

To cite this output:

Scully, RM, *et al* (2012) The 2011 Welsh Referendum Study
ESRC End of Award Report, RES-000-22-4496. Swindon: ESRC



ESRC End of Award Report

For awards ending on or after 1 November 2009

This End of Award Report should be completed and submitted using the **grant reference** as the email subject, to **reportsofficer@esrc.ac.uk** on or before the due date.

The final instalment of the grant will not be paid until an End of Award Report is completed in full and accepted by ESRC.

Grant holders whose End of Award Report is overdue or incomplete will not be eligible for further ESRC funding until the Report is accepted. We reserve the right to recover a sum of the expenditure incurred on the grant if the End of Award Report is overdue. (Please see Section 5 of the ESRC Research Funding Guide for details.)

Please refer to the Guidance notes when completing this End of Award Report.

Grant Reference	RES-000-22-4496		
Grant Title	The 2011 Welsh Referendum Study		
Grant Start Date	1 February 2011	Total Amount Expended:	£96365.04
Grant End Date	1 November 2011		
Grant holding Institution	Aberystwyth University		
Grant Holder	Prof Roger Scully		
Grant Holder's Contact Details	Address	Email	
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	01970 622689		
Co-Investigators (as per project application):		Institution	
Prof Richard Wyn Jones		Cardiff University	

1. Non-technical summary

Please provide below a project summary written in non-technical language. The summary may be used by us to publicise your work and should explain the aims and findings of the project. *[Max 250 words]*

The 2011 Welsh Referendum Study examined the March referendum on greater devolution for Wales. Over 3000 voters (the largest sample ever gathered by a political survey in Wales) were interviewed via the internet during the referendum campaign; the vast majority were then re-interviewed immediately after the vote. The study investigated the reasons for participation and vote choice in the referendum. Among the major findings are:

- While turnout in the referendum was low, it did not reflect disproportionate participation levels from different national identity groups in Wales, nor did it reflect opponents of devolution failing to take part in the referendum;
- The referendum campaign was relatively unsuccessful at engaging and informing the public about the issues at stake, and the campaign period did little to change the overall pattern of voting intentions;
- While many referendums become ‘hi-jacked’ by extraneous matters, voting choices in the 2011 referendum in Wales were primarily driven by something directly pertinent to the issue on the ballot – people’s general views about how Wales should be governed – supplemented by their evaluations of the performance of the devolved institutions.

2. Project overview

a) Objectives

Please state the aims and objectives of your project as outlined in your proposal to us. *[Max 200 words]*

The Welsh Referendum Study had several objectives.

First, it sought to investigate the explanatory power of the following perspectives on referendum voting behaviour:

- *Party Cues*: To what extent do parties – and voters’ attitudes to parties and their leaders – influence individual voting decisions?
- *National Identities and Sentiments*: How voting decisions in a referendum on Welsh devolution would be shaped by individuals’ identification with, and attitudes towards, Wales and the UK?
- *Performance*: Whether voters’ willingness to support greater powers for a political institution would be driven by the perceived performance of that institution.

Second, the study also sought to explain the overall outcome of the referendum and the impact of the campaign period on that outcome.

Third, the study aimed to advance the conduct of referendum studies in the UK through significant innovations in sampling methodology and research design.

Fourth, the study aimed to achieve the effective use of resources, by producing a body of high-quality data at relatively low cost.

Finally, the research team sought to maximise the impact of the research, through the early release of data generated, and by the effective communication of findings to academic and non-academic users.

b) Project Changes

Please describe any changes made to the original aims and objectives, and confirm that these were agreed with us. Please also detail any changes to the grant holder's institutional affiliation, project staffing or funding. *[Max 200 words]*

There were no significant changes made to the aims and objectives of the study.

c) Methodology

Please describe the methodology that you employed in the project. Please also note any ethical issues that arose during the course of the work, the effects of this and any action taken. *[Max 500 words]*

The study was implemented as a two-wave panel survey, with fieldwork conducted via the internet by YouGov. This was a significant innovation. All previous referendum and election studies in Wales, and all previous referendum studies in the UK, had conducted sampling face-to-face or by post (or, in one instance, face-to-face combined with telephone). Within available research budgets, this permitted those studies to conduct a single wave survey, often of fewer than 1000 respondents. By using internet-based sampling, this study achieved a substantially greater sample size; it was also the first UK referendum study to produce panel data, with the same respondents interviewed both before and after the vote.

