



DG Undeb Sy'n Newid: Ein Dyfodol
UK's Changing Union: Our Future

Attitudes of Young People Towards Devolution in Wales

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for *Ein Dyfodol*

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The UK Changing Union Partnership

The UK's Changing Union project is a joint initiative between the Wales Governance Centre at Cardiff University, the Institute of Welsh Affairs, and Cymru Yfory/Tomorrow's Wales. The project seeks to explore and debate the future of the Union and the Welsh devolution settlement through research and engagement with relevant public and civil society stakeholders. We are funded by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the Nuffield Foundation.

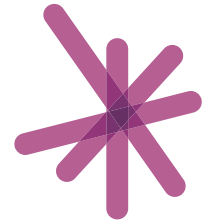
A core part of the Changing Union project is Our Future, which is aimed to provide opportunities for young people to develop their ideas, participate in the debate and influence decisions. This part of the project is being designed and led by young people.

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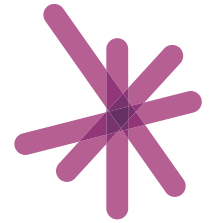


1. Introduction

This paper outlines attitudes towards devolution of young people in Wales. For the purposes of this discussion, 'young people' are defined as those within the 18-35 age group.¹ Their attitudes will be compared throughout with those of older age cohorts.

The evidence for this paper is drawn from the major academic surveys of political attitudes in Wales conducted between 1997-2013. Further details about these surveys are given in the Appendix.

¹ There is only very limited evidence available for Wales on the political attitudes of those younger than 18, for two reasons: i. Most surveys of political attitudes and voting behaviour or intentions concentrate, understandably, on the voting age population; ii. Laws and codes of practice on the protection of children make surveys on the political attitudes of those below 16, in particular, difficult to carry out.



2. Young People's Attitudes to Devolution

There are many potential ways of asking about attitudes towards devolution. Here we concentrate on three well-established questions types.

Since 1997, all major surveys have included at least one form of 'Constitutional Preference' question: where respondents are given a set of possible options for how Wales might be governed, and asked to indicate which one they most prefer. Most surveys in recent years have followed the following format:

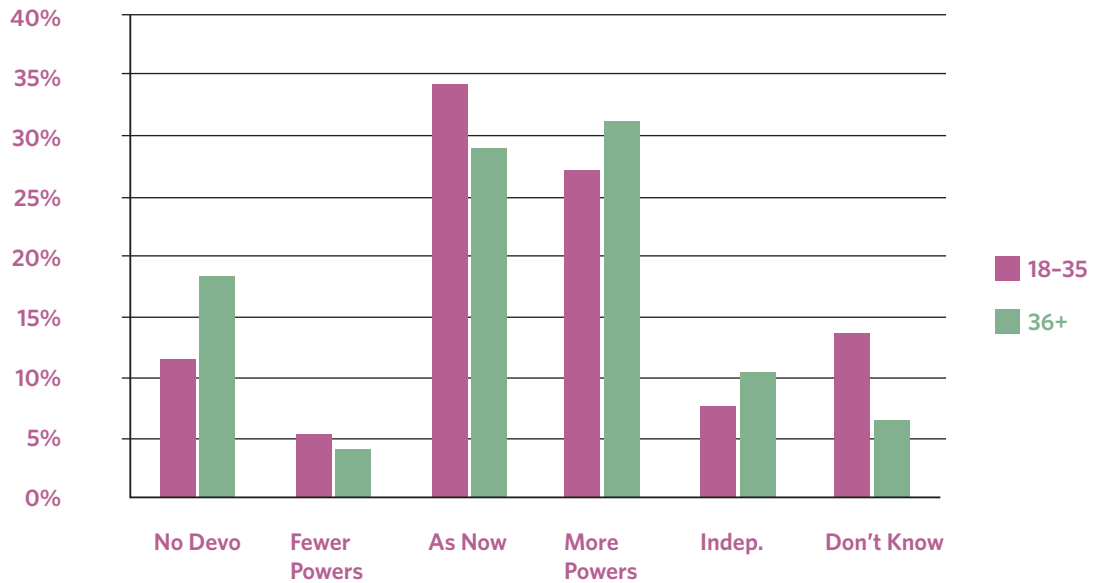
Which of these statements comes closest to your view?

