

UK Data Archive

Study Number 5747

North East Referendum Campaign and Media Coverage, 2004

USER GUIDE

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PROJECT RATIONALE

It is something of a truism that the British state has long been among the most centralized in the capitalist world. For all the democratic structures that exist, prime ministers exercise considerable power both through their dominance of the cabinet and because they are able to invoke 'crown prerogative' in taking a whole range of executive actions (Benn, 2001). Furthermore, the British state has historically been highly geographically centralized: command and control functions have been overwhelmingly concentrated in London, whilst local government during the twentieth century - and particularly in the period since the 1980s - became increasingly subject to central government diktat (Cochrane, 1993; Stewart and Stoker, 1995). Such geographies of power have strong echoes in the UK's economic geography, as the south and east of England have consistently enjoyed the highest levels of wealth and lowest levels of unemployment for at least 100 years (Lee, 1971; Mohan, 1999). Nevertheless, for much of the post-second world war period, an uneasy regional truce was maintained as generalized economic growth in the 1950s and 1960s contributed to full (male) employment, whilst explicit, though ultimately unsuccessful regional policy signalled that the state aimed to keep a lid on processes of uneven development.

The economic crisis of the 1970s, and the Thatcherite response, undermined this truce. First, the national territories of Scotland and Wales and England's northern regions increasingly felt politically alienated from a central state that - throughout the 1980s and for most of the 1990s - was dominated by a Conservative government sustained by southern English votes and with little sympathy for regional traditions. For example, the Scottish Development Agency, which continued to pursue an interventionist and largely corporatist approach to economic development for much of the Thatcher period, was dismantled in July 1994 (MacLeod, 1999). Neoliberalized economic policy and an acceleration in the decline of manufacturing saw the UK's peripheral economies collapse during the early 1980s (for example, Massey, 1984; Massey, 1986; Martin and Rowthorn, 1986; Lewis and Townsend, 1989; Martin, 1989; Mohan, 1999), even while the south east continued to thrive (Peck and Tickell, 1992; Tickell and Peck, 1995; Allen et al., 1998). The centralized state and gradual homogenisation of local political cultures and identities paradoxically began to fuel a new localist and regionalist politics. During the 1990s, this led to a renewed belief, in the economic and geographical periphery, that the UK's political economy *structurally* favoured the greater south east and that a transformation of governance would be necessary were uneven economic development to be tackled (although see John et al., 2002; 2003). Furthermore, the political geography of electoral support for the Labour Party mapped closely on to the distribution of these relative economic weaknesses. The failure of a devolution referendum in Scotland in 1979 did nothing to dampen support for a measure of self-government, and the election of John Smith as Labour Party leader in 1992 and the Labour Party to government in May 1997 gave momentum and legislative authority to national devolution campaigns. Following referenda in September 1997, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland were granted relatively autonomous elected bodies, each with different powers but each, too, with significant capacity to deviate from centrally determined priorities (MacLeod and Goodwin, 1999; Trench, 2001; Goodwin et al., 2002; Keating, 2002).

This variegated approach to devolution appeared to leave England, with the exception of London, largely untouched (Harvie, 1994; Travers, 2002), although the country accounts for 85% of the UK population and peripheral regions of England experienced similar levels of economic and political alienation to those in Scotland and Wales (Tomaney and Ward, 2000). However, while significantly less well developed than elsewhere in the UK and Europe, the campaign for regional government in England is gathering momentum. Institutions of regional governance are already in place, while plans to create elected Regional Assemblies have been strengthened by new legislation (Jeffrey and Mawson, 2002). Even so, in comparison to devolution in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and even London, Labour's proposals for the development of regional government in England are at best very modest (Tomaney, 1999).

Although 1997 – the year that New Labour took power – is sometimes seen as 'year zero' for the English regions, their development has been a gradual and progressive process (Hogwood and Keating, 1982; Garside and Hebbert, 1989). At the earliest, and most trivial, stage of the process, government administrative functions were geographically dispersed. With few notable exceptions, such dispersals involved routine tasks, while senior civil servants remained proximate to the political centre. The relocation of administration activities in the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency from London to Swansea in the early 1970s, or more recently the relocation of social security administration to Leeds in the 1980s, brought welcome employment to depressed economies, but did little to alter the geography of real power in England (Marshall et al., 1997). All too frequently the dispersed civil service functions resembled manufacturing branch plants, with limited management autonomy and a relatively low-skilled labour force. The current round of more significant developments in English regional government began under the Conservatives. During the 1980s, while the national territories each had economic development bodies that invested significantly at promoting the country as a location for mobile investment, the peripheral English regions each had a poorly funded inward investment promotion body (Dicken and Tickell, 1992). However, the deepening of European integration and, particularly, the emergence of discourses around a 'Europe of the regions' as a counterweight to the economically centralising reality of a single European economic space prompted the start of a very real regionalisation of English political and economic life (Hebbert and Machin, 1984; Harvie, 1994; Tomaney, 1996; Halkier et al., 1998; Keating, 1998). Thus, north west England began to organize seriously as a region in response to explicit pressure from the European Union and implicit recognition that winning EU structural funds required a regionally coherent message, rather than the series of competitive and fragmentary voices that had characterized the region hitherto (Tickell, Peck and Dicken, 1995; John et al, 2002). By the mid-1990s it was clear that some form of regional tier of government had become a necessary part of doing business with the European Union (Hall and van der Wee, 1998).

The English regions have developed in an incremental way, with functions being devolved down from central departments and up from local government in an ad-hoc manner over many years. However, recent legislative changes, which strengthen the regional tier of government and make it more accountable to the public, have brought arrangements onto a more formal footing. The publication of the white paper *'Your Region, Your Choice'* by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister – or ODPM – in May 2002 outlined the government's proposals (ODPM, 2002), including the creation of a new set elected Regional Assemblies, local government reform and the

empowerment of regional institutions in a range of specific new areas. These proposals were further developed by the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Act 2003, which prepared the way for referenda on elected Regional Assemblies in the North East, North West and Yorkshire and the Humber regions, following an ODPM soundings exercise that identified a degree of public and institutional support for elected government in each region (although see the comments of David Davies in *Hansard*, 2003). However, there is considerable evidence to suggest that, beyond the three northern regions, support for regional government elsewhere in England will be limited (Harding, 2002; Heath et al., 2002; Sandford, 2002; Curtice, 2003).

The regional referendums will test public appetite for regional government in England. Although the historical case for the English regions has been made (Tomaney 2003), they remain predominantly administrative constructions without the national media, political culture and identity that formed the basis of devolution campaigns in Scotland, Wales (and to a lesser extent London). As such, the referendum campaigns will be as much about the development of regional identity and the building of public awareness as they will be about supporting or opposing government policy proposals. Furthermore, the referendums are a vital test of the long-term sustainability of New Labour's devolution agenda. A 'no' vote to elected government in all three regions may signal the end of the current round of sub-national constitutional reform.

