

Devolution and Electoral Politics in Scotland and Wales

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In this article we examine the impact of devolution on electoral politics in Scotland and Wales. After reviewing the electoral history of the two territories, we set out the result for the 1999 and 2003 devolved elections, noting the substantial differences between voting patterns in these elections from those for the UK parliament. We then go on to consider the main reasons why voting patterns differ across the two types of poll. The paper concludes by summarizing the main findings and then considering both the implications of the findings for future devolved elections and the potential contribution of the study of such elections to broader theories of voting behavior.

For all that—as discussed elsewhere in this issue—the United Kingdom has never approximated a classic unitary state, in terms of electoral politics it for a long time looked very much like one. With other electoral contests (for local government and, since 1979, five-yearly elections for the United Kingdom’s representatives in the European Parliament) having only limited consequences, electoral politics were highly monocentric: for the major political parties, elections to the Westminster parliament were more or less the “only game in town,” and political parties in the United Kingdom developed and organized themselves around the need to win representation at Westminster (Judge 1993, chap. 3). By introducing elections to the Scottish Parliament (SP) and the National Assembly for Wales (NAW), devolution has changed the character of electoral politics in these nations. The consequences of this for party organization and behavior are discussed by Jonathan Hopkin and Jonathan Bradbury in the following article; here, we focus on exploring and explaining the major characteristics of devolved elections in Scotland and Wales.¹

The discussion proceeds in the following order. First, we introduce some essential background material—an overview of the electoral history of Scotland and Wales before devolution and an outline of the results of the two sets of devolved elections to have occurred thus far, in 1999 and 2003. Second, we draw on survey data to examine whether, and to what extent, voters in the two nations behave systematically differently in the devolved electoral context than in the Westminster one. Following this, we go

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on to explore why many voters appear to behave differently in the different types of election. Finally, the concluding section briefly summarizes our main findings before considering the implications our findings have for future devolved elections and what the study of devolved elections may have to contribute to broader theories of electoral behavior.

Electoral Politics in Scotland and Wales

By the time of the first elections to the SP and NAW in May 1999, the electoral politics of Scotland and Wales had come to assume strikingly similar features. Both nations had witnessed the electoral wipeout of the Conservative Party in the May 1997 UK general election, as the Tories were left with parliamentary representation from English constituencies alone. Both were by now bastions of the Labour Party—a dominance extended further in the 1997 poll. And both Scotland and Wales had indigenous nationalist parties (the Scottish National Party [SNP] and Plaid Cymru, respectively) attaining modest but significant levels of electoral support and parliamentary representation. However, these parallel positions had been arrived at via two strikingly contrasting routes. To explain the context within which the devolved elections have been fought, we first present a brief overview of the electoral history of Scotland and Wales.

The Historical Legacy

For most of the democratic era, Welsh politics has experienced a marked paucity of serious electoral competition. One-party domination has generally prevailed—first under the Liberals and subsequently Labour. Liberal hegemony was initiated by the franchise reforms of the 1870s and 1880s that substantially widened voting rights (Morgan 1981, 26–58, 123–155). In the 1885 election, the Liberals won thirty of thirty-four Welsh seats. In subsequent elections the overwhelming majority of Welsh constituencies, both rural and industrial, remained impregnably Liberal; the Conservatives retained a foothold in only a few, heavily anglicized, areas. Liberal domination reached a zenith in 1906: only one non-Liberal was elected, Labour's Keir Hardie, himself dependent on Liberal support. Even growing industrial militancy in the years before 1914 made little impression on Liberal hegemony.

However, the pillars that had underpinned Liberal hegemony in Wales—nonconformist religious affiliation, the Welsh language, and a confident sense of Welsh identity—proved unsustainable in the face of the deep splits in the Liberal Party that ensued during World War I; the economic disintegration experienced by Wales in the postwar years; and the corrosive power of social change, including deepening secularization and anglicization. In retrospect, the interwar years now appear as an interregnum between the decline of one hegemony and the rise of a second. While the personal magnetism of Lloyd George continued to hold sway over much of rural,

Welsh-speaking Wales (in the 1929 election, for example, five of the successful candidates were either family members or closely associated with the family circle [Morgan 1981, 275]), the Labour Party was developing into the new dominant force in Welsh politics. By 1922, Labour was garnering 40.8 percent of the vote in Wales; even in the otherwise disastrous 1931 election, its share of the Welsh vote increased (to 44.1 percent), and the foundations were being laid for the almost total Labour dominance that followed after World War II.

At the 1945 general election, Labour won a stunning 58.5 percent of Welsh votes (compared with 48 percent for the United Kingdom as a whole, and 47.6 percent in Scotland), inaugurating a new hegemony. The fortunes of the once mighty Liberals have never really threatened to revive, while for the Conservatives, with the exception of a few atypical constituencies, most of the country has remained alien territory (Wyn Jones et al. 2002). Aside from a brief period in the mid- to late 1960s when their 1966 Carmarthen by-election victory precipitated a surge in Plaid Cymru support, the nationalists also never threatened Labour's dominance. Indeed, from the mid-1970s Plaid Cymru became increasingly dependent on the votes of Welsh speakers along the country's western coast, while over much of the country its vote was derisory. And when focused through the prism of the nonproportional (single-member district plurality) electoral system used for UK general elections, the unbalanced electoral preferences of Welsh voters have been further exacerbated in favor of the largest party, Labour.