- There should be no devolved government in Wales
- The National Assembly for Wales should have fewer powers
- We should leave things as they are now
- The National Assembly for Wales should have more powers
- Wales should become independent, separate from the UK
- Don't Know

Figure 1 displays findings for this question in 2012, showing support for each option among respondents aged 18-35 and those aged 36 and older. As can be seen, younger respondents are notably more likely to select the Don't Know option, as well as the 'As Now' one. Older voters, by contrast, are more likely to choose both the 'No Devolution' option as well as 'More Powers', and even 'Independence'. This suggests little overall difference in levels of support for devolution between younger and older voters; the distinction is more in older voters having more clearly established views.

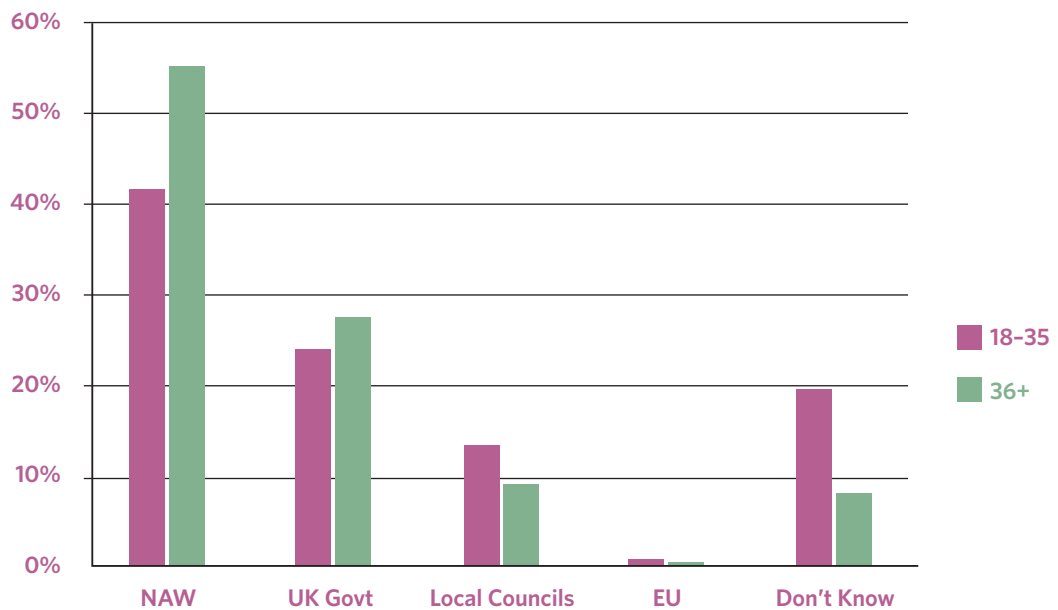
A second way of asking about attitudes to devolution asks respondents about the 'level of government that ought to have most influence over how Wales is run'. Respondents are given the four options of Local Councils, the NAW/WAG, the UK Government at Westminster, and the European Union. Figure 2 displays the percentage of respondents in 2012 who chose each option, again contrasting those 18-35 and those 36 and older.