The study originally sought a sample of 2000 respondents for both pre- and post-referendum waves. But YouGov were so successful in recruiting respondents that the pre-referendum wave achieved 3029 respondents; 2569 (84.8 percent) of these also completed the post-referendum wave. This greater sample size facilitated robust estimates of the proportions of Yes voters, No voters, and Non-voters across the major geographic, national identity, partisan, linguistic and social class groups in Wales; and addressing some of the main study objectives, which required knowledge of groups forming a relatively small proportion of the Welsh electorate. (For instance, examining the effect of party cues required samples of supporters from each major party and those without a party attachment).

The pre-referendum wave sample was implemented on a 'rolling' basis in the month before the vote. Over these 30 days, an average of just over 100 respondents per day was achieved. This has made it possible to generate robust estimates of key variables at different stages of the campaign period.

The surveys enquired into the following matters:

- *Participation and Vote*: Did respondents vote in the referendum, and if so, which way?
- *Knowledge*: How knowledgeable were people about the referendum?
- *Campaign Evaluations*: How aware were they of the activities of the Yes and No campaigns? How did they evaluate their efforts?
- *Parties and Party Cues*: How did respondents perceive the stances taken by parties and prominent politicians on the referendum issue?

- *National Identities and Sentiments*: To what extent did people identify with Wales and/or the UK? What were their broader attitudes towards Welshness and Britishness?
- *Performance Evaluations*: How did respondents rate the performance of the devolved Welsh institutions? How did they evaluate the equivalent UK-level institutions? And what were their performance expectations for the future?
- *Respondents*: Individual characteristics and broad political attitudes.

Where appropriate questions were used in the 1997 Welsh Referendum Study, or other previous referendum studies, this study replicated those questions to maximise the comparability of data. Referendum studies conducted outside the UK, the British Election Study, and previous election studies in Wales were also drawn upon to guide the shaping of questions. Some questions, including most background questions on respondents, were covered in the pre-referendum wave; others questions were asked post-referendum. But many were asked in identical form in both waves, to measure potential changes over time.

d) Project Findings

Please summarise the findings of the project, referring where appropriate to outputs recorded on the ESRC website. Any future research plans should also be identified. *[Max 500 words]*

The study produced several main findings.

Turnout in the 2011 Welsh referendum was low (35.6 percent). The study found some, typical socio-demographic differences in participation rates: middle-class voters were somewhat more likely than others to participate; younger voters much less so. But there were only minimal turnout differences according to national identity – this was not a referendum in which only the more ‘Welsh’ took part. There were substantial and robust differences in turnout rates according to levels of general political interest, sense that voting in a duty, and perceptions of the importance of the referendum. However, there were minimal differences in participation rates according to constitutional preferences: the clear Yes victory in the referendum did not reflect disproportionate participation by those favouring greater Welsh autonomy.

The study showed that the referendum campaign struggled to connect to and inform the voters of Wales. Few voters were directly contacted – in any way – by the campaigns or the parties, and few were left feeling well-informed by the conclusion of the campaign period. The No campaign had a particularly limited impact on, and visibility with, voters. Of the main parties, only Plaid Cymru’s stance on the referendum was correctly perceived by a clear majority of voters. The campaign period saw only very modest changes in vote intention, although the proportions intending to vote did slowly increase. Among those who did not ultimately vote, the study found no evidence of a substantial latent No vote that the weakness of the No campaign had failed to mobilise.

Among those voting, the study found some socio-demographic differences in vote choice: those identifying as exclusively or primarily Welsh were far more likely to vote Yes than those with a more British national identity; Welsh speakers were also more likely to support greater political autonomy for Wales than non-speakers. There were also – wholly intuitive – differences in vote choice by supporters of the different parties. Plaid Cymru supporters were particularly likely to vote Yes; Conservatives most likely to vote No. But the greatest differences in vote choice, which remained robust in all specifications of multivariate models, were

associated with two factors. One was the performance of the devolved institutions: even after allowing for numerous potentially countervailing factors, those with a positive evaluation of the performance of devolved government were significantly more likely to vote in favour of greater autonomy. The other factor – consistently the most powerful explanatory variable in all analyses – was constitutional preference: that is, how people voted in the referendum was strongly associated with their broader views on how they believed Wales should be governed.

