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 Scully, RM, *et al* (2012) The 2011 Welsh Election Study  
 ESRC End of Award Report, RES-062-23-2625. 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.

<b>Grant Reference</b>	RES-062-23-2625		
<b>Grant Title</b>	The 2011 Welsh Election Study		
<b>Grant Start Date</b>	1 November 2010	<b>Total Amount Expended:</b>	£103802.88
<b>Grant End Date</b>	31 October 2011		
<b>Grant holding Institution</b>	Aberystwyth University		
<b>Grant Holder</b>	Prof Roger Scully		
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<b>Co-Investigators (as per project application):</b>		<b>Institution</b>	
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 Election Study examined Wales' fourth devolved election. The study interviewed a representative sample of over 2000 respondents during the election campaign; the vast majority were then re-interviewed immediately after the vote. The study was the first ever of a devolved election to produce detailed evidence about the impact of the campaign period.

The study investigated the reasons for participation and vote choice in the election; the impact of the campaign; and public attitudes to devolution.

Among the major findings are:

- While the perceived importance of the Welsh Assembly has increased, devolved elections in Wales are still seen as less important than UK general elections;
- Little change in vote choice occurred during the campaign, although the strong Labour campaign helped the party consolidate its lead
- Factors traditionally associated with electoral choice in Wales (notably social class and language) are much less good at explaining voting than those factors (government performance and leadership) identified by 'valence politics' approaches
- The 2011 Welsh election was decided both by attitudes to parties, leaders and government performance in Wales and by attitudes to politics and government at the UK level.

## 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 2011 Welsh Election Study had several objectives:

First, exploring the principal factors shaping vote choice in devolved elections, investigating:

- What shapes individual decisions on whether to vote, and for whom to vote;
- Why such choices may differ from those made in UK general elections and other elections;
- Whether contemporary theories of voting behaviour, particularly 'valence politics', help explain devolved elections;
- How that explanatory power compares with the most prominent explanation of voting behaviour in Wales developed hitherto, the 'Three Wales Model'.

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

Third, the study sought to examine public attitudes towards devolution in Wales, exploring:

- The structure, and consistency, of public preferences;
- How assessments of the performance of devolved government influence attitudes towards the principle of self-government;
- The extent to which such attitudes drive vote choice in NAW elections.

The study also sought to continue the valuable time-series of Welsh election studies developed since 1997; to achieve effective use of resources by producing high-quality data at relatively low cost; and to maximise the impact of the research through early release of the data generated, and by 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]*

The original Case for Support stated that:

“the study will provide a firm foundation for the conduct of a Referendum study in the event that, as currently appears very possible, a referendum on extending Welsh devolution by granting primary law-making powers to the NAW is held either in May 2011 or the autumn of that year.”

In the event, the referendum was held before that date, in March 2011. Thus, this aspect of the project was no longer relevant. The referendum was instead examined through a separate project, the 2011 Welsh Referendum 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 election studies in Wales, had conducted sampling face-to-face (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 election study in Wales to produce panel data, with the same respondents interviewed before and after the vote.

The study originally sought a sample of 2000 respondents for both pre- and post-election waves. In fact, YouGov recruited 2359 respondents to the pre-election wave; of these, some 2217 (or just under 94 percent) then completed the post-election wave. These sample sizes facilitated robust estimates of key variables among important sub-samples.

The pre-election wave sample was implemented on a ‘rolling’ basis in the month before the vote. Over these 30 days, an average of just under 80 respondents per day was achieved. This has made it possible to generate estimates of party support levels and other key variables at different stages of the campaign period.

The surveys enquired into the following matters:

- *Electoral Participation*: What sort of people did and did not vote in the election? What reasons did people give for (non)participation?
- *Party Choice*: Among people who did participate, why did they vote the way they did? How consistent were their votes across the two ballots, and compared with other recent elections?
- *Responses to the Campaign*: How aware were people of the parties' campaigns? How did they evaluate the parties' efforts?
- *Attitudes to Parties and Leaders*: How did people perceive and react to the major parties, and to their (UK and Welsh) leaders?
- *Attitudes to Devolution*: What were people's attitudes towards, and perceptions of, devolution?
- *Government Performance*: Evaluations of the record of the Welsh Assembly Government and the UK government.
- *Respondents*: individual characteristics, identifications, and broad political attitudes.