Figure 1: Constitutional Preferences by Age (%), Wales 2012



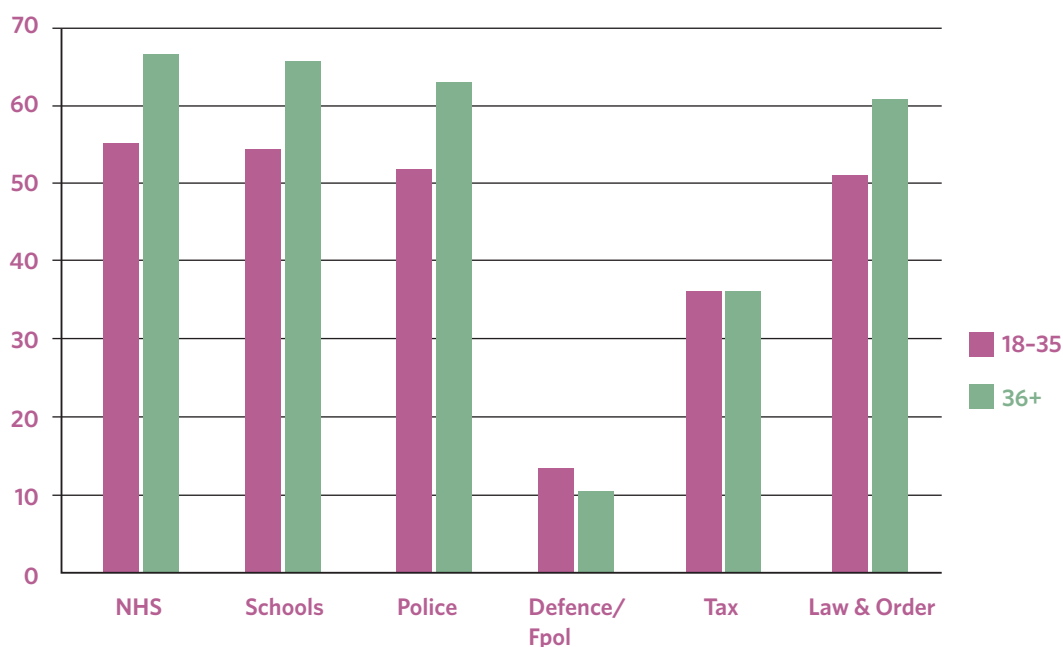
The results here are very similar to those derived from the previous question, in that younger voters are significantly more likely to choose the Don't Know option. Older voters, however, do appear a little more favourable towards the idea of the devolved level of government being the most important in running Wales.

Figure 2: Most Influence over 'How Wales is Run' (%) Wales 2012

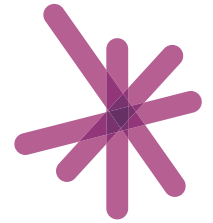


Several recent surveys have also asked about the level of government that ought to have most influence over specific policy areas. Figure 3 shows the percentage in 2013 who indicated that they supported the devolved level of government having such responsibility for each of several policy areas, with respondents again disaggregated into 18-35 and 36 and older. The figure shows that with only the marginal exceptions of 'Defence and foreign policy' and 'Taxation', older voters were more enthusiastic than younger ones about responsibility being devolved for all areas that respondents were questioned about. However, this point requires two caveats. First, narrow majorities of younger voters support the devolved level of government being the most influential over all areas. Second, the lower level of endorsement for devolving these policies from younger voters does not reflect greater enthusiasm amongst them for the UK government in Westminster (or Councils or the EU) to wield power here: once again, the major difference is that younger voters were notably more likely to select a 'Don't Know' option.

Figure 3: Most Influence over Specific Policy Areas (%) Wales 2013



The consistency of evidence from the three different forms of question analysed here bolsters our confidence in the general conclusion that emerges. Young people in Wales are not notably more supportive of devolution than older age cohorts. Indeed, if anything the opposite is the case. But this does not reflect greater active opposition to devolution among the young; rather, it reflects them being notably less certain in their views, and more likely to respond to questions on the subject with a Don't Know response.