This project is a potentially unique opportunity to report on and analyse this period of region-building in England. It will also set the research agenda for understanding the increasingly variegated pattern of regional governance following the referendums. If one or more regions vote 'yes', we will seek to analyse the way in which the new elected regional assembly interacts with the restructured system of local government and with other adjoining, unelected regional institutions. If any region returns a 'no' vote, the key issue will be the way in which regional government seeks to redefine its role and to work with other institutions of government and partnership organisations within the region. Irrespective of the outcome of the referendums, the balance of political power will shift in these three northern regions, and the future trajectory of devolution in England defined.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This project studies the creation of new political spaces in three English regions. It focuses on referendums in three regions to be held in autumn 2004. The objectives of the project are to qualitatively assess public discourses, in the media and in other public forums, during the period leading up to the referendums. This will involve the close scrutiny of public in the period leading up to the referendums, in the regional and national media and in other information published by the 'yes' and 'no' campaigns. Additionally, the project will assess the impact of the referendums on the governmental structure of the three regions. This will take the form of a detailed analysis of institutions of governance in each region. The first stage will be the analysis of networks of regional governance, which will enable us to identify key individuals and organisations in the region. The second stage will be a series of research interviews in each region. It is uncertain at this stage if any referendum will result in a 'yes' vote. However, our research design will enable us to assess the future structure of governance each of the three referendum regions.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The key research questions addressed by the project were:

- How can patterns of public support for regional government be understood in the context of referendum campaigns?
- How are public discourses around elected regional government developed during the referendum campaigns?
- What will be the impact of elected regional government on the existing structure of regional government?
- How can the referendum campaigns inform our understanding of the regionalism and devolution process in England?

RESEARCH METHODS

The research will rely upon analysis of (i) primary economic and social statistics for the referendum regions (ii) publicly available secondary data sources (such as documents published by the regional 'yes' and 'no' campaigns and institutions of regional government) (iii) the regional and national media coverage of the referendums (iv) interviews with key officials in the regional governance architecture and local authorities and (v) interviews with key regional partner organisations and other expert informants both within the regions and beyond. Items (i) and (ii) are readily available and can be collected from web sites, via direct contacts with the institutions involved, and by monitoring regional media through web sites and other online resources including LexisNexis. In the cases of items (iii) – (v), the research team has an extensive range of contacts in the regional political and policy communities at the national level and a track record of identifying and contacting key informants within the English regions.

It is anticipated that, during the period leading up to and during the referendums, there will be intense media coverage of events both from regional and local media and at the national level. We will collect and record relevant materials from newspapers and the broadcast media. A programme of content analysis will be used to generate data on the processes of region building and its presentation to the regional publics. It will be the responsibility of the research assistant to monitor the regional and local media and to construct a database of items and articles. Furthermore, it is anticipated that a retrospective analysis of newspaper articles and press releases will be conducted. This will enable us to set the public debates during the referendum period in their historical context.

We will construct a database of the key board and public-private partnership members in each of the referendum regions. This will be used as the basis for a programme of sociometric network analysis on their membership (Wasserman and Faust 1994, Scott 1992). We will create a matrix of all of the main organisations in each region, and where there is a person who is a common member of two organisations' boards, we will record that connection. Using UCINET V computer software, we will analyse the cohesion of regional political and policy networks, and identify key cliques and individuals within the regions. This will form a quantitative data resource in its own right, and will establish in a rigorous and comparative manner the established institutional structures of each of the referendum regions. The extensive data collection task will be the responsibility of the research assistant during the first three months of the project. Subsequently, Steven Musson will carry out the data analysis and reporting. Furthermore, the project will benefit from the expertise of Peter John, who has published in this area (John 1998, John and Cole 1998).

The network analysis, along with our prior experience in research of this type, will be used to inform the selection of interview subjects. The aim will be to examine the role and views of key players in the region: their place in regional networks of governance, their perceptions of the devolution policy agenda and the impact of institutional restructuring on the region. Interview material will be analysed using standard qualitative research methods. Tapes will be transcribed by a subcontractor, before being coded and subsequently analysed by the research team. By combining qualitative and quantitative data, a progressive and triangulated research design will be adopted. The applicants have considerable experience in these modes of analysis and of researching regional government, and will closely oversee the data collection and analysis process. In particular, it is anticipated that Tickell and John will participate in interviews with key informants.

Interview research has both strengths and weaknesses. While it allows for a depth of understanding of process and complexity, it is also a highly subjective methodology in which respondents do not always give an accurate answer. Furthermore, the analysis of interview transcripts and the reading of competing explanations and logics from multiple sources is a difficult task. The research methodology adopted here addresses these potential dangers in two ways. First, we will use a range of data, both collected and archival, to triangulate between sources. Second, we will interview a range of

respondents both within the referendum regions themselves and in Wales, where the devolution campaign provides the closest available precedent for the processes at work in the northern English regions. We will investigate the extent of rehearsed and adaptive learning from Wales on the part of both the pro and anti devolution camps. Unlike the study regions, Wales has a consensus of ideology, even if it is derived by its 'other' and by *something* of a national media. However, we see the Welsh referendum campaign as an important comparative process through which the three English regions in this study can be understood.

PUBLICATIONS ARISING

Tickell A, John P, Musson S (2005) The north east region referendum campaign of 2004: Issues and turning points *Political Quarterly* 76, 488-496



The University of Reading

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Dr Steven Musson

15 November 2005

Dear xxx,

Regional referendum in north east England, November 2004

We are writing to ask whether you would be willing to give a short research interview about your experience as xxx.

We are carrying out an ESRC-sponsored research project on the north east referendum of November 2004. Our focus is on the effectiveness of the campaigns and the role of the media in influencing public opinion in the region. We are also interested in the wider implications of the north east referendum, for English regionalism and for future referendums in the UK.

We would be interested in talking to you about your involvement with xxx and your experience of campaigning on this issue. We think that your experience of xxx will be invaluable for our research.

We will be in xxx carrying out research on xxx and will contact you in the next few days to try and arrange an interview. However, if these dates are not convenient, we will be happy to arrange a more suitable date. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Steven Musson, University of Reading
Professor Adam Tickell, University of Bristol
Professor Peter John, University of Manchester

North east interview questions

The offer

How was the type of powers on offer through the Bill an issue for the campaigns?

Did the coupling of regional government with local government reorganization emerge as a significant issue?

Timing

Political timing

Did the referendum come too late in the political history of New Labour?

Would the result have been different had the North East gone in 1997?

Campaign timing

Did the official campaigns finish too early, i.e. before postal balloting commenced?

Was campaign momentum lost due to the protracted period of postal voting?

Would holding elections on one day have made any difference to the turnout or to the result?

Campaigns

What were the key issues for the campaign groups and for the public?

To what extent was the 'Yes' campaign a movement of the regional political / civic elite?

What was the impact of having two 'No' campaigns?

What kinds of experience brought in to campaigns from other regions / nations?

How did political parties approach the campaigns? 'No' appeared depoliticised, but what were the 'Yes' associations, formally and informally, with Labour and Lib Dems?

Role of smaller political parties, e.g. UKIP, especially in the unofficial 'No'

Did 'No' fight a strong campaign, or were they 'pushing at an open door' once the weak offer was made?

Media

Did the media campaign make any difference, in the result or in raising awareness?

Differences in the printed and broadcast media approach to the two campaigns, especially relating to the complexity of 'Yes' and simplicity of 'No' messages?

Did the national media cover the referendum campaigns to any extent?

Other issues

Does the result reflect a wider anti-political or anti Labour sentiment?

Did the cancellation of referendum in other regions devalue the offer?

Did local government become involved in the campaigning?

Note on the process of rendering interview transcripts anonymous

For each interview submitted, the names of the interviewees have been replaced with a unique identification tag (Interviewee 1, Interviewee 2 etc). This replacement method has been rigorously applied across all transcripts. As such, when the name of one of our interviewees is raised in another interview, their name has been replaced with their unique identification tag.

Wherever possible, we have tried to leave the names of individuals, places and organisations in the transcripts. Where this was not possible, for example when this might have compromised the identity of the interviewee, the name has simply been deleted and replaced with unique identification code. This coding has been used in a consistent way between interviews.