Lopsided electoral competition has been a much less consistent feature of Scottish politics. In contrast to Wales—where the Conservatives were alienated from most of the population by religious, linguistic, and other cultural differences—an indigenous Tory tradition existed in Scotland. In combination with a Liberal unionism that arose in the 1880s out of fierce opposition to Prime Minister Gladstone's policy of Home Rule for Ireland, Conservatism was able not only to challenge the Liberals for dominance of Scottish politics early in the twentieth century but to persist as a major electoral force well into the second half of the century. The merger of the Conservative and Liberal unionist parties in Scotland in 1912—until 1965 fighting elections under the banner of the Scottish Unionists—created a political movement that flourished as “a coalition of forces adapted to the contours of the Scottish political landscape” (Keating 2005, 50; see also Mitchell 1990). This coalition encompassed much of the urban middle classes as well as rural landowners and prosperous farmers—the familiar social bases of Conservative support in England and Wales. But its unionist aspect also drew in large numbers of “Orange” Protestant, working-class voters from communities with strong links to their counterparts in Northern Ireland.

Conservative unionism gained a plurality of the Scottish vote, and a majority of its parliamentary representation, in 1931 and 1935, and this success persisted into the postwar era. The Scottish Conservatives were again the most popular party in Scotland in 1951, 1955 (when they won an absolute majority of all votes), and 1959. But 1959 is

also significant because it was then that a significant gap began to emerge between Conservative electoral performance in Scotland and in England. A differential of 2.8 percent in vote share became 3.4 percent in the 1964 UK election and 5.1 percent in 1966. This trend continued almost unabated throughout the 1970s and 1980s and reached its culmination with electoral wipeout for the Scottish Conservatives in 1997.² The party that benefited most from Conservative decline was Labour, which from 1964 onward has always been Scotland's strongest party. But the Liberals have also made ground as—unlike in most of England—they have built effectively concentrated support, mainly in rural northern Scotland. The performance of the SNP has been more volatile. The SNP's highpoint in the October 1974 election saw it accrue 30.4 percent of the Scottish vote, but in UK general elections since it has never yet seriously threatened Labour's dominance in terms either of votes or of parliamentary representation.

The Devolved Elections

Elections to the SP and NAW concern institutions that vary not only in the powers that they wield but also somewhat in their electoral arrangements. In Scotland, the parliament is a 129-member body, elected through the two-vote, mixed-member proportional system used, *inter alia*, in postwar Germany. Single-member constituencies elect seventy-three representatives, with the remaining fifty-six allocated from eight regional party lists via the d'Hondt formula. Wales' Assembly comprises forty constituency members and another twenty elected from five regional lists. As in Scotland, regional representatives are allocated via d'Hondt in order to achieve greater proportionality; however, with only one-third list members, Wales' arrangements will almost invariably produce rather less proportional outcomes.

1999. A combination of the electoral system and the history of Labour dominance meant that the first devolved election in Wales was almost universally expected to produce a Labour majority. This was despite negative publicity experienced by the party after the resignation amidst personal scandal of the Welsh Labour leader in fall 1998, and an ensuing and bitterly divisive leadership contest that followed. Given prior expectations, the election result was shocking, producing some remarkable contrasts

Table 1 Vote shares and seats by party, Wales, 1997 and 1999

Party	1997 (%)	Westminster seats	1999 (first vote) (%)	1999 (second vote) (%)	NAW seats
Labour	54.8	34	37.6	35.5	28
Conservative	19.5	0	15.8	16.5	9
Liberal Democrat	12.3	2	13.5	12.6	6
Plaid Cymru	10.0	4	28.4	30.6	17

Table 2 Vote shares and seats by party, Scotland, 1997 and 1999

Party	1997 (%)	Westminster seats	1999 (first vote) (%)	1999 (second vote) (%)	SP seats
Labour	45.6	56	38.8	33.6	56
Conservative	17.5	0	15.6	15.4	18
Liberal Democrat	13.0	10	14.2	12.4	17
SNP	22.1	6	28.7	27.3	35

Table 3 Vote shares and seats by party, Wales, 2001 and 2003

Party	2001 (%)	Westminster seats	First vote (change from 1999) (%)	Second vote (change from 1999) (%)	NAW seats
Labour	48.6	34	40.0 (+2.4)	36.6 (+1.1)	30 (+2)
Conservative	21.0	0	19.9 (+4.0)	19.2 (+3.2)	11 (+2)
Liberal Democrat	13.8	3	14.1 (+0.6)	12.7 (+0.1)	6 (—)
Plaid Cymru	14.3	4	21.2 (−7.2)	19.7 (−10.8)	12 (−5)
Others	2.3	0	4.8 (+0.1)	11.8 (+6.9)	1 (+1)

with the previous Westminster election (see table 1). Having won almost 55 percent of Welsh votes in 1997, Labour dropped to 37.6 percent on the constituency vote and 35.4 percent on the second (list) vote, and it fell short of a majority in the sixty-seat Assembly. There was also a significant fall in Conservative support from their already mediocre 1997 performance, putting the Tories in a (poor) third place. Most dramatic of all, however, was a substantial advance in support for Plaid Cymru—from 10 percent in 1997 to 28.4 percent on the first vote and 30.5 percent on the second.