These findings are all presented, and discussed at length, in Chapter 6 of *Wales Says Yes*.

e) Contributions to wider ESRC initiatives (eg Research Programmes or Networks)

If your project was part of a wider ESRC initiative, please describe your contributions to the initiative's objectives and activities and note any effect on your project resulting from participation. [Max. 200 words]

n/a

3. Early and anticipated impacts

a) Summary of Impacts to date

Please summarise any impacts of the project to date, referring where appropriate to associated outputs recorded on the Research Outcomes System (ROS). This should include both scientific impacts (relevant to the academic community) and economic and societal impacts (relevant to broader society). The impact can be relevant to any organisation, community or individual. [Max. 400 words]

The principal impacts of the project thus far have come from developing awareness of the major findings of the study among both academic and wider non-academic audiences.

Presentations of findings of the study have been made to two major academic conferences: the Annual Conference of the Political Studies Association of the UK (April 2011, London) and the Annual Conference of the Elections, Public Opinion and Parties specialist group (September 2011, Exeter). The sessions at which these presentations were made were both attended by many specialists in the field; these presentations helped bring to their attention the study and its design, its major findings, and the fact that the data from the study would shortly be available to other scholars to draw on for their own research.

Presentations about the study have also been made to two public Breakfast Seminars, held in Cardiff and Aberystwyth in June 2011; and also to a seminar at the Institute of Government in London in December 2011. These sessions were collectively attended by more than 160 people, including scholars from a variety of academic disciplines, several Members of Parliament and of the National Assembly for Wales, senior civil servants, representatives of major civil society organisations and journalists. These events also attracted publicity in the *Western Mail* and *Daily Post* newspapers.

Aspects of the project's findings (specifically those related to trends in national identifications) were also discussed in *The Guardian* (October 6th 2011)

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b) Anticipated/Potential Future Impacts

Please outline any anticipated or potential impacts (scientific or economic and societal) that you believe your project might have in future. *[Max. 200 words]*

The book-length study of the 2011 Welsh Referendum produced by the research team, *Wales Says Yes: Devolution and the 2011 Welsh Referendum*, will be published by the University of Wales Press in March 2012. We anticipate that this book will reach a substantial academic audience, among students not only of Welsh politics but also of devolution and regionalism more generally, and among students of referendums. We also expect the book to have a substantial non-academic impact, among political and social elites, and on political debate, in Wales.

Data-sets from the study have been made available for downloading at the study website (<http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/interpol/research/research-projects/welsh-election-study/about-the-referendum-study/>) and submitted to ESDS. We anticipate that other scholars will draw on this data to advance their understandings of Welsh politics and society, and of referendums.

The research team have been asked to make a presentation of the findings of their work, and its implications, to the Commission on Devolution in Wales (the Silk Commission) in January 2012. We may plausibly anticipate that this will have some impact on the deliberations of the Commission; which in turn may substantially influence the constitutional position of Wales within the UK.

You will be asked to complete an ESRC Impact Report 12 months after the end date of your award. The Impact Report will ask for details of any impacts that have arisen since the completion of the End of Award Report.

4. Declarations

Please ensure that sections A, B and C below are completed and signed by the appropriate individuals. The End of Award Report will not be accepted unless all sections are signed. Please note hard copies are **not** required; electronic signatures are accepted and should be used.

A: To be completed by Grant Holder

Please read the following statements. Tick **one** statement under ii) and iii), then sign with an electronic signature at the end of the section (this should be an image of your actual signature).

i) The Project

This Report is an accurate overview of the project, its findings and impacts. All co-investigators named in the proposal to ESRC or appointed subsequently have seen and approved the Report.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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ii) Submissions to the Research Outcomes System (ROS)

Output and impact information has been submitted to the Research Outcomes System. Details of any future outputs and impacts will be submitted as soon as they become available.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
or	
This grant has not yet produced any outputs or impacts. Details of any future outputs and impacts will be submitted to the Research Outcomes System as soon as they become available.	<input type="checkbox"/>

iii) Submission of Datasets

Datasets arising from this grant have been offered for deposit with the Economic and Social Data Service.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
or	
Datasets that were anticipated in the grant proposal have not been produced and the Economic and Social Data Service has been notified.	<input type="checkbox"/>
or	
No datasets were proposed or produced from this grant.	<input type="checkbox"/>