Some questions, including many background questions, were covered in the pre-election wave; others were more appropriate to ask post-election. But a substantial number of questions were asked in identical form in both waves, in order that any change over time could be measured. Many questions sought to replicate ones used in previous election studies in Wales, to maximise the comparability over time of data. Efforts were also made to maximise compatibility of question wording with the simultaneous Scottish Election Study, and with the 2010 British Election Study.

#### **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 project had several major findings.

On electoral participation, the study found fairly typical associations between voting turnout and factors like age, political interest and sense that voting is a duty. As in previous devolved elections, however, there appeared little association between attitudes to devolution and participation: it is not only supporters of devolution who take part in devolved elections. Turnout was also associated with levels of interest in the devolved election. But despite the result of the March 2011 Welsh referendum, and the growing perceived importance of the National Assembly, elections to the body are still viewed by most voters as less important than UK general elections.

Data on the campaign period showed little change in party support in the four weeks prior to the vote. Labour maintained its lead consistently. Post-election evaluations showed substantial lack of awareness of the campaign; among those with clear views, however, Labour's campaign was evaluated most positively; Plaid Cymru did notably poorly. General attitudes to both Labour and Plaid Cymru were broadly positive across much of the electorate; there was substantial hostility to both the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats. However, Labour proved far more successful than Plaid Cymru at converting positive attitudes into party support and votes. The Conservatives were effective at mobilising a limited support base.

Analysis of voting shows that contemporary ‘valence politics’ explanations of voting behaviour are much more able to account for how people vote in devolved elections than the social background characteristics – particularly class and language – invoked by the Three-Wales Model. Attitudes to the parties, government performance and leadership account for voting patterns far more effectively. Moreover, when comparing government performance at the UK and Welsh levels, and UK and Welsh leaders, voters’ judgements about parties and leaders at both levels appear to make a significant contribution towards accounting for voting in devolved elections.

On attitudes to devolution, the study’s findings support the broad picture seen in other studies in recent years: that the clear majority of people in Wales support devolution and favour the devolved institutions being the most influential in governing Wales. Other questions show that most people have a reasonable general understanding of devolution, but much more limited knowledge on specific matters (except, in areas like Schools policy, where devolution has a direct impact on the lives of their own families). The study also found that while attitudes to devolution do not directly influence vote choice in a devolved election, perceptions of the performance of the devolved institutions are associated both with attitudes to devolution and with vote choices. Finally, the study found that while perceived importance of the devolved institutions has increased, their public legitimacy remains somewhat conditional.

#### **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 about the study have also been made to two public Breakfast Seminars, held in Cardiff and Aberystwyth in October 2011; and also to a seminar at the Institute of Government in London in December 2011. These sessions were collectively attended by more than 150 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.

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Early-release data (supplied to the two Co-Investigators by YouGov) was also used extensively by the Co-Investigators in their contributions to BBC Wales' coverage (on television, radio and the internet) of the 2011 National Assembly election.

Data from the study also contributed to a paper on 'Electoral Politics in the Post-Devolution UK' presented by Prof Wyn Jones to an international workshop in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, in November 2011.

### **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*]

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 also submitted to ESDS. The availability of this data to scholars has also been announced on the e-mail list of the Elections, Public Opinion and Parties specialist group. We anticipate that other scholars will draw on this data to advance their understandings of Welsh politics and society, and of sub-state elections.

A paper based drawing heavily on the findings of this project – as well as the Scottish Election Study – is to be presented at the University of Manchester in March 2012; a revised version of this paper will also be presented to the Annual Conference of the European Political Science Association in Berlin in June 2012. This paper will then be submitted for publication in a major journal, and should have a significant impact on how devolved elections are understood and studied.

The data will also be integral to the major book on Welsh politics which the two Co-Investigators are currently preparing.

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"/>
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**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"/>
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##### 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"/>
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**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"/>
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**or**

No datasets were proposed or produced from this grant.	<input type="checkbox"/>
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