The Scottish result was markedly similar to the Welsh one, but this was much less of a shock than in Wales. The electoral system made it highly unlikely that Labour (or any other single party) would ever win a majority in the SP; furthermore, a significant advance by the SNP had been anticipated by the opinion polls for more than a year before the election, and the final result detailed in table 2 was actually a significant relief to the Scottish Labour Party (which went on to form a coalition government with the Liberal Democrats).

2003. Four years on,³ the second set of devolved elections occurred in a broader political context that had been dominated for some months by the United Kingdom's controversial involvement in the United States-led war in Iraq. The fact that the elections were held three weeks after the fall of Baghdad—and thus during the rather brief period when the war was generally popular in the United Kingdom—was almost certainly one important factor in explaining why the main “prowar” parties (Labour and the Conservatives) performed better than they had feared, while those parties that

Table 4 Vote shares and seats by party, Scotland, 2001 and 2003

Party	2001 (%)	Westminster seats	First vote (change from 1999) (%)	Second vote (change from 1999) (%)	SP seats
Labour	43.3	55	34.5 (-4.4)	29.4 (-4.2)	50 (-6)
Conservative	15.6	1	16.6 (+1.0)	15.6 (+0.2)	18 (—)
Liberal Democrat	16.3	10	15.3 (+1.1)	11.8 (-0.6)	17 (—)
SNP	20.1	5	23.7 (-5.0)	20.9 (-6.5)	27 (-8)
Others	4.7	1	9.8 (+7.1)	22.2 (+10.9)	20 (+14)

had publicly opposed the war (the Liberal Democrats and the two nationalist parties) fell below their expectations (see tables 3 and 4).

In Wales, Labour had recovered from the leadership disputes that had damaged them in 1999 and ran an effective campaign targeted at winning back constituency seats lost four years previously. Defeating Plaid Cymru in several key constituency battles, Labour won thirty seats and effective control of the Assembly. Plaid Cymru—which had in the intervening period seen a popular party leader retire and be replaced by someone, Ieuan Wyn Jones, who proved to have little public appeal—lost five seats (four constituency and one list) and saw a substantial decline from their 1999 vote share, while the Conservatives surprised most observers with a significant increase in vote share, winning them two extra list seats. It appeared that the 1999 nationalist tide had ebbed and politics in Wales had returned to “normal,” with Labour dominant—although a closer look at the 2003 results reveals that Labour’s victory was achieved by the narrowest of margins, despite the party making only modest gains on a “disastrous” 1999 performance and attaining a vote share some 16 percent below that achieved in the 1997 UK election.

In Scotland, Labour’s vote share declined significantly on 1999, but the party comfortably held its position as the largest party, benefiting enormously from the weakness of the SNP. Like their Welsh counterparts, the nationalists had fought the election under a new and uninspiring party leader (John Swinney); in consequence, votes lost by Labour went not to the SNP but, in the main, to the minor parties (notably the Greens and the Scottish Socialists), who collectively secured a substantial share of the list vote and several additional seats.

Devolved elections have not produced a new party system in Scotland and Wales; the major parties contesting Westminster elections have continued to be the leading forces in elections to the SP and the NAW. However, the behavior of Scottish and Welsh voters has not necessarily followed the same patterns as for the Westminster level. Two devolved elections have seen somewhat lower levels of support for the Labour Party than has long been typical in UK general elections and—withstanding their setback in 2003—greater levels of support for the Scottish and

Welsh nationalist parties. The task for the following sections of this article will be to explain why this has occurred.

Exploring Electoral Politics under Devolution

This section begins the process of trying to understand voting behavior in devolved elections by addressing a simple question: do significant numbers of voters behave differently in devolved as compared with Westminster elections? Our “null” hypothesis here is that voting behavior does not systematically differ between the two electoral arenas.⁴ Although this might appear to be clearly contradicted by the election results in Wales and Scotland, a potential explanation consistent with the null hypothesis does exist. It might be that parties have simply ebbed and flowed in their general popularity over recent years. One plausible explanation of why this might occur would be that the electoral campaigns for devolved elections have a “priming” effect in that they raise the salience of nationalist parties and national (i.e., Scottish or Welsh) considerations, whereas Westminster elections prime voters to think about United Kingdom-wide considerations and the United Kingdom-wide parties. This could account for the differential success of different parties at devolved versus UK elections, even if voters do not *at any one point in time* have systematically different voting preferences for elections at one level compared with another. Here, we draw on survey data gathered over several years to test whether this is true: in tables 5–10 below, index of dissimilarity scores (which can be interpreted as the net proportion of voters having differing preferences across the two electoral arenas) act as a useful summary index.⁵

1999

The electoral shock experienced in Wales by Labour in 1999 was doubtless related in part to the bad publicity generated by the party before the election. Nonetheless—and contrary to our null hypothesis—there was no *general* rejection of the Labour Party

Table 5 Actual devolved and hypothetical Westminster vote share, Wales, 1999

Party	NAW vote (first vote)	Hypothetical Westminster vote
Labour	37.5%	53.3%
Conservative	14.0%	18.4%
Liberal Democrat	12.4%	11.6%
Plaid Cymru	30.8%	14.9%
Weighted <i>N</i>	678	1,004
Index of dissimilarity = 20.2		

Source: 1999 Welsh National Assembly Election Study.

