

Institution: Aberystwyth University
Unit of Assessment: 21: Politics and International Studies
Title of case study: Public Opinion and Devolution in Wales
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>The case study describes the impact of research conducted at the Institute of Welsh Politics (IWP) on public opinion on Welsh devolution by Professor Wyn Jones and Professor Scully. Two types of impact have been generated by this research. First, the research has informed public policy processes relating to the Welsh devolution settlement primarily in Wales but also in the UK more generally. Second, the research, and its dissemination through media, public seminars and educational activities has resulted in impact on societal beneficiaries in Wales, specifically through informing and shaping public discourse on and understanding of Welsh devolution. The impact derives from ESRC-funded public opinion surveys and key academic publications on public attitudes in Wales towards devolution.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Since its creation in 1997, the aims of the Institute for Welsh Politics have been to provide rigorous independent analysis of Welsh politics, and to feed research into public and policy debates relating to Welsh democracy. This case study is centred on IWP research on public opinion in Wales. The research was conducted at Aberystwyth by Prof. Richard Wyn Jones and Prof. Roger Scully from 2001 up until February 2009, and was continued at Aberystwyth by Scully until March 2012 (in on-going collaboration with Wyn Jones). Dafydd Tristan contributed to this research at Aberystwyth up until September 2002 and acted as the third author to one of the articles (3.1). The impact of this research continues to be promoted by IWP staff at Aberystwyth as detailed in section 4.</p> <p>The research consists of i) surveys, the results of which have been made publically available, and ii) analysis of these surveys in research publications.</p> <p>Prior to this research, the absence of regular Wales-specific opinion surveys meant that popular attitudes on issues relating to the governance of Wales were little understood. The research by Wyn Jones and Scully, then, constitutes the first systematic examination of the evolution of public opinion and electoral behaviour in Wales, during a period of major developments in the operation and scope of Welsh democratic institutions.</p> <p>Research conducted took place in two stages. First, research in 2001-2004 funded by the ESRC (3.4) examined the legitimacy of the devolution settlement (3.1, 3.2). The marginal public endorsement of devolution in 1997 raised questions about the level of public support for the National Assembly for Wales (NAW). Wyn Jones' and Scully's research has closely tracked public attitudes towards devolution since the creation of the NAW and in so doing has provided insights into the extent to which this major constitutional innovation has become accepted as the appropriate form of government by the people of Wales. They find that whilst negative perceptions of the impact of the Assembly are widespread, opposition to devolution has fallen substantially since the 1997 referendum and support for further devolution has increased. Contrary to early predictions, there is also no empirical evidence of a linkage between opposition to devolution and non-participation in Welsh elections.</p> <p>Subsequent research elaborated on those themes. Prof. Roger Scully was the Principal Investigator for the ESRC-funded 2011 Welsh Referendum Study (3.5). The survey was methodologically innovative in its use of 'rolling' samples through the campaign period (thus allowing changes in attitudes during the campaign to be tracked). The data formed the core of a major study of the process leading up to, and the outcome of, the 2011 referendum on the granting of primary legislative powers to the NAW. Scully's contribution to the book that emerged from this work (3.3) was made at the IWP before his departure in March 2012. The book makes two key arguments: firstly, that the referendum was unnecessary, given that the issue was a technical rather than a constitutional one; secondly, that the Welsh electorate voted 'yes' because of a genuine belief that the NAW should have the right to make its own legislation. This latter finding points to the growing legitimacy of Wales's devolved institutions.</p>

3. References to the research

Research outputs:

- 3.1 Scully, R., Wyn Jones, R. and Trystan, D. (2004) Turnout, Participation and Legitimacy in Post-Devolution Wales. *British Journal of Political Science*, 34 (3): 519-37. DOI: 10.1017/S000712340400016X. Notes on quality: peer-reviewed, published in a well-respected journal in the field of political science; cited in subsequent literature (Google Scholar: 20 citations).
- 3.2 Wyn Jones, R. and Scully, R. (2003) A Settling Will? Wales and Devolution, Five Years On. *British Elections and Parties Review*, 13: 86-106. DOI: 10.1080/13689880308413089. Notes on quality: peer-reviewed, published in a well-respected journal; cited in subsequent literature (Google Scholar: 13 citations).
- 3.3 Wyn Jones, R. and Scully, R. (2012) *Wales Says Yes: The 2011 Welsh Devolution Referendum*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press. ISBN: 978-0708324851. Notes on quality: peer-reviewed; well-received in popular and academic reviews. David Moon in his review in *Political Studies*, for example, argues that: 'this is... the best text on Welsh devolution I have read in a long time. Highly accessible, it deserves not only a place on course reading lists but a readership beyond academia' (review available at: http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1478-9302.12016_103/full).