On several occasions, an interviewee made 'off the record' comments that were transcribed. These comments have been removed and this practice has been noted in the submitted transcript.

NOTE ON NETWORK ANALYSIS

Research methodology

The research used the method of collecting social network data from private sector boards. We collected information from all the economic development partnerships in the region by starting with the three regional institutions and by identifying their main sub-regional sub contractors – the organisations they work through at the local level. So Regional Development Agencies work through regeneration partnerships and economic partnerships, Government Offices through learning and skills councils. The point was to identify the main regional bodies and their sub-regional partners. We then moved on to identify the composition of their boards and the organisations represented on them. Apparently non-regional organisations are included because they may have representatives on various partnership boards, although they were not sampled themselves. As such, there are a small number of sampled organisations and a much larger number of derivative organisations such as HM Treasury. We coded the presence of a board member on the board of another organization as a link, coding at number higher than one in the case of more than one link, making the matrix a valued graph. The resulting data matrices, which are symmetric because the link indicates both a link to and from each actor, were analyzed by UCINET software.

Organisations included in analysis in each region

Government Office

Regional Assembly

Regional Development Agency

Regional Chambers: North East Chamber of Commerce (Council)
 Several in the North West (e.g Manchester)

Economic Partnerships (e.g.): Durham Economic Partnership
Tyne and Wear Partnership

Learning and Skills Councils

Regeneration Partnerships: (e.g.) New East Manchester
Liverpool Vision

Procedure for processing information ready for UCINET 5

1. Produce a list for each region:

Reference	First Name	Surname	Organisation 1	Organisation 2
1	Steven	Musson	Birkbeck	Bristol
2	Adam	Tickell	Manchester	Bristol
3			

2. Convert this list into a sheet showing individuals and organisations:

Reference	First	Surname	Birkbeck	Bristol	Southampton	Manchester
1	Steven	Musson	1	1	0	1
2	Adam	Tickell	0	1	1	1
3	Peter	John	1	0	1	1

Use find and replace (e.g. replace blanks with 0) to speed this up

3. Turn everything into code

	1	2	3	4
P1	1	1	0	1
P2	0	1	1	1
P3	1	0	1	1

Also keep a list showing:

P1 = Steven Musson

P2= etc.

1= Birkbeck

2= etc.

4. Transform the sheet to show how many links there are between organisations.

	1 (Birkbeck)	2 (Bristol)	3	4
1 (Birkbeck)	..	1	1	2

2 (Bristol)	1	..	1	2
3	1	1	..	2
4	2	2	2	..

UCINET 5 is programmed to read data in this form – i.e. mirror image around a blank diagonal

NOTE ON MEDIA ANALYSIS

The analysis of media coverage of the north east referendum of November 2004 covers a period from January 2003 – November 2004. The media included in our analysis were North East, North West and Yorkshire Humber regional newspapers and UK national newspapers. Our research method was to identify coverage in all national newspapers using the LexisNexis database. The search terms ‘North East / North West / Yorkshire / Humberside’ and ‘Referendum’ were employed. For regional and local newspapers in the north east, we also used this method for the majority of cases. Some local newspapers (e.g. Sunderland Echo) are not included in LexisNexis and as such, individual online archives were searched using the term ‘Referendum’.

Once newspaper articles had been identified, the full text was downloaded and read. For each article, the following information was recorded:

- Region
- Date of publication
- Name of newspaper
- Headline
- Area (i.e. national or regional)

Further to this information, we also noted the section of the newspaper in which it was published (i.e. news item, editorial comment, letter to the editor) and made an assessment of the primary tone of the article (positive, i.e. pro-regional assembly, negative, i.e. anti-regional assembly, neutral). This assessment was made by a research assistant, however a cross check using a random 5% sample was made by a member of the research team. These were found to be accurate.

RES-219-25-2001 - Qualitative Study of Public Discourse in the Three Referendum Regions

In 2002 the government set out proposals to create a new set of elected regional assemblies. Initially, there was to be referenda on elected regional assemblies in the North East, North West and Yorkshire and the Humber regions. However, in 2004 the referendums in Yorkshire and Humber and the North West were postponed. The vote in the North East went ahead, but the result was a resounding 'No'.

This study, by the University of Bristol investigates this unique attempt at region-building in England and investigates the attitudes and narratives that resulted in the 'no vote' in the North East.

Key Findings

Campaigning

- Because the government's proposals were seen as timid, committed supporters of devolution were unenthusiastic about the nature of the offer and felt hampered in their campaign. Conversely, the No campaign could argue that a Yes vote would lead to additional costs without achieving additional autonomy for the region.
- The Yes campaign tended to over-emphasise the degree to which a region would be changed if a Yes vote were achieved. This made voters wary as there were many convincing counter-claims reported in the media at this time.
- The Yes campaign adopted a strategy which emphasised links between itself and the wider regional movement in the North East which proved counter-productive. The campaign quickly became seen as a creature of the regional establishment.
- The No campaign adopted a simple and effective strategy that centred on three key messages: that an assembly would be expensive; would lead to more politicians; and would not have enough power to make any real difference in the region.
- The No campaign benefited from being able to represent itself as anti-establishment and fostered an 'anti-politics' rhetoric that appealed to voters.

Timing

- The referendum took place towards the end of the political cycle and traditional Labour supporters felt that they could vote against the proposals as a relatively low-cost means of 'punishing' the government for disaffection elsewhere.
- Most of the electorate had their ballot papers for two or three weeks before sending them in. The Yes campaign was timed to peak at the start of this

period whilst the No campaign was at its most effective at the end. It is possible that this issue of timing, combined with a postal-ballot may have influenced the extent to which the Yes campaign was defeated.

Media

- The media in the North East devoted significant time to the referendum. Regional broadcast media focussed on the referendum as an event in itself, whilst the regional press covered the elected assembly for a longer period.
- Analysis of the various media reports suggests that during the course of the campaigns, the tone of the coverage became increasingly sceptical and favoured the No campaign.

About the Study

Research was led by Professor Adam Tickell, School of Geographical Sciences, University of Bristol. Research methods included analyses of media, campaign literature, interviews with key opinion formers and the collection of information on 600 governance institutions across the three regions.

Key Words

Devolution, regional elected assemblies, the North East

Qualitative Study of Public Discourse in the Three Referendum Regions

Non-Technical Summary

Revised research questions:

The agreed revised research questions were:

How can patterns of public support for regional government be understood in the context of the referendum campaign?

How are public discourses around elected regional government developed during the referendum campaign?

What will be the impact of elected regional government on the existing structure of regional government?

How can the referendum campaign inform our understanding of regionalism and devolution process in England?

What do the similarities and contrasts between the referendum region and the delayed referendum campaigns imply for the development and trajectory of the English regions project?

Results

Our analysis suggests that there are a number of inter-locking explanations as to why the result was such an unemphatic No.

Limited devolution. Paradoxically, the government's proposals were too timid and sought to relocate powers. In some cases, the new assembly appeared to draw powers up from local government, in spite of assurances to the contrary given in the White Paper. The tightly circumscribed powers meant that

- (i) committed supporters of devolution were unenthusiastic about the nature of the offer and felt hampered in their campaign.

(ii) the No campaign could argue that a Yes vote would lead to additional costs without additional autonomy and that ‘the north east deserves better’. Indeed, some members of the aborted Yorkshire and Humberside No campaign even claimed they would have supported a stronger and more meaningful regional assembly.