Table 6 Actual devolved and hypothetical Westminster vote share, Scotland, 1999

Party	SP vote (first vote)	Hypothetical Westminster vote
Labour	40.3%	48.1%
Conservative	14.3%	15.9%
Liberal Democrat	14.5%	14.2%
SNP	29.3%	21.1%
Weighted <i>N</i>	1,040	1,246
Index of dissimilarity = 9.4		

Source: 1999 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey.

Table 7 Actual Westminster and hypothetical devolved vote share, Wales, 2001

Party	Westminster	Hypothetical NAW vote (first vote)
Labour	51.9%	49.4%
Conservative	16.7%	10.6%
Liberal Democrat	15.6%	11.9%
Plaid Cymru	14.3%	26.2%
Weighted <i>N</i>	733	667
Index of dissimilarity = 12.3		

Source: 2001 Wales Life and Times Survey.

Table 8 Actual Westminster and hypothetical devolved vote share, Scotland, 2001

Party	Westminster	Hypothetical SP vote (first vote)
Labour	52.7%	47.3%
Conservative	11.3%	9.6%
Liberal Democrat	16.6%	13.7%
SNP	15.8%	25.7%
Weighted <i>N</i>	1,053	1,158
Index of dissimilarity = 10.1		

Source: 2001 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey.

and adoption of Plaid Cymru by a large section of the Welsh electorate. Data from the 1999 postelection survey in Wales show stark differences between how people say they did behave in the NAW election and how they say they would have done if they had been asked to vote in a Westminster election (see table 5). For the (hypothetical) context of a UK general election, Labour retained the support of a majority of Welsh

Table 9 Actual devolved and hypothetical Westminster vote share, Wales, 2003

Party	NAW vote (first vote)	Hypothetical Westminster vote
Labour	42.7%	50.0
Conservative	17.4%	23.0
Liberal Democrat	12.1%	14.8
Plaid Cymru	23.8%	10.1
Weighted <i>N</i>	466	754
Index of dissimilarity = 15.6		

Source: 2003 Wales Life and Times Survey.

Table 10 Actual devolved and hypothetical Westminster vote share, Wales, 2003

Party	SP vote (first vote)	Hypothetical Westminster vote
Labour	35.7%	44.8%
Conservative	18.6%	19.8%
Liberal Democrat	13.4%	13.6%
SNP	25.5%	17.7%
Weighted <i>N</i>	849	1,101
Index of dissimilarity = 10.5		

Source: 2003 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey.

voters, while the gains made by Plaid Cymru from 1997 appear of much smaller magnitude. This pattern—of voters making alternative electoral choices for different political arenas—was not a peculiarity of the Welsh. We see in table 6 a very similar pattern for Scotland, with the SNP scoring a notably lower level of support in the (hypothetical) context of Westminster than for the SP, while for Labour (and also to a slight extent the Conservatives) the opposite is true. Thus, it would appear that even in the inaugural devolved elections, many voters were capable of distinguishing this political arena from Westminster.

2001

Although many voters appear to have had different voting preferences for UK and devolved elections in 1999, it remains possible that this was a one-off artifact of peculiarities of the first devolved polls. In tables 7 and 8, therefore, we use data from postelection surveys conducted after the 2001 UK general election. The comparison here is the obverse of that conducted on the 1999 data: between how people report having voted in the Westminster election of that year and how they say

they would have voted in a contest for the devolved chamber. Two things are immediately apparent. First, there are again considerable differences in preferences across the two electoral arenas. Second, these differences are in the same direction as before. That is, we see Labour and the Conservatives (and, this time, the Liberal Democrats) doing better in Westminster elections, but Plaid Cymru and the SNP get much higher levels of support in the devolved context.

2003. Finally, we draw on data gathered after the second devolved elections to see whether the previously observed patterns persist. The answer, quite clearly, is that they do (see tables 9 and 10). Once again, we see the Labour and Conservative parties winning greater support for a hypothetical Westminster election. And again, the nationalist parties score substantially more heavily for devolved elections. The main problem for Plaid Cymru and the SNP in 2003 (compared with 1999) was simply a general decline in support over these four years. They have continued to win much more support at the devolved level than for Westminster in both good and bad years; but 2003 was definitely a bad year for them.

