

Scotland to Push for Second Independence Referendum Post-election

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The Scottish independence movement has come a long way since I was a child. A few decades ago the Scottish National Party was on the fringes of politics and even when the Scottish parliament was founded, it was a Labour government at the helm. Independence was a distant dream, untouchable. It was even more intangible a prospect when my parents were young – back in the 1950s the SNP was as ostracised as the BNP currently is, with its members considered to be rather unhinged!

Gradually, over the decades, this has changed, with **Alex Salmond** presiding over the first ever SNP government and **Nicola Sturgeon** winning the largest number of seats ever for her party. Scotland's party of independence has now been ruling the country for 12 years, and continues to dominate the political scene. On Thursday's general election it won 47 out of 59 seats on a mandate of stopping Brexit and calling a second referendum on Scottish independence. Nicola Sturgeon has been labelled the UK's second most powerful politician. Her party has never been as popular, and independence has never been so close. Now it seems the question is not if, but when.

Boris Johnson, having slaughtered **Jeremy Corbyn** in the election, is jubilant. He is currently coasting along on cloud nine, feeling vindicated after months of accusations hurled at himself and his 'untrustworthy' leadership. The man who just a short time ago, it was said, could face jail for deceiving the Queen and illegally proroguing parliament, took a gamble which paid off. He defiantly won the general election and now has a parliament behind him to pass his beloved Brexit bill.

And yet it's not clear that he fully understands the implications of Thursday's vote for the future of the Union. In fact it seems he is in denial. In a phone call with Nicola Sturgeon on Friday night Johnson reportedly emphasised that 'he remained opposed to a second independence referendum'. But his words are not accepting the reality of the situation: that the majority of Scots have just voted decisively for the party which stands on an independence platform. And Sturgeon is not going to back down. In an interview on Sunday she said: "If he thinks – and I said this to him on Friday night on the telephone – that saying no is the end of the matter, he is going to find himself completely and utterly wrong."

Sturgeon, usually mild mannered and reserved in her rhetoric on independence, has unequivocally turned up the volume in the debate, declaring that Scotland could not be "imprisoned" in the UK against its will. She accused the Tories of ignoring the will of the Scottish people and that they will have to 'face up to and confront reality' about what the election result means. In an interview with the BBC's Andrew Marr on Sunday the Scottish First Minister expressed frustration that she was being forced to explain her position: "It

really is such a subversion of democracy that you're talking to the leader of the party that overwhelmingly won the election, and I'm under pressure to say what I'm doing because the mandate that I won is not going to be honoured by the party that got roundly defeated in Scotland".

The independence campaign of course, narrowly lost in the 2014 referendum 45% to 55%. But so much has changed since then. At that time, the campaign for remaining in the Union was even using EU membership as an argument against independence, saying that Scotland would be jeopardising its future in the EU by leaving the United Kingdom. A few years later, the sad irony of this cannot be missed. Brexit has completely altered the political landscape in Britain, stirring up nationalism both north and south of the border. England has put Brexit before the United Kingdom, and Scotland has equally decided that its future remains with Europe, but not with England.

The Johnson government has a policy on Brexit, but its strategy on Scotland is less certain. Since the Prime Minister took office, his presence north of the border has been lacking, as has his interaction with Scottish politicians. Even his relationship with Scottish Tory leader, Ruth Davidson, was poor, as they had opposite views on Brexit. Johnson has deepened the hatred for the Conservative party in Scotland, estranging apathetic voters even further. By denying a second referendum he will only foster more bad feeling towards him and the Westminster government and boost the Nationalists' campaign. If he doesn't turn his attention to Scotland soon, he'll have a Catalonia situation on his doorstep before he knows it...

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