Campaigning matters

The second result from our research was that the approaches of both the Yes and the No campaign groups made a significant difference to the outcome of the referendum.

The yes campaign tended to over-emphasise the degree to which the region would be changed if a Yes vote were achieved. Alongside these Yes claims, the public could observe many counter claims, such as Lord Rooker’s declaration that the region would have ‘no money, no powers.’ The Yes campaign adopted a strategy that reflected the links between itself and the wider regional movement in the north east, which had long prioritised issues of regional accountability. In some respects, this became counter-productive as the Yes campaign came to be seen as a creature of the regional establishment. Furthermore, the campaign found it difficult to sustain that an elected assembly would be an alternative to the London-centric political system and the close association with the Labour Party made it difficult to identify the failures of national government as a reason to introduce an elected regional assembly. As the campaign progressed, and it became clear that opposition was gaining momentum, the Yes campaign adopted a disastrous negative campaign seeking to associate objectors with the Conservative Party and other right wing groups that failed to convince.

The No campaign proved effective and adopted an effective, and simple, strategy centred on three key messages: that an assembly would be expensive, lead to more politicians and have few powers to make a real difference to the government of the region. This simple message was reinforced by a series of high profile, media-friendly events. Furthermore, the No campaign was able to present itself as being anti-establishment. The No campaign also benefited because it did not need a coherent message and was able to foster an ‘anti-politics’ rhetoric, particularly with its one, very effective, campaign broadcast that hammered home the message that the ERA would create an additional cadre of politicians who were, it implied, out for themselves. Over the course of the campaign this anti-politician and anti-tax

message increasingly chimed with an electorate whose historical support for the Labour Party was already weakening without a natural replacement having been found. More generally, the result of the North East may be seen as an expression of the decline in political trust in Britain and is another example of where the public believe that politicians only act for their own interest

The timing of the vote was critical for the outcome of the referendum in three senses. First, advocates of devolution felt that it had been hard work even to get to the stage of a referendum, which compared unfavourably with the situation in the national territories, and also with London. Second, the referendum took place towards the end of the political cycle and traditional Labour Party supporters felt that they could vote against the proposals as a relatively low cost means of ‘punishing’ the government for disaffection elsewhere. Finally, most of the electorate had their ballot papers for two or three weeks before sending them in: Yes For the North East timed their campaign to peak at the start of this period whilst North East Says No was most effective at the end. The use of the postal ballot, and the campaign groups’ understanding of its effect, may have made a difference to the scale of the proposal’s defeat.

The *Media* in the north east devoted significant amounts of time and space to the referendum. While regional broadcast media focused on the referendum as an event in itself, the regional press had been covering the case for an elected assembly for a longer period. The regional broadcast media devoted considerable news and current affairs time to the referendum. BBC North East recruited an additional political correspondent, while BBC radio assigned a national reporter to the event. National media coverage was more scarce. Content analysis suggests that during the course of the campaign, the tone of the coverage became increasingly sceptical and favoured the No message.

Networks

The analysis of the governance networks (described in the submitted research note), suggested that the North East has a slightly denser set of connections between political, economic and social elites than found in the other two regions, but that it is not significant, which confirms the idea that the three Northern regions do not differ enough

in their regional elite network to justify setting the North East apart.

Qualitative Study of Public Discourse in the Three Referendum Regions

Research Report

5000 words

Background

Including, for example, relevant previous or parallel research. Theoretical positions and hypotheses where relevant.

The publication of the white paper 'Your Region, Your Choice' by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister – or ODPM – in May 2002 outlined the government's proposals to create a new set elected Regional Assemblies. These proposals were further developed by the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Act 2003, which prepared the way for referenda on elected Regional Assemblies in the North East, North West and Yorkshire and the Humber regions, following an ODPM soundings exercise that identified a degree of public and institutional support for elected government in each region. Although the historical case for the English regions has been made (Tomaney 2003), they remain predominantly administrative constructions without the national media, political culture and identity that formed the basis of devolution campaigns in Scotland, Wales (and to a lesser extent London). As such, it was envisaged that the referendum campaigns would elucidate the development of regional identity and the building of public awareness as about supporting or opposing government policy proposals. The process was also vital test of the long-term sustainability of New Labour's devolution agenda.

This project was seen as a potentially unique opportunity to report on and analyse this period of region-building in England.

Objectives

The aim and the objectives were revised following the announcement in July 2004 by the Secretary of State that the referendums in Yorkshire and the Humber and the North West were to be postponed. The ostensible reason for the postponement was that all postal ballots in these two regions were potentially open to fraud and misunderstanding,

but there was little doubt in either the House of Commons (for example, Hansard, 22 July 2004 col 501-) or the wider community that the government's soundings were such that the realised that elected assemblies would be overwhelmingly rejected.

Original aims and objectives

Original Aim

To understand the creation of new regional political spaces through public discourses around the three referendums

This aim was partially met as discussed in specific objectives below.

Original Objectives

To investigate the rationale and depth of support for elected regional assemblies

This aim was met in full through (i) analysis of media content; (ii) the results of the referendum; (iii) interviews in each region with key opinion formers; (iv) network analysis of key institutions (summarised in research paper *Networks and Regional Governance* enclosed)

To monitor and investigate public discourses around elected regional assemblies in the three referendum regions

This aim was met in full through (i) analysis of media content; (ii) analysis of literature (paper and web-based) of campaigning organisations. After the July 2004 announcement, the public discourse in the NW and Y&H almost entirely disappeared and our focus shifted to a deeper analysis of the NE.

To assess the likely impact of elected regional assemblies in those regions where there is support for them

REFERENCE No.

This aim was not met. Preliminary analysis of the impact of an elected regional assembly in the North East was conducted but the referendum result rendered this analysis redundant.

To establish a methodological framework through which regional discourses in other regions can be understood

This aim was met in part through the media content analysis, network analysis and intensive interviews with opinion formers and campaign groups. The results of the referendum mean that the framework is unlikely to be used in the near future.

To engage a wide range of regional communities in the dissemination of research findings within a timeframe that enables a relevant and meaningful intervention to be made

This aim was met in part through presentations at the ARO/ Devolution Programme conference in Durham, 2004 and at the House of Commons in 2005. We circulated copies of the Devolution Brief to interview respondents. However, following the NE referendum, there was little interest in the region in discussing the results.

Revised research questions:

The agreed revised research questions were:

How can patterns of public support for regional government be understood in the context of the referendum campaign?

This aim was met through the analysis of media content and research interviews (summarised in research paper enclosed and below)

How are public discourses around elected regional government developed during the referendum campaign?

This aim was met through the analysis of media content, campaign literature and research interviews

What will be the impact of elected regional government on the existing structure of regional government?

This aim was not met because it implied a Yes vote in the referendum

How can the referendum campaign inform our understanding of regionalism and devolution process in England?

The emphatic nature of the rejection of the Government's proposals has led to a wholesale rethinking of devolution in England.

What do the similarities and contrasts between the referendum region and the delayed referendum campaigns imply for the development and trajectory of the English regions project?

This aim was partially met through the interviews, media analysis and network analysis. The network analysis suggests that, contrary to expectations, the North East is less 'institutionally exceptional' than some commentators believe.

Methods

Specific reference to methods used, including survey design, special equipment, new methods and analysis of results.

The research deployed a mixed methods approach:

- (i) network analysis

REFERENCE No.

The network analysis mapped the density of the relationships between key institutions of economic, political and social governance in each region. We collected information on the representative memberships of 600 governance institutions across the three regions. The network analysis was analysed using UCINET V. Results of the network analysis are summarised below and the network files being submitted to the Data Archive.