The overall lesson to draw from this section is that our null hypothesis is decisively rejected. Scottish and Welsh voters have not had similar political preferences for Westminster and SP and NAW elections since 1999. The major United Kingdom-wide political parties, Labour and the Conservatives, consistently gain higher support levels in the context of United Kingdom-wide elections. Plaid Cymru and the SNP, parties based solely in Wales and Scotland, respectively, win much more support for elections relevant only to their particular nations. The following section seeks to explain why this might be the case.⁶

Understanding Voting in Devolved Elections

An obvious starting point for explaining voting in devolved elections is with the empirical generalizations and analytical frameworks produced by work that has studied analogous elections elsewhere.⁷ One important literature is that on “electoral cycles,” which shows a consistent trend, across many different national contexts, for parties holding national government office to experience losses in popularity until about the midpoint of their term and then to recover some support.⁸ The evidence for such cycles includes voting at substate elections. Given that the 1999 and 2003 devolved elections both occurred at exactly the midterm of the United Kingdom-level government, an electoral cycle interpretation appears consistent with the lower levels of support enjoyed by Labour. But such general trends in party support offer little explanatory purchase on why, in the empirical analysis reported above, such stark differences were observed in voter preferences between the United Kingdom and the devolved electoral arenas at a single point in time.

Work on second-order elections (SOEs) has provided a powerful account of voting for the European Parliament, and this framework has also been applied to substate

elections.⁹ The most advanced formulations of SOE approaches (see particularly van der Eijk and Franklin 1996) incorporate elements of electoral cycles literature but go well beyond the latter in contending that elections other than “first-order,” statewide polls produce certain characteristic phenomena. A first is relatively low turnout: with less at stake than in first-order elections, fewer people vote. But among those who do vote, factors relevant to statewide politics—most particularly the popularity of the national government—are dominant in guiding voting choices, rather than matters specific to the ostensible purpose of the elections themselves. Patterns of decline in support for governing parties in substate elections, noted in work on electoral cycles, have been interpreted within the SOE literature as a symptom of the more general primacy of first-order considerations in shaping voting decisions at a secondary level.

Given the low turnouts experienced in devolved elections¹⁰ and the patterns of voting observed (consistent with many voters using devolved elections to cast a protest vote), an SOE interpretation of devolved elections has superficial plausibility. But this does not warrant the immediate acceptance of such an interpretation. The track record of SOE approaches in explaining substate elections is distinctly patchy. While holding up well in some contexts (such as regional elections in Germany and many such contests in Spain),¹¹ previous work has indicated SOE interpretations to be least satisfactory in contexts (such as the “historic nationalities” in Spain—the Basques, Catalans, and Galicians) that bear a strong *prima facie* similarity to Scotland and Wales as regions with a strong sense of cultural and political distinctiveness. Experience there suggests that that “regional elections in the historic nationalities at least are clearly not ‘second order’ elections, but rather operate according to a distinctive region-specific dynamic” (Hough and Jeffery 2003, 249). One symptom of this dynamic is that electoral support for regionalist/nationalist parties is consistently higher at regional elections than for statewide contests.

The literature on multilevel voting (MLV) has developed from the recognition that first-order factors should not be *assumed* to be the dominant drivers of voting patterns in substate elections.¹² The importance of such factors can vary, spatially and temporally. And it is possible that some political parties will perform systematically better in some types of elections than others for reasons bearing little relation to those identified by SOE theories. MLV approaches suggest some long-term expectations for devolved elections—notably that the relative success of the nationalists in this sphere is likely to be an enduring feature. But an MLV perspective on devolved elections also generates testable implications that are clearly distinct from those implied by SOE approaches. The MLV approach predicts that many voters, and particularly those voting differently at a devolved election than at a Westminster election, will be focused on factors specific to Scotland/Wales in making their voting choices. By contrast, SOE theory would suggest that we should expect United Kingdom-wide considerations to be dominant in shaping voting choices.

Our previous research has shown the MLV approach to offer the more satisfactory explanation of voting in the 1999 devolved election in Wales (Trystan et al. 2003). In this article, we extend our analysis to cover both Scotland and Wales: this is important because the parallels in aggregate patterns of support observed above do not necessarily mean that the same factors drive party support in the two nations. And examining the 2003 election—held against the backdrop of ongoing disputes about the United Kingdom’s involvement in Iraq—should provide a harder test for the validity of the MLV approach.

We apply a multivariate model of voting behavior to data from the 2003 postelection surveys in Scotland and Wales. The dependent variable is respondents’ vote, defined in relation to the main nationalist party (SNP or Plaid Cymru) because these are the parties whose level of electoral support varies most substantially between devolved and Westminster elections. The respective Scottish and Welsh electorates are divided into three groups. Those who support the nationalists neither for Westminster nor for devolved elections (“nonsupporters”) are contrasted in the model with those supporting the nationalists for both Westminster and devolved elections (“loyalists”) and those who support the nationalists in a devolved election only (“switchers”).¹³ Because the dependent variable takes three categories, we use a multinomial logit model. The independent variables in the model include standard sociodemographic controls (age, sex, and social class),¹⁴ plus several variables more specifically concerned with tapping into the respective impact of United Kingdom-wide and Scotland/Wales-specific factors in shaping voting behavior:

- First, we include two dummy variables if a respondent reported according priority to “Welsh” or “British” considerations, respectively, in deciding how to vote.
- Second, we include a series of questions gauging respondents’ perceptions of the impact of the devolved institutions on three major policy issues: health care, education and the state of the economy.
- Third, we also have a series of questions gauging perceptions of the impact of the Westminster government on health, education, and the economy.
- Fourth, we include evaluative ratings on the three major UK political party leaders and the Scottish/Welsh leaders of the four major parties.¹⁵
- Finally, we include a question concerning respondents’ opinions on the United Kingdom’s involvement in the Iraq war. (Further details on all these variables, and the survey questions that they relate to, are given in Appendix 2).

Results from the analysis are reported in tables 11 and 12. They show a reasonable fit to the data (better in Wales than Scotland).¹⁶ The results also indicate that in addition to some impact for the control variables entered in the model—the SNP finds it more difficult to win support among older and more affluent Scottish voters; Plaid Cymru is relatively unsuccessful at winning support among the middle classes—there are also some interesting results among the variables of more immediate

Table 11 Multinomial logit estimates (standard errors) for model of election voting, Wales, 2003

Variable	Plaid loyalists	Plaid switchers
Age	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Female	0.38 (0.39)	0.21 (0.37)
Social class		
Salaried	-0.42 (0.49)	-0.70 (0.52)
Routine non-managerial	-2.27 (0.76)***	-0.56 (0.50)
Petty bourgeoisie	-1.08 (0.71)	-2.94 (1.44)**
Skilled managerial	-0.36 (0.73)	0.71 (0.58)
Working class	-1.00 (0.55)*	-0.54 (0.53)
Level of voting decision		
Mainly Wales	1.42 (0.57)**	1.05 (0.51)**
Mainly United Kingdom	-0.38 (0.67)	-0.05 (0.57)
Leader evaluations		
Blair	-0.42 (0.10)***	-0.31 (0.09)***
Duncan-Smith	-0.17 (0.09)*	-0.17 (0.09)*
Kennedy	-0.06 (0.11)	0.11 (0.11)
Morgan	-0.09 (0.12)	-0.02 (0.11)
Wyn Jones	0.69 (0.12)***	0.58 (0.12)***
Bourne	-0.02 (0.15)	0.03 (0.14)
German	0.06 (0.14)	-0.13 (0.12)
Iraq	-0.34 (0.40)	-0.20 (0.37)
UK government evaluations		
Health	-0.59 (0.38)	-0.21 (0.34)
Economy	-0.15 (0.35)	-0.20 (0.35)
Education	-0.12 (0.39)	0.27 (0.36)
Welsh Assembly government evaluations		
Health	0.26 (0.40)	0.17 (0.38)
Economy	-0.86 (0.59)	0.64 (0.44)
Education	-0.18 (0.43)	-0.36 (0.40)
Intercept	-1.19 (1.13)	-2.07 (1.09)
Log likelihood = 672.41		
Model improvement = 190.39		
Nagelkerke pseudo $R^2 = 0.43$		
Weighted $N = 481$		

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

theoretical importance. The patterns for individual variables are not wholly consistent between the two nations. In Wales, both Plaid Cymru loyalists and switchers are disproportionately those most focused on Welsh matters for making voting choices; both groups were also relatively favorable to the Plaid Cymru leader and strongly antipathetic to the UK prime minister. In Scotland, SNP loyalists were strongly

Table 12 Multinomial logit estimates (standard errors) for model of election voting, Scotland, 2003

Variable	SNP loyalists	SNP switchers
Age	-0.02 (0.01)**	-0.00 (0.01)
Female	-0.21 (0.25)	0.18 (0.27)
Social class		
Salaried	-1.23 (0.37)***	-0.21 (0.36)
Routine non-managerial	-0.29 (0.39)	0.50 (0.38)
Petty bourgeoisie	-0.60 (0.55)	0.20 (0.54)
Skilled managerial	0.39 (0.43)	0.79 (0.47)*
Working class	0.37 (0.31)	0.13 (0.38)
Level of voting decision		
Mainly Scotland	0.94 (0.31)***	0.27 (0.32)
Mainly United Kingdom	-1.40 (0.50)***	-0.45 (0.38)
Leader evaluations		
Blair	-0.12 (0.06)**	0.01 (0.06)
Duncan-Smith	—	—
Kennedy	—	—
McConnell	-0.30 (0.08)***	-0.22 (0.08)***
Swinney	0.55 (0.07)***	0.40 (0.07)***
McLetchie	-0.11 (0.07)*	-0.06 (0.07)
Wallace	-0.07 (0.07)	-0.09 (0.08)
Iraq	-0.17 (0.24)	0.16 (0.25)
UK government evaluations		
Health	-0.19 (0.23)	-0.20 (0.23)
Economy	-0.25 (0.23)	-0.24 (0.24)
Education	0.04 (0.27)	0.14 (0.28)
Scottish Executive evaluations		
Health	0.24 (0.27)	-0.22 (0.31)
Economy	0.43 (0.31)	-0.39 (0.37)
Education	-0.08 (0.27)	-0.26 (0.29)
Intercept	-0.25 (0.64)	-2.18 (0.71)
Log likelihood = 1,003.21		
Model improvement = 251.17		
Nagelkerke pseudo $R^2 = 0.33$		
Weighted $N = 849$		

