



The Constitution Unit

Monitor Supplement: April 2005

The General Election and the Constitution

Since the Monitor went to press, the general election campaign has kicked off in earnest. This special general election supplement compares the main parties' manifesto commitments in the field of constitutional policy.

Policy Area	Labour	Conservatives	Liberal Democrats
House of Lords	Abolish remaining hereditary peers and hold free vote on composition. Codify Lords procedural conventions and limit time most bills spend in Lords to 60 days. Forms of scrutiny in Lords to 'complement rather than replicate those of the Commons'.	The party will 'seek cross-party consensus for a substantially elected Lords'.	The current Lords will be replaced with a 'predominantly elected second chamber'.
House of Commons	Support for reforms that improve parliamentary accountability and scrutiny led by the Commons Modernisation Committee.	Number of MPs to be cut by 20%. Select Committees to be strengthened and more legislative scrutiny time allowed. Scots MPs to be barred from voting on English laws.	The scrutiny powers of the Commons will be strengthened by enhancing the Select Committee system.
The Executive Branch		Homeland Security Minister to be created. 'Regulatory budgets' for departments to be imposed, capping the total annual cost of regulations imposed. Regulations also to undergo 'sunset reviews' to ensure that their imposition has created more benefits than costs for business.	Royal Prerogative powers exercised by Prime Minister (e.g. on going to war) will be 'subject to parliamentary accountability'. The DTI will be abolished and the number of government ministers cut by a third. 'Sunset clauses' will be inserted in regulations affecting business.
The European Union	Joining single currency to remain subject to meeting the five economic tests and a referendum. Referendum on EU Constitution to be held; Labour to 'campaign whole-heartedly' in favour.	An unequivocal no to joining the Euro. Will hold referendum on the Constitution but will campaign for a No vote. Powers over asylum policy to be 'taken back from Brussels' and the opt out of the Social Chapter renegotiated.	In favour of the European Constitution and of 'creating the right economic conditions to join the euro'. Both decisions will be subject to a referendum.

Policy Area	Labour	Conservatives	Liberal Democrats
Devolution	Welsh Assembly to be given 'enhanced legislative powers' and its structure and electoral system reformed. Determination to get Northern Ireland devolution back on track.	A multi-option referendum to be held on future of Welsh Assembly with options including stronger powers, the status quo and abolition. Direct rule of Northern Ireland to be made more accountable.	Primary legislative powers for Welsh Assembly and stronger powers for the Northern Ireland Assembly. Consideration of how to extend the role of the Scottish Parliament.
English Regions	Powers of GLA and London Mayor to be reviewed. Further responsibility for planning, housing, development, transport to be devolved to regional bodies.	Will abolish Regional Chambers. Most powers currently exercised at a regional level will be given to local authorities. Learning and Skills Councils and Strategic Health Authorities also to be abolished.	Some regional powers will move to local level. Remaining regional bodies will be streamlined into single agencies headed by executives comprising elected councillors not government appointees.
Local government	Councils – especially those who perform well – to be given further freedoms to deliver services, subject to minimum standards. Possibility of further introduction of directly-elected mayors. Examination of idea that local elections should be on 'whole council' basis every four years.	Local government to be 'liberated' from central government. More powers will be given over planning decisions including relating to traveller camps. Regional powers over housing, transport and fire services to be 'returned to local authorities'.	More powers to be given to local government from central government and unelected regional bodies. For example, strategic planning will return to local authorities.
Electoral Systems	A commitment to 'reviewing the experience of the new electoral systems'. Confirmation that electoral reform for Westminster would require a referendum but no pledge made to hold such a vote.		Introduce the Single Transferable Vote for elections to Westminster, all local councils and the devolved institutions. Review the electoral system for European Parliament elections.
Other	Will continue exploring how to support political parties' 'vital democratic role', but campaigning 'must always be funded by parties' own resources'.	Human Rights Act to be reviewed and potentially amended to prevent it being used by travellers to circumvent planning regulations.	Voting age to be reduced to 16.

Scottish National Party

- Scotland to become an independent nation with a written constitution.
- Against EU Constitution which claims exclusive competence over fishing policy.
- Scottish Parliament to hold 'Citizen Debates' and 'Civic Debates' bringing together individual citizens, organisations and MSPs. Members of the public also to be able to vote for subject of weekly 'People's Business' debate in Parliament.
- Community councils to be reformed and strengthened.
- Tony Blair to be impeached for his decision to go to war in Iraq.
- Act of Settlement 1701 to be repealed.
- Voting age to be reduced to 16.

Plaid Cymru*

- Support for primary legislative, tax-raising and borrowing powers for National Assembly for Wales by 2007.
- Longer-term plan is to hold referendum on independence for Wales.
- Would support joining the Euro and EU Constitution subject to referendums.
- In favour of the single transferable vote for local and National Assembly elections.
- Supporters and initial proponents of plan to impeach Tony Blair over the Iraq war.
- Voting age to be reduced to 16.

* The 2005 Plaid Cymru manifesto was unavailable at time of writing. List of policies is based on previously-published policy documents and discussions with party officials.