(ii) media content analysis

The media analysis explored the tone and content of regional and national media coverage of the debates on the regional elected assemblies. A database of material was derived from Lexis-Nexis and supplemented with coverage from the regional news media that Lexis-Nexis does not archive. A full list of regional newspapers was obtained from the Society of Publishers and we obtained approaching full coverage of paid for newspapers in the North East region and approximately 80% in the other two regions (local weekly newspapers were not fully covered and weekly free newspapers were very patchily covered in all regions). The BBC's web-based coverage was also monitored, as were a sample of radio and television programmes.

Media stories were coded according to whether they were (i) editorial matter; (ii) news stories; (iii) reader letters and (iv) other and also coded for (a) advising a yes vote or a positive slant; (b) advising a no vote or a negative slant; and (c) proffered no advice and was neutral in tone and content.

Results of the media analysis are summarised below and are in the process of being submitted to the data archive as a rich Excel worksheet with pivot tables.

(iii) analysis of campaign literature and websites in the North East region

An archive of some of the campaign literature and the full websites of the designated Yes and No campaign groups was developed. These informed our analysis of the evolution of the campaigns and some of the results of the analysis are summarised below and in our published research.

The archive of the websites will be maintained at the University of Bristol.

(iv) interviews with key informants

We interviewed key opinion formers in each of the three regions.

In the North East, we interviewed members of staff and heads of the designated Yes and No campaign groups and also the head of the unofficial No campaign. We also interviewed local politicians, representatives from the local media (both as generic informants and to discuss our research findings from the media content analysis), business people, trade unionists, and informed commentators. The majority of the interviews took place during the campaign but a small number interrogated the results. In the other two regions, we interviewed local politicians, campaigners and informed commentators *after* the referendums had been postponed and explored the reasons for that decision and the likely regional future.

The interviews informed our analysis of the evolution of the campaigns are summarised below and in our published research.

Anonymised interview transcripts are in the process of being submitted to the Data Archive.

Results

A report of the results of the project and analyses to date.

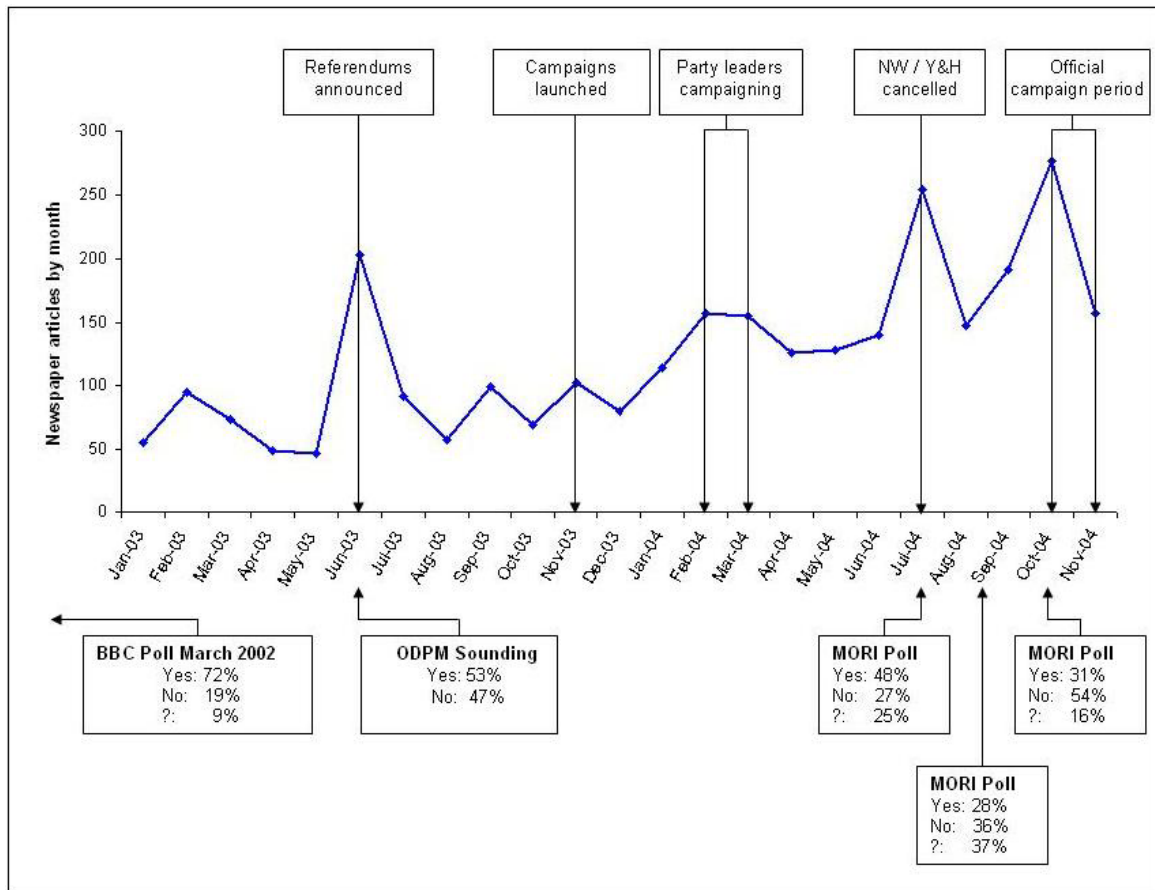
RESULTS

'I do not know why the referendum was lost—there is a range of reasons. I have probably spent more time than anyone else defending the proposal and listening to people's views in markets, streets and in debates. I gave some of the reasons, which included worries about too many politicians and cost. Europe was

mentioned from time to time, as if the proposal were a Euro-plot. All those factors played a part. I do not think that there was one major reason. I cannot therefore really give an answer to the question "Why?" All I need to know now is that I did not convince people and that I was emphatically defeated. (John Prescott, 8 November 2004, *Hansard*, 426, 151, col 598.)

At the time of the original application for this research grant, it was expected that referendums on establishing elected regional assemblies would be held in the North East, North West and Yorkshire & the Humber regions but the government abandoned the latter two votes with the claim that there were concerns about electoral fraud that meant that they had to be 'postponed'. This research project consequently was reframed to monitor the referendum process in the North East and to explore the degree to which a (widely anticipated) positive result would be a reflection of a degree of 'exceptionalism' in that region. In the event, the electorate of North East England voted by a margin of almost four to one against proposals that would introduce an elected regional assembly with the power to set the strategic priorities and oversee the economic development activities of existing regional agencies. The result dealt a death blow to the, already faltering, long-standing campaign for devolution in the national territories of the UK to be matched by parallel moves in the English regions.

Dealing, as it did, with a rapidly changing political environment, this research project both remained faithful to the agreed revised aims and objectives (in that it retained the comparative element between the three regions) and it monitored the falling support for the government's proposals during the course of the summer and autumn of 2004. As the referendum campaign progressed and media coverage increased, opinion polls in the north east showed a gradual erosion of support for an elected regional assembly (see figure below).



In so doing, it allowed us to address the question posed by the Deputy Prime Minister as to ‘Why?’ he was so emphatically defeated and these allow us to draw specific conclusions about the course of the campaign and generic conclusions that draw upon the nature of the proposals made by the ODPM. Our analysis suggests that there are a number of inter-locking explanations as to why the result was such an unemphatic No and that the interplay of these factors was also critical, particularly in the ways in which the No campaign responded to the limited form devolution on offer and the interaction between the campaigns and regional media coverage. Overall, however, we drew six conclusions that are detailed below.