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Scotland focused in making their voting decisions and far less concerned with UK issues than other voters, but these variables do not show any significant impact for SNP switchers. And although SNP loyalists show considerable hostility to Tony Blair, more consistent are SNP voters' attitudes to the two main Scottish leaders—both

loyalists and switchers were relatively favorable to the SNP leader and hostile toward the Labour leader in Scotland.

Beyond some of these immediate differences, however, the results reported point to a fairly consistent picture, and one in line with our prior discussion. The results indicate no signs of any “Iraq effect”—the issue dominating UK political debate at the time—or of voters responding to any disappointment with the policy record of the UK government. United Kingdom-level factors, such as attitudes to the prime minister, were not wholly irrelevant to voting decisions, but no one would have expected that they would be. And what is equally clear is that such factors are not the dominant, exclusive drivers of voting choice. As we have shown previously, voters in Scotland and Wales can, and often do, make different electoral choices for devolved elections from Westminster ones. And as we have now shown, they are often guided by factors specific to Scotland and Wales when making such choices.

Conclusion

Two rounds of elections to the devolved institutions in Wales and Scotland have thus far had only a limited impact on the party systems of those nations—the dominant parties in elections to the UK parliament at Westminster have also dominated the devolved elections. Nonetheless, the respective levels of support for those parties have differed, as significant numbers of voters have chosen to behave differently across the two electoral arenas. Why have many voters behaved differently? Our findings suggest that it is not primarily because of factors anticipated by “second-order” theories of elections; rather (and even in 2003, when political debate was dominated by the United Kingdom’s involvement in Iraq), those supporting a different party at devolved elections and Westminster ones tend to be those most concerned with Scottish/Welsh issues. Significant numbers of voters in Wales and Scotland appear to recognize Westminster and devolved levels as distinct political arenas, to evaluate parties differently for those respective arenas, and to vote accordingly.

Our findings have implications for electoral politics in Scotland and Wales (particularly, that systematic differences in voting behavior across different electoral arenas will likely persist while many voters view the major parties as having different degrees of relevance to different political arenas), but they also have potentially wider analytical implications for theories of electoral behavior. The findings here add to the broader body of work that, collectively, demonstrates SOE theories to have considerable empirical purchase in explaining some nonstate elections but much more limited success in accounting for behavior in others. But the obvious question of *why* SOE approaches enjoy this variable success is difficult to answer, mainly because of the theoretical weakness of this work. SOE theories offer an understanding of what we might term “voting in a vacuum”—something that leads to “national” (i.e., statewide)

factors shaping voting behavior in certain characteristic ways. What is not very clearly theorized is why this vacuum exists: discussions have a tendency to conflate one clear possible factor shaping election turnout and behavior (the substantive consequences of an election, often seen as a function of the powers of the body being elected) with another factor that is usually less clearly articulated (the extent to which voters are asked to make choices in an electoral context that is meaningful to them). The latter—to the extent that it has been discussed—has sometimes been related to the political campaigns surrounding an election. For example, the most detailed discussion of European Parliament elections suggests that a “vacuum” persists because of the lack of discussion of, and choices about, the European Union offered by the major parties in these elections (van der Eijk and Franklin 1996).

An alternative perspective, however, would point to the importance of *nationalism*. Nationalism is not only the dominant single organizing principle of political life across today’s world; it has also been shown to be a very strong force shaping electoral competition and voting behavior (Caramani 2004). In short, one dimension of the pervasive power of nationalism is that the “nation” appears the obvious context in which to locate electoral choices for most voters. Thus, one might suggest that voting in European Parliament elections occurs in a “vacuum,” not because (or at least not exclusively because) of the inadequate powers possessed by the European Parliament, or the campaigns run by political parties but because of the absence of a Europe-wide *national* context in which to locate electoral choices. In this absence, voters are likely to fall back on “second-order” national factors in deciding how to vote. However, the complex nature of identities in nonstate nations such as Scotland and Wales (and, indeed, Catalunya, the Basque Country, and various other instances) provides, in elections to devolved institutions, an alternative national focus within which many voters may locate their electoral choices.

These ideas remain at the level of a hypothesis; although consistent with existing evidence, they require substantial further testing, in Scotland, Wales, and elsewhere. But such ideas do suggest that explanations of why Welsh and Scottish voters behave the way they do in devolved elections may also point toward a more general understanding of the factors that shape voting behavior across a variety of electoral contexts.

Appendix 1: Data Sources

The 1999 Welsh National Assembly Election Study and 2001 and 2003 Wales Life and Times Surveys were funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (grant numbers R000238070 and L219252042), with fieldwork conducted by the National Centre for Social Research. Scottish Social Attitudes has been an annual survey conducted since 1999 by the National Centre for Social Research, with initial financial support from the Economic and Social Research Council. (For further details, see http://www.natcen.ac.uk/natcen/pages/or_socialattitudes.htm#ssa.)