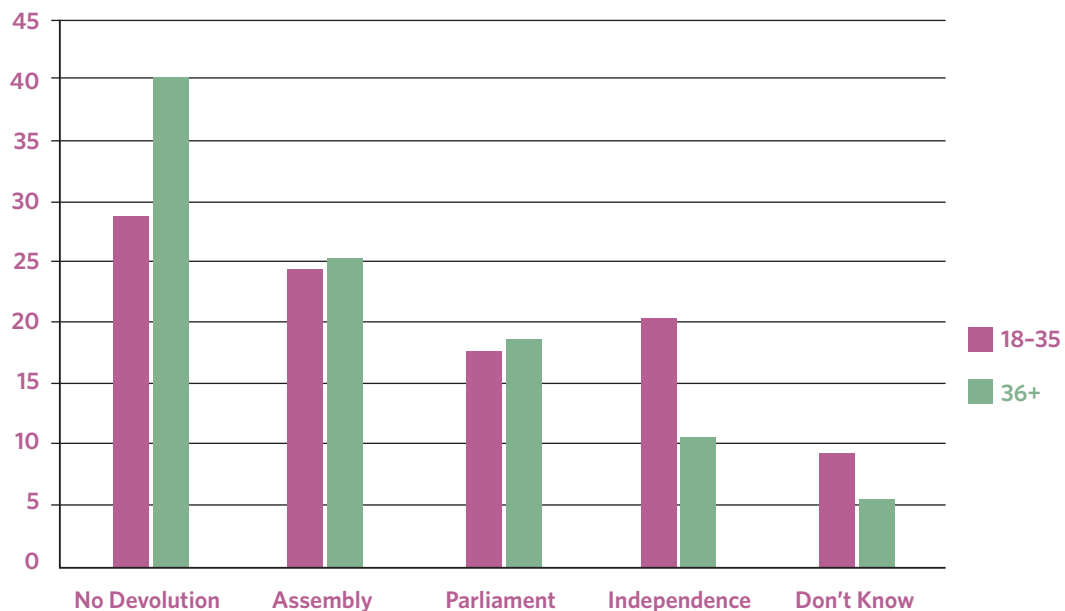


3. How Have Attitudes Changed Over Time?

There have been clear and substantial changes in attitudes to devolution in Wales since the 1997 referendum. Opposition to devolution fell substantially in the years after the narrow Yes vote; while support for independence has not grown at all, some form of devolved government for Wales has been the clear majority viewpoint expressed in all major surveys conducted in Wales since 2003. And in recent years, clearer support has also been emerging for the scope and powers of the devolved institutions to be enhanced.²

To what extent have these changes in attitudes over time been general to all age groups? Have the attitudes of younger people change to a greater or lesser extent? We can address these questions by examining responses to a form of constitutional preference question asked in numerous surveys between 1997-2011.³ Figure 4a shows responses to this question in 1997; as before, the figure compares respondents in the 18-35 age group and those older. We see that, as before, younger respondents were somewhat more likely to select the Don't Know option. The most striking differences between the age groups, however, was that in 1997 younger respondents were much more likely than older ones to support independence, whereas older people were much more likely to oppose devolution outright.