1. Limited devolution

The first explanation for the result is that, paradoxically, the government’s proposals were too timid. With few exceptions, the White Paper sought to relocate powers already available to existing, unelected regional institutions and elected assemblies would primarily be strategic bodies that would ‘join up’ existing activities and be accountable,

rather than service deliverers in their own right. In some cases, the new assembly appeared to draw powers up from local government, in spite of assurances to the contrary given in the White Paper. For example, regional co-ordination of fire and rescue services, previously a local authority activity, was to be reallocated to the regional tier (Jeffery 2006).

To its supporters, the referendum in the North East was seen as the first stage of a process whereby the balance of power and authority would begin to shift away from Whitehall and Westminster and towards a region that has consistently lagged the rest of England according to most economic and social indicators. However, the tightly circumscribed powers meant that

(i) committed supporters of devolution were unenthusiastic about the nature of the offer and felt hampered in their campaign. For example, interviewees told us that

“Had [the Cabinet] really been committed, they could have come in and said the regional assembly would be able to dual the A1, but we didn’t get any help like that.” (Yes Campaigner, December 2004)

“If we were saying that this would be able to pay for 10,000 apprentices in the engineering sector, then the impact would be huge. If we were able to say that this would give us a light rail system around Durham-Teesside International Airport ... it would be incredibly significant. But to say, “Well, we can influence these things and we can put some more pressure on those things”, it hasn’t really had the impact that greater powers would give us.” (Yes Campaigner, October 2004)

(ii) the No campaign could argue that a Yes vote would lead to additional costs without additional autonomy and that ‘the north east deserves better’. Indeed, some members of the aborted Yorkshire and Humberside No campaign even claimed they would have supported a stronger and more meaningful regional assembly. One television journalist who covered the campaign from outside the region highlighted the difficulty of finding out exactly what an elected assembly would do: “It was not like in Scotland, where they could say that they would be running education. There was none of that. You just couldn’t get hold of it at all.” (Yorkshire & Humberside TV journalist, November 2004).

2. Campaigning matters

The second result from our research was that the approaches of both the Yes and the No campaign groups made a significant difference to the outcome of the referendum.

The yes campaign tended to over-emphasise the degree to which the region would be changed if a Yes vote were achieved. In one press release, for example, it claimed, “a North East Regional Assembly will be able to reverse this trend [towards regional economic divergence]. It would be able to focus spending on local priorities and directly tackle the causes of slow economic growth that are currently hampering the region.”¹ But alongside these Yes claims, the public could observe many counter claims, such as Lord Rooker’s declaration that the region would have ‘no money, no powers.’²

The Yes campaign adopted a strategy that reflected the links between itself and the wider regional movement in the north east, which had long prioritised issues of regional accountability. In some respects, this became counter-productive as the Yes campaign came to be seen as a creature of the regional establishment (it campaigned on these credentials with celebrity endorsements from Sir John Hall, chairman of Newcastle United Football Club, Sir John Bridge, the former chief executive of the regional development agency; the regional political establishment, including the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats and figures, such as Ray Mallon, the Mayor of Middlesbrough and populist former police chief; the trade unions; and figures from sport and the arts, such as Brendan Foster and opera singer Suzannah Clarke). In interviews, both Yes and No campaigners said that the elite endorsement was a tactical error because it underscored the impression that the substantive content was weak. Furthermore, as both the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister campaigned for a yes vote, the campaign found it difficult to sustain that an elected assembly would be an alternative to the London-centric political system and the close association with the Labour Party made it difficult to identify the failures of national government as a reason to introduce an elected regional assembly.. Indeed, before the cancellation of the north west referendum, ministerial visits were seen by Yes campaigners to be highly counterproductive by campaigners in the region.

¹ 09/10/04 Leading academics back North East Regional Assembly (this file is archived by the research team at the University of Bristol and available for consultation).

² *House of Lords*, 5 March 2003: columns 813-814.

As the campaign progressed, and it became clear that opposition was gaining momentum, the Yes campaign adopted a disastrous negative campaign seeking to associate objectors with the Conservative Party and other right wing groups. Although a region with a strong Labourist tradition and continued antipathy to the Conservative Party, both insiders and external observers came to believe that this line of attack was a tactical error that trivialised the issues and failed to provide a convincing rebuttal of the claims being made by the No campaign. In any case, negative campaigning is inherently risky, and the academic assessments of its effectiveness cannot draw definite conclusions (Lau et al 1999).

The No campaign proved to be an effective adversary. At the outset, it was expected that Neil Herron, who came to prominence as the, so-called, ‘Metric Martyr’ would be designated by the Electoral Commission as the Official No Campaign. In the event, this was given to a coalition of local businessmen in collaboration with the New Frontiers Foundation, a – now-defunct – conservative think tank. Neil Herron’s group continued to campaign and gave the impression that there was a broad-based coalition against the proposal. The designated No campaign adopted an effective, and simple, strategy centred on three key messages: that an assembly would be expensive, lead to more politicians and have few powers to make a real difference to the government of the region.

“I think you have a limited amount of time in which you are speaking to ... people. Now, you need to ask yourself the question, do you want them to come away with having seen a picture of five ministers carrying a banner saying ‘Vote Yes’, or do you want to say, ‘It’s going to raise your Council Tax by x quid’”? (No campaigner, October 2004)

This simple message was reinforced by a series of high profile, media-friendly events, including the iconic white elephant. For example, £1million in fake banknotes was burned to symbolise the cost of the new assembly (a message strengthened by coverage of cost overruns at Holyrood). Furthermore, the No campaign was able to present itself as being anti-establishment. Although an adviser to the Conservatives’ Regions spokesman was working in the No offices, the campaign distanced themselves from the Conservative Party, who had relatively little electoral support in the region.. One No campaigner in Yorkshire and the Humber indicated:

“If we [in the Yorkshire no campaign] had been seen as the Tories, it would have been a disaster. I still think we would have won, but at the outset I really couldn’t see that an apparently Tory-led campaign could win. So we had to make it appear people-led or at least non-party political” (November 2004)

The No campaign also benefited because it did not need a coherent message and was able to foster an ‘anti-politics’ rhetoric, particularly with its one, very effective, campaign broadcast that hammered home the message that the ERA would create an additional cadre of politicians who were, it implied, out for themselves. Over the course of the campaign this anti-politician and anti-tax message increasingly chimed with an electorate whose historical support for the Labour Party was already weakening without a natural replacement having been found: after all, a monkey and a former police chief had been elected city mayors in place of party politicians that had ruled northern local authorities for many decades. More generally, the result of the North East may be seen as an expression of the decline in political trust in Britain and is another example of where the public believe that politicians only act for their own interest (Bromley et al, 2001). Such sceptical opinions make citizens keener to reject proposals that have been rolled out by the political elite. Instead, they warmly embrace more straightforward and populist messages. The way in which the No campaign portrayed itself as politically independent and hostile to the establishment may have helped its cause. In that sense, the North East result may be part of a more general cross-national popular reaction against the treasured projects of party politicians.

The timing of the vote was critical for the outcome of the referendum in three senses. First, advocates of devolution felt that it had been hard work even to get to the stage of a referendum, which compared unfavourably with the situation in the national territories, and also with London. The late adoption of the proposal may have given a negative signal to the electorate about the government commitment to devolution, a signal that was compounded by the cancellation of the votes in the two other regions.