Research grants:

- 3.4 Economic and Social Research Council-sponsored grant awarded to project *Welsh Electoral Surveys 2001/2003 (Wales Life and Times Studies 2001/2003)*. Principal Investigator: Richard Wyn Jones. Dates of grant: 01/01/2001-31/12/2004. Value of grant: £274 984. Notes on quality: final report graded as 'Outstanding'. For published research data see: <http://www.esds.ac.uk/search/indexSearch.asp?ct=xmlSn&q1=33345>
- 3.5 Economic and Social Research Council-sponsored grant awarded to project *2011 Welsh Referendum Study*. Principal Investigator: Roger Scully. Dates of grant: 01/02/2011-01/11/2011. Value of grant: £81 043. Notes on quality: highly competitive research grant; successful publications drawing on data (see 3.3 above); final report yet to be graded by funder. For published survey data see: <http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/interpol/research/research-projects/welsherelectionstudy/data/>

4. Details of the impact

The research has impacted on i. public policy processes relating to the Welsh devolution settlement, and ii. public discourse on, and understanding of, devolution in Welsh society.

The impact of the research on *public policy processes* is three-fold. First, the research influenced the recommendations of the All Wales Convention (AWC), a public enquiry, established in 2008 to assess public attitudes towards devolution, and in particular, the desire to transfer primary legislative powers to the NAW. Informed by their research on public attitudes in Wales, Scully and Wyn Jones presented summaries of their work to the Convention in 2008. This work was, as members of the Convention confirm, 'a key contribution to the considerations of the AWC and a determinant of its final recommendations' (5.1, 5.2). As one member of the Convention explains, the research was 'an essential and pivotal component of evidence collected by the Convention as part of its work'; it 'weighed heavily in discussions and unquestionably helped to shape the recommendations of the Convention' in a way which 'constitutes clear and unambiguous impact' (5.2). The AWC recommended moving to a referendum on further legislative powers for the NAW as they, in line with Wyn Jones' and Scully's research findings that broad support for devolution in Wales had developed, noted 'a context of substantial support for devolution as it stands, and clear signs of an appetite for more' (5.3). It was 'following the findings of the All Wales Convention' that on February 2, 2010 the First Minister and Deputy Minister of Welsh Government announced their intention to ask for a referendum, a motion which was debated and agreed to by the Assembly Members on February 9, 2010 (5.4). The resultant 'yes' vote in the 2011 referendum impacted the Welsh and British constitutional settlement.

Second, the IWP's research has impacted on other actors involved in public policy-making

processes on devolution in the UK more generally. The research informed, for example, the more recent work of the UK Government's Commission on Devolution, established in October 2011 to review the present financial and constitutional arrangements in Wales. The Commission's 2012 report on Part I of its work, prepared in November 2011, acknowledges directly the arguments made by Wyn Jones and Scully on the problems of conducting a referendum on a technical question (as articulated in an article in the current affairs magazine *Agenda*, drawing directly on research in their book *Wales Said Yes*) (5.5). The research on public attitudes has also informed the opinions of other key actors on future constitutional change as is evidenced by the Welsh Government's reference to this data in its submission to Part II of Commission's work (5.6).

Third, the IWP's work on the legitimacy of devolution has also had secondary impact on the policy work of other organisations. This can be seen in the Welsh Office Green Paper proposals on the reform of electoral arrangements for Welsh Assembly elections. Some of the recommendations made in 2012 are informed by a 2006 Electoral Commission investigation into turnout among Welsh voters, which in turn draws on the IWP's survey data and research findings (5.7).

In respect to the impact of IWP's research on *informing and shaping public discourse on, and understanding of*, devolution in Wales, three distinct claims for impact are made.

First, the research findings have been disseminated widely through Welsh and English-language media (e.g. BBC radio and television, S4C, *The Guardian*, *Agenda*, *Barn*). This resulted in public commentary on the core arguments of their work. Thus, for example, referring to their work, discussions on the motivations and structure of the 2011 referendum, reasons for the referendum outcome, and legitimacy of devolved institutions featured in prominent Welsh publications in 2012. A notable example is an article 'The impact of civic Wales' featured on a prominent Welsh news magazine website 'Click on Wales'. In this article the author 'reads between the lines of [the *Wales Says Yes*] book' highlighting the significance of its core findings and agreeing with many of its major conclusions. Through closely engaging with Wyn Jones' and Scully's arguments, the author offers his own interpretations of the referendum process, as do the online commentators on his piece (5.8). This indicates impact on public understanding and debate on the Welsh referendum.

Second, the research has also contributed to improving public knowledge and debate through having influenced the work on Welsh public opinion of a major national polling organisation, YouGov. In 2009, Scully collaborated closely with YouGov to develop their first Wales-specific surveys. These were very closely informed by Wyn Jones' and Scully's previous research expertise on Welsh public opinion (5.9). The survey findings of YouGov's work were disseminated in co-operation with Scully at well-attended seminars in Cardiff and at Aberystwyth in October 2009, and were widely reported in the Welsh media (5.10). This led directly to ITV commissioning YouGov to conduct further polls between May 2010 and May 2011 (5.9). Through assisting in further knowledge gathering and public dissemination in this way, the research has contributed to the furthering of knowledge on Welsh public opinion, which in turn has assisted in informing the public debate and discourse on democracy in Wales, as the media and blog discussions of YouGov data attest (5.10).