Figure 4a: Constitutional Preferences by Age (%) 1997, Wales

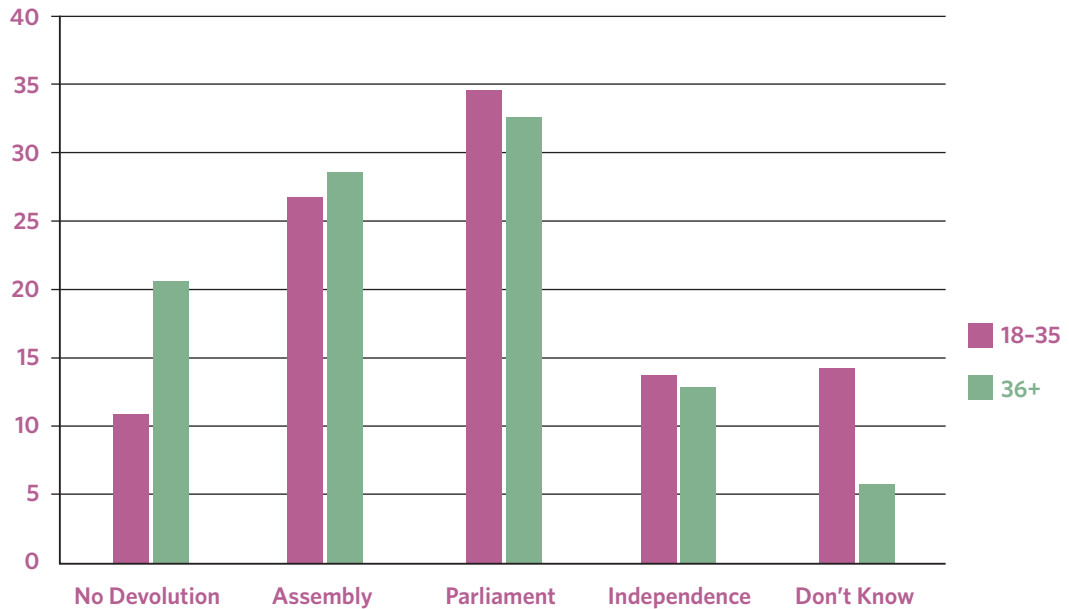


² See discussion in Richard Wyn Jones and Roger Scully, *Wales Says Yes: Devolution and the 2011 Welsh Referendum* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012), chapter 3.

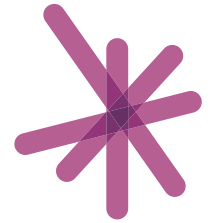
³ This question is similar to that discussed around Table 1 in presenting respondents with a series of constitutional alternatives for Wales and asking them to select their most preferred option. The question differs in the labelling of the options presented.

When we examine Figure 4b (which shows responses to the same question in 2011) we see that opinion as a whole has shifted, with opposition to devolution declining and support for the Parliament option having grown. While older respondents remain somewhat more likely to oppose devolution outright, the differences between them and younger people here have attenuated slightly; younger respondents continue to be more likely to select a Don't Know response.

Figure 4b: Constitutional Preferences by Age (%) 2011, Wales



In a number of other respects (such as with regards to national identity and geography) the years 1997-2011 witnessed a homogenisation of attitudes to devolution in Wales. Opposition to the existence of a National Assembly fell everywhere, but it fell particularly rapidly where opposition had previously been greatest. Such trends were reflected in the 2011 referendum result. The evidence here suggests that this is also true, to some extent, with regards to age.