“If the [elected] regional assembly had been there twenty, thirty years ago when they had pits and the shipyards and everything else, I think it would have been a different matter. I think ... there’d have been a lot more

funding, resource, a lot more knowledge of the issues rather than the kind of way in which everything was shut up; I think it would have been able to push the North East's view a lot more on that. I still think the industries would have gone, but I think the replacements, the job replacements, the new industries and everything else may have been better". (Newspaper editor, North East, September 2004)

Second, the referendum took place towards the end of the political cycle and seemed to resemble a by-election as national politicians descended to the North East to urge a yes vote. In this context traditional Labour Party supporters felt that they could vote against the proposals as a relatively low cost means of 'punishing' the government for disaffection elsewhere. Finally, most of the electorate had their ballot papers for two or three weeks before sending them in: Yes For the North East had timed their campaign to peak at the start of this period whilst North East Says No was most effective at the end. The use of the postal ballot, and the campaign groups' understanding of its effect, may have made a difference to the scale of the proposal's defeat.

The *Media* in the north east devoted significant amounts of time and space to the referendum. While regional broadcast media focused on the referendum as an event in itself, the regional press had been covering the case for an elected assembly for a longer period. This included over 1,400 news stories, letters to the editor and editorial comment in the 22 months leading up to the referendum in the north east alone. Newspapers ran features written by leading members of the Yes campaign during 2003 and 2004. In the north west and Yorkshire and the Humber more than 1,000 further items appeared in regional newspapers including the *Yorkshire Post*, *Manchester Evening News* and *Liverpool Echo* on the referendums there.

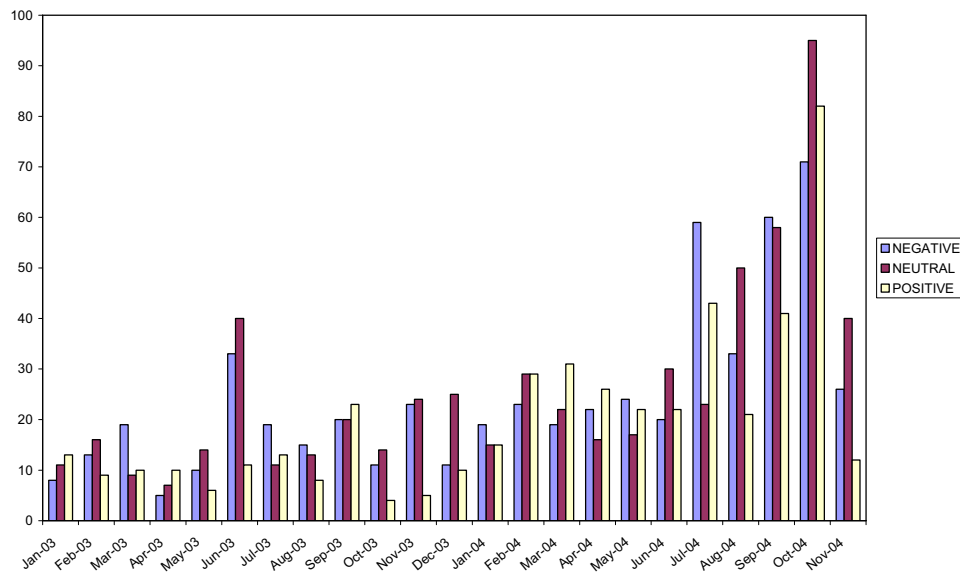
The regional broadcast media devoted considerable news and current affairs time to the referendum. BBC North East recruited an additional political correspondent, while BBC radio assigned a national reporter to the event. In addition to frequent news items, BBC North East held a televised 'Great Debate' on 17th October 2004. The programme's producers claimed over 100,000 viewers, even though it was broadcast late on a Sunday evening. Both BBC and ITV and screened four official campaign election broadcasts during the campaign period, while on 4th November 2004, the results were announced live on national BBC Radio. Tyne Tees, the main regional ITV broadcaster in the north east, also covered the referendum in depth, including a two-hour election night broadcast

and regular news and discussion items throughout the campaign. In contrast to the regional broadcast media, national television and radio covered the referendum in a limited manner. The focus was heavily on reporting the result and its aftermath, rather than on raising public awareness of issues during the campaign (Wring et al 2005). In some respects, this reflects the cost to the north east of cancelling referendums in the north west and Yorkshire and the Humber: although a significant regional media issue, the north east referendum remained an essentially parochial affair.

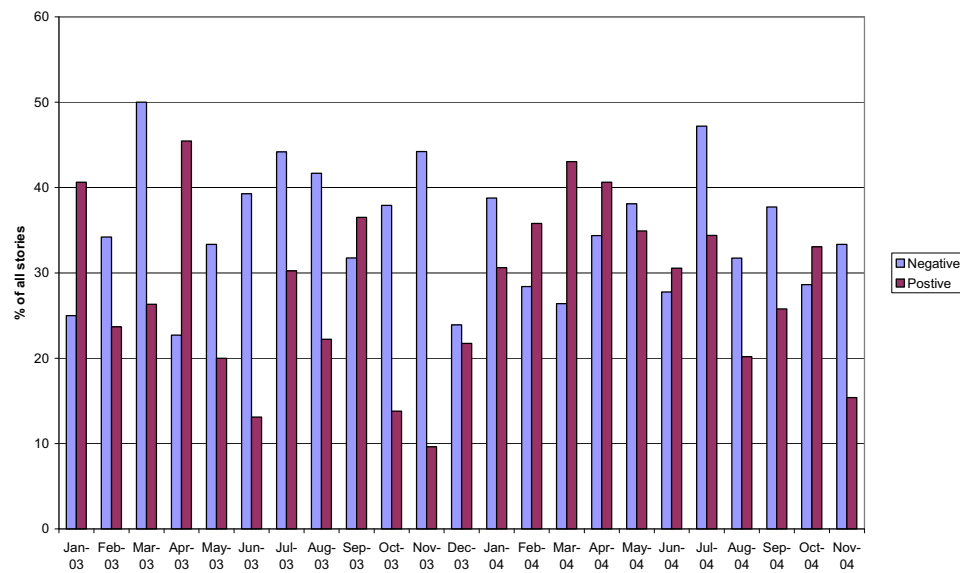
National media coverage was more scarce. Over the long term, *The Times* ran 80 articles from January 2003 to November 2004 and *The Guardian* 52, compared with 19 in the *Daily Mirror* and nine in *The Sun* over the same period. National newspapers were more likely to adopt a negative tone when reporting the referendum. Between January 2003 and November 2004, 218 items relating directly to the north east referendum appeared in the national press, of which 23 were positive in tone, while 114 were negative. Furthermore, nine of the 23 positive items came in the form of letters to the editor, rather than in news stories or editorial comment. The only national newspaper to run a positive editorial was *The Guardian*. In contrast, Britain's most widely read newspaper, *The Sun*, did not feature any positive coverage of the referendum and announced the result on page 9 under the headline 'Prezza in Vote Flop' (*The Sun*, 5th November 2004 p 9). Some in the Yes campaign believe that the lack of national media interest in the referendum was particularly damaging to them, because they were required to maintain public interest in the referendum as well as to publicise the potential benefits of an elected assembly.

Furthermore, content analysis suggests that during the course of the campaign, the tone of the coverage became increasingly sceptical and favoured the No message.