Third, various IWP staff have contributed to the continuous dissemination of the research findings of Scully and Wyn Jones through educational activities outside the HEI. For example, Dr Anwen Elias's contribution entitled 'Political Representation' to the Open University course, *Understanding Contemporary Wales*, specifically promoted Scully's and Wyn Jones' research findings on the subject and has impacted several staff at BBC Cymru. BBC programme makers completed the course as part of a broader skills and experiences programme, in part 'to help them give context to items on devolution when producing content for broadcast' (5.11). BBC Wales External Affairs Manager confirms: 'Anecdotally a number of staff members who took part in the project have mentioned that they feel they have a better understanding and confidence in dealing [with] contemporary and on-going issues because of the knowledge they learnt as part of the course'. (5.11) The role of the discussion of public opinion and devolution is mentioned specifically as continuing to be 'beneficial by giving BBC Wales' staff a basis on which they frame current and future debates' (5.11).

Further, between 2008 and 2013, research on Welsh public opinion was promoted by IWP staff through development of online sources and delivery of workshops for A-level and Welsh Baccalaureate students across Wales.

Impact case study (REF3b)

In terms of the former, Scully drew directly on his work on the 2011 Welsh Referendum in an article prepared for the A-level Government and Politics website, www.politicscymru.com (5.12). From December 2011 when the material was submitted to the website to April 2013, this article had received more than a hundred hits (5.12), which, considering the number of students taking Government and Politics in Wales (estimated at around 260 a year across AS- and A-levels), demonstrates considerable interest in public opinion on Welsh devolution amongst the non-higher education student population in Wales.

School children's perceptions on Welsh devolution and public opinion have also been informed through workshop sessions with secondary school students. The most recent round of 'schools sessions' which directly focused on public opinion and devolution in Wales were delivered in June and July 2013 by IWP staff Dr Elin Royles and Dr Huw Lewis. These workshops promoted directly the work of Scully and Wyn Jones. Feedback surveys of these events indicated a significant impact on the attendees. 87% either strongly agreed or agreed that the session had improved their understanding of public attitudes towards devolution in Wales, and 85% strongly agreed or agreed that the session had improved their understanding of how people voted in the 2011 Welsh Devolution Referendum (5.13).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1 Contact person: a member of the All Wales Convention.
- 5.2 Correspondence from a member of the All Wales Convention.
- 5.3 *All Wales Convention Report*. 2009, p. 98.
Available at: <http://allwalesconvention.org/getinformed/thereport/thereport/?lang=en>.
- 5.4 Triggering the referendum. 2 March 2011. Available at:
<http://wales.gov.uk/legislation/referendumpowers/referendumjourney/triggerreferendum/?lang=en>.
- 5.5 *Empowerment and Responsibility: Financial Powers to Strengthen Wales*. Commission on Devolution in Wales, November 2012, p. 127. Available at:
<http://commissionondevolutioninwales.independent.gov.uk/files/2013/01/English-WEB-main-report1.pdf>.
- 5.6 *Evidence submitted by the Welsh Government to the Commission on Devolution in Wales*. February 2013, p 4-5. Available at:
<http://wales.gov.uk/docs/caecd/publications/130215silkevidence.pdf>.
- 5.7 *A Green Paper on Future Electoral Arrangements for the National Assembly for Wales*. Wales Office, May 2012, pp. 28-9. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/green-paper-on-electoral-reform>. This Green Paper refers to findings in *Wales - A Poll Position: Public Attitudes towards Assembly elections*, Electoral Commission, 2006. Available at:
http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/electoral_commission_pdf_file/0020/16/166/ECWlshPPfinal_Eng_23320-17362_E_N_S_W.pdf.
- 5.8 The impact of civic Wales, Click on Wales, 2 March 2012. Available at:
<http://www.clickonwales.org/2012/03/the-impact-of-civic-wales/>. See also a linked reference The day labour became Welsh, 13 March 2012. Available at:
<http://www.clickonwales.org/2012/03/the-day-labour-became-welsh/>.
- 5.9 Testimonial letter from representative of YouGov.
- 5.10 An example of media commentary on IWP/YouGov seminars in Blog Vaughan Roderick, 27th October 2009 (Bant a ni; Ar y llaw arall, Syr Emyr; Language: Welsh). Available at:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/thereporters/vaughanroderick/2009/10/bant_a_ni_1.html;
http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/thereporters/vaughanroderick/2009/10/ar_y_llaw_arall_syr_emyr.html. See also *Betsan's Blog*, 27 October 2009 (Polls Apart?). Available at:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/thereporters/betsanpowys/2009/10/polls_apart.html.
- 5.11 Testimonial from External Affairs Manager of BBC Wales.
- 5.12 Correspondence from an associate of www.politicscymru.com, 19 April, 2013. Scully's article is available at: <http://www.politicscymru.com/en/cat1/article24/>.
- 5.13 Survey data on 'schools session' on Welsh public opinion and devolution with secondary school students (Language: Welsh). Sessions organised on 28 June, 8 July and 11 July, 2013.