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LSE Spatial Economics Research Centre

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Cities reject elected mayors

It looks like most, if not all, of the cities offered a choice are voting no to mayors [check Centre for Cities for a useful running commentary on results].

I confess to being fairly indifferent (a position I would appear to share with the vast majority of the electorate judging by the turnout figures). There have been some pretty strong claims made for mayors off the back of relatively little evidence. When it comes specifically to the issue of economic growth, what evidence there is supports metro-mayors (covering wider areas), *not* the directly elected Local Authority leaders which are on offer this time round.

As Diane Coyle argued on her blog yesterday, "to have a mayor or not doesn't seem to me to be the issue, so much as what decision-making powers are decentralised, and the quality of governance applied to decisions at the city region level." I agree with this assessment. As has been widely discussed, the government were very vague on powers, with some arguing that this contributed to the strength of the no vote.

A couple of other reflections. First, there is a certain irony in the fact that Labour went for a new tier of government that was arguably 'too big' (elected regional assemblies) while the coalition have gone for something that was arguably 'too small' (elected local authority leaders). Second, surely the discussion on mayors has to go on the back burner for now, with focus instead on further city deals? Further down the line, perhaps government can return to this issue with stronger proposals around metro-mayors and a set of negotiated city deals which better clarify the issue of powers and what mayors might actually do.

[Update: Bristol says 'yes'; so perhaps the intial pessimism misplaced, but my general indifference unchanged]

Posted by Prof Henry G. Overman on Friday, May 04, 2012   G+1 Recommend this on Google

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