Tone of newspaper coverage, January 2003-November 2004



Tone of Newspaper coverage (per cent of all stories in month)



Comparison of newspaper coverage by tone and item type in the north east

	<i>Tone of Coverage</i>			<i>Total number</i>
	<i>% Positive</i>	<i>% Negative</i>	<i>% Neutral</i>	
North East news stories	26.9	24.5	48.6	1079
North East editorial comment	24.8	41.6	33.6	149
North East letters to the editor	34.8	59	6.2	400
North East all coverage	28.6	34.6	36.8	1628
North West all coverage	16.7	40.3	43.0	785
Yorkshire & Humber all coverage	14.9	49.2	35.9	457
<i>Total number</i>	<i>665</i>	<i>1104</i>	<i>1101</i>	<i>2870</i>

Number of referendum stories and circulation of selected regional / national newspapers

<i>Newspaper</i>	<i>Circulation</i>	<i>Referendum stories (Jan 2003 – Nov 2004)</i>
Evening Chronicle (Newcastle)	83,000 ¹	148
The Journal (Newcastle)	41,000 ¹	486
Sunderland Echo	46,000 ¹	55
Northern Echo (Co Durham)	53,000 ¹	410
Teesside Evening Gazette	56,000 ¹	103
The Sun	177,000 ²	6
The Mirror	101,000 ³	10
The Daily Telegraph	22,000 ⁴	25

Networks

REFERENCE No.

The analysis of the governance networks (described in the submitted research note), suggested that the North East has a slightly denser set of connections between political, economic and social elites than found in the other two regions, but that it is not significant, which confirms the idea that the three Northern regions do not differ enough in their regional elite network to justify setting the North East apart.

References

C. Bromley, J. Curtice and B. Seyd. (2001) 'Political engagement, trust and constitutional reform', *British Social Attitudes*, 18th Report (London: Sage).

R. Lau, L. Sigelman, C. Heldman and P. Babbitt (1999) 'The effects of negative political advertisements: a metaanalytic political assessment' *American Political Science Review* 93(4), 851-875

Activities

To include related activities such as conferences, networks etc.

Outputs

Publications, other dissemination, datasets (with confirmation of deposit at the Data Archive where applicable), software etc. These should not duplicate the Regard return but may be used to highlight particularly important outputs.

None not submitted to Regard.

Impacts

Are there instances of the research results being used or applied outside of the project, including commercial exploitation, either actual or proposed? Please detail any links with, or interest shown by, users of the research.

In addition to standard academic outputs, the research was:

REFERENCE No.

- presented at a session for MPs and journalists at the House of Commons chaired by Joyce Quinn MP.
- discussed at a meeting of the Electoral Commission, chaired by Sam Younger
- presented at a user-orientated conference in the North East of England and discussed on that occasion with the relevant speakers from major political parties

Future Research Priorities

Are there lines of research arising from this project which might profitably be pursued (not necessarily with ESRC funding)?

The key area of intellectual interest that the research raised was that of how the anticipated positive result was overturned. Whilst the specifics of the result are highly specific, there are two important lessons for protagonists in future referendums in the UK. First, it is easier to campaign to maintain the status quo unless there are compelling reasons for change. Second, it is essential to use the media effectively and create symbols that chime with the core message.

1.7 Ethics

The majority of the research involved the transformation of readily accessible and publicly available data. The research interviews were conducted according to 'normal' social science practice and the University of Bristol's Research Ethics Policies and Procedures. We gave all interview subjects a summary of the research project and assured them that we would treat the interviews confidentially. Whilst some of our subjects waived this right, we have adopted the practice universally and all transcripts have been anonymised prior to submission to the Archive.

OTHER

REFERENCE No.

Please contact: ESRC Communications (Info Centre), Economic and Social Research Council, Polaris House, North Star Avenue, Swindon, SN2 1UJ. Tel: 01793 413122; e-mail; infocentre@esrc.ac.uk

It is necessary for the Principal Award Holder to sign the "Society Today" declaration on P4 of the End of Award Report form.

Annex A: Revised Project Outline: Qualitative study of public discourse in the three referendum regions

Adam Tickell and Peter John

This project is a unique opportunity to report on and analyse this period of region-building in England. The regional referendum in the North East and the preparations for those to take place in Yorkshire and Humberside and the North West will test public appetite for regional government in England and the extent to which regional elites and influential publics are leading the regionalisation of English politics. It will also set the research agenda for understanding the increasingly variegated pattern of regional governance following the first referendum. Irrespective of the outcome and timing of the referendums, the balance of political power will shift in these three northern regions affecting the future trajectory of devolution in England.

If the North East region votes ‘yes’, the project will seek to analyse the way in which the new elected regional assembly interacts with the restructured system of local government and with other adjoining, unelected regional institutions. If the North East region returns a ‘no’ vote, the key issue will be the way in which regional government seeks to redefine its role and to work with other institutions of government and partnership organisations within the region.

In the case of the delayed referendum regions, the project will be able to monitor and analyse the volume and content of media coverage prior to, and subsequent on, the decision to postpone the referendums, to monitor and analyse the volume and content of media coverage of the referendum in the North East region. In the event of a “Yes” vote, it will explore the degree to which regional media cast the North East settlement as being a competitive ‘threat’ to their interests (particularly as articulated to central government); interview key opinion formers about the rationale for, and their reaction to, the decision to postpone the referendums; interview key opinion formers about the reaction to the North East result; and interrogate the report of the electoral commission in light of the government’s announcement. The research will be able to compare the extent of region building between the referendum region and the delayed referendum regions.

The key research question to be addressed by the project will be:

- How can patterns of public support for regional government be understood in the context of the referendum campaign?
- How are public discourses around elected regional government developed during the referendum campaign?
- What will be the impact of elected regional government on the existing structure of regional government?
- How can the referendum campaign inform our understanding of regionalism and devolution process in England?
- What do the similarities and contrasts between the referendum region and the delayed referendum campaigns imply for the development and trajectory of the English regions project?

The research will rely upon analysis of (i) primary economic and social statistics for the referendum regions (ii) publicly available secondary data sources (such as documents published by the regional ‘yes’ and ‘no’ campaigns and institutions of regional government) (iii) the regional and national media coverage of the referendum (iv) interviews with key officials in the regional governance architecture and local authorities and (v) interviews with key regional partner organisations and other expert informants both within the regions and beyond. Items (i) and (ii) are readily available and can be collected from web sites, via direct contacts with the institutions involved, and by monitoring regional media through web sites and other online resources including LexisNexis. We plan to carry out interviews with core actors in the cancelled referendum regions, and seek to cover a much wider group of actors in the North-East.

It is anticipated that, during the period leading up to and during the first referendum, there will be intense media coverage of events both from regional and local media and at the national level. We will collect and record relevant materials from newspapers and the broadcast media, looking at coverage in both the referendum region and in cancelled referendum regions.. A programme of content analysis will be used to generate data on the processes of region building and its presentation to the regional publics. Furthermore, it is anticipated that a retrospective analysis of newspaper articles and press releases will be conducted.

We will construct a database of the key board and public-private partnership members in each of the referendum regions. This will be used as the basis for a programme of sociometric network analysis on their membership. We will create a matrix of all of the main organisations in each region, and where there is a person who is a common member of two organisations’ boards, we will record that connection. Using UCINET V computer software, we will analyse the cohesion of regional political and policy networks, and identify key cliques and individuals within the regions.

The network analysis, along with our prior experience in research of this type, will be used to inform the selection of interview subjects. The aim will be to examine the role and views of key players in each region: their place in regional networks of governance, their perceptions of the devolution policy agenda and the impact of institutional restructuring on the region.

Indicative Timetable

Month	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Preparation	Field work						Writing up				
	Analysis						Dissemination		Archiving		