratic institutions, feel as alienated as citizens from the North East. Second, that a regionally devolved and democratically elected institution in the North East would be unable to establish clear boundaries between itself and the central state.

Conclusion: Regional Democracy – Of No Consequence?

This paper seeks to assess what may have happened in the North East if the referendum had been successful. The evidence presented above strongly indicates that regional actors would have been disappointed in any referendum package that centred solely on introducing regional levels of democracy if they wished to increase efficacy or decrease alienation. By comparing the North East with Nova Scotia, a jurisdiction with many similar social and economic variables, as well as a strong regional government, this paper argues that the consequence of regional devolution—especially given the hopes, effort, resources and political capital invested in the reforms—would have been the status quo. The people of the North East would have remained alienated and isolated, while the decision makers in the centre continued to largely bypass the region.

Yet it must be noted that in Nova Scotia there are two levels of government which interact with each other and attempt to shift responsibility. In the North East the RDA could take some responsibility for regional failure in theory, but in practice its lack of power and undemocratic nature meant that only the central government could truly be held accountable. Actors in the North East did not appear to appreciate the fact that with regional government comes regional responsibility, and that the central government is able to assign blame to regional institutions for failures in the region. Weinstock (2006) argues in direct opposition to Lajoie (2006) above that the creation of discrete regional and state spheres of power may be neither possible nor desirable. In Canada the constituent provinces have had over 150 years to establish themselves as independent

from the central government within their constitutionally assigned fields, yet have failed to do so. As such, the hopes of regional campaigners to create clear boundaries between regional and central powers in the North East may be thought of as at best naïve, and at worst as dangerously setting themselves up for disappointment.

This, of course, should not be interpreted to mean that regional democracy is not a "good thing", rather it cautions those advocating for democratic reforms in England and other parts of the world. Democratic reform has to be a well thought out package, regional alienation needs to be addressed alongside other considerations, not the least of which are representation at the centre, the electoral system, and the role of political parties in mitigating or exacerbating regional alienation.

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