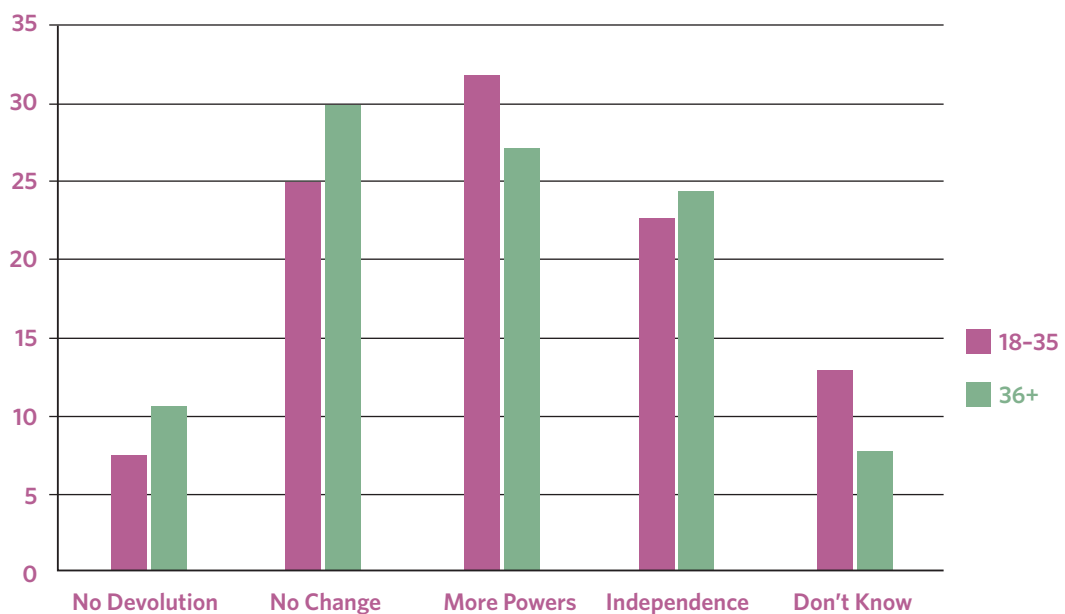


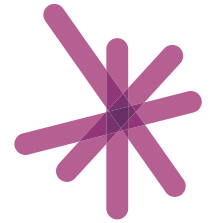
4. Wales and Scotland: How Do Attitudes Compare?

How do attitudes to devolution of young people in Wales compare with those of people in Scotland? The first, and perhaps most obvious, difference between the two nations, which is not one specific to young people, is that the 'centre of gravity' of public opinion in Scotland is in a rather different place than in Wales. Support for independence in Scotland is substantially higher, while support for a 'no devolution' option is notably lower. This can be seen from the findings presented in Figure 5, which shows responses to a question on constitutional preferences similar to those reported for Wales in Figures 1 and 4b.

Does Scotland see similar differences in attitudes according to age group as does Wales? To address this question the figure again compares those aged 18-35 with older respondents. While slight question wordings make comparisons a little imprecise, we see similar findings to Wales in that younger people are more uncertain (i.e. more likely to select Don't Know option). The findings are also similar to Wales in that otherwise we see only modest differences between older and younger respondents.

Table 5: Constitutional Preferences by Age (%) 2011, Scotland





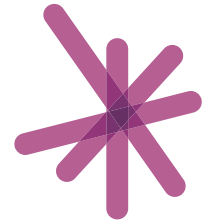
5. Summary

While younger voters were more likely to support devolution in the 1997 referendum,⁴ the evidence presented here suggests that attitudes towards devolution in Wales now differ little between younger and older members of the electorate. The major difference between the age cohorts is that younger voters tend to be notably more likely to opt for Don't Know options on the various questions used in surveys about the topic.

This likely primarily reflects the lower levels of engagement with much of 'conventional politics' often seen among the young – something also manifest, for example, in lower rates of voter turnout. The complexity of Wales' devolution arrangements may be a particular turn-off for those already disinclined to have an interest in conventional politics.

Beyond this difference, the broad picture that emerges from the evidence is one of general support for devolution among the people of Wales, young and old. Opposition to devolution is now confined to a distinct minority – around one in five of the population – while (unlike in Scotland) support for independence is even less common. This pattern of attitudes has been relatively stable for some years now. Devolution has become the settled will of the Welsh people, and there is no indication from the available evidence on attitudes of younger voters that this will change

⁴ See Richard Wyn Jones and Dafydd Trystan, 'The 1997 Welsh referendum vote' in (B. Taylor and K. Thomson, eds.) *Scotland and Wales: Nations Again?* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999).



Appendix: The Evidence

This paper draws on several surveys:

- The 1997 Welsh Referendum Study. This was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council of the UK, with fieldwork conducted face-to-face by the National Centre for Social Research. The sample size was 686.
- The 2011 Welsh Election Study pre-election wave. This was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council of the UK, with fieldwork conducted via the internet by YouGov UK. The sample size was 2359.
- The 2011 Scottish Election Study. This was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council of the UK, with fieldwork conducted via the internet by YouGov UK. The sample size was 2046.
- Surveys conducted in April 2012 and February 2013 by YouGov UK in collaboration with the Wales Governance Centre at Cardiff University. Fieldwork was conducted via the internet. The sample size of the April 2012 survey was 1039; in February 2013 the sample size was 1007.

Data from all these surveys was weighted during analysis to ensure that the samples were representative of the adult electorate.

Research Paper

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