Appendix 2: Variables Used in Multivariate Analysis

Variable	Survey question	Coding
Age of respondent		Years
Sex		"0" male, "1" female
Social class categories		"1" if member of class category, "0" otherwise
Level of voting decision: Wales/Scotland	"When you were deciding how to vote in the NAW/SP election, did you vote ..."	"1" for response "Mostly according to what was going on in Wales/Scotland," "0" otherwise
Level of voting decision: Britain	"When you were deciding how to vote in the NAW/SP election, did you vote ..."	"1" for response "Mostly according to what was going on in Britain as a whole," "0" otherwise
Iraq	"Please say how much you agree or disagree with this statement: 'Britain was wrong to go to war with Iraq'"	"1" if agreeing, "0" otherwise
Leader evaluations: Blair, Duncan-Smith, and Kennedy	"How good or bad a job do you think X has done/would do as prime minister"	"0" for "very bad" through "10" for "very good"
Leader evaluations: devolved-level leaders	"How good or bad a job do you think X has done/would do as first minister"	"0" for "very bad" through "10" for "very good"
UK and devolved policy evaluations	"Would you say that since [1999] the standard of the health service/quality of education/standard of living in Wales/Scotland has increased or fallen?" "Who do you think this has mainly been the result of?"	"-1" if respondent accorded responsibility for perceived decline to UK or devolved government in any of three areas, "1" if respondent according responsibility for perceived improvement to UK or devolved government in any of three areas, "0" otherwise

Notes

1. Note that this article does not address the elections to the Northern Irish Assembly, held in 1998 and 2003. Partisan and electoral politics in Northern Ireland assume a very different shape to those on the British mainland, and the central arguments of this article about the factors shaping behavior in devolved elections in Scotland and Wales are almost certainly inapplicable to Northern Ireland.
2. For an account of both the success of Conservative unionism and its later decline, see Seawright (1999).

3. Both the SP and the NAW serve fixed four-year terms.
4. Note that we define the null hypothesis in terms of *systematic* differences. Some random variation in how people vote across different electoral contexts is virtually inevitable; we are interested in the extent to which there is significant variation in particular and potentially explicable directions.
5. Index of dissimilarity scores are calculated as one-half of the aggregate of (absolute value) differences in levels of party support across the two electoral arenas. Although we calculate this measure using the standard formula used elsewhere, we deploy the measure differently from other authors (e.g. Hough and Jeffery 2003). Previous work, lacking survey data, has compared recent election results for statewide and regional elections. Our method (calculating the index for survey data on voting preferences gathered at a single point in time) allows for a more direct summation of the extent of differences in partisan preferences across alternative electoral arenas at a single point in time.
6. The findings discussed in this section concern only aggregate patterns of electoral support. However, an individual-level cross-analysis of Welsh electoral preferences (Wyn Jones and Scully, forthcoming) showed that in this instance, the aggregates reported are not masking much more subtle individual-level processes. The three “British” parties retain the substantial majority of their NAW supporters for a Westminster election and add to that support significant numbers of those who are nonvoters in the National Assembly context. Plaid Cymru, however, loses almost half its NAW support (mainly to other parties) for Westminster elections; in return, it attracts for Westminster very few of those who are NAW nonvoters and virtually none (in our sample, literally no one at all!) of those who support other parties for the assembly.
7. One potential explanatory factor in shaping voting choice in all elections is the voting system; given the differing voting systems used in Westminster elections compared with devolved elections, one might expect that this plays some role in shaping differing voting choices across the different electoral arenas (see also Curtice 2004). Our analysis here can have only limited insight into the importance of the electoral system—we do not know exactly how people might have voted under alternative electoral systems. However, by focusing our analysis on the first (constituency) vote, which in both the 1999 and 2003 devolved elections was cast in identical fashion and for the same districts as in the previous Westminster elections, we minimize the likely impact of voting rules on vote choice.
8. For useful overviews of the literature on electoral cycles, see Soldatos (1994) and Hough and Jeffery (2003); for a convincing application of some of these ideas to the United States, see Erikson (1998).
9. The extant SOE literature includes, *inter alia*, statements of the core ideas (Reif and Schmitt 1980); detailed applications in specific electoral contexts, including the United Kingdom (Heath et al. 1999) and the European Union (Marsh 1998); and partial critiques and extensions (Blondel et al. 1998; van der Eijk and Franklin 1996).
10. Recorded voter turnout levels have been, in Scotland, 58 percent in 1999 and 49 percent in 2003; in Wales, 46 percent in 1999 and 38 percent four years later.

11. One should note that Hough and Jeffery (2003) do suggest that German regional elections have become somewhat less clearly “second-order” national elections in the years since reunification.
12. Examples of this literature include Hough and Jeffery (2003), Trystan et al. (2003), and several articles in a special issue of *European Urban and Regional Studies* (2003), vol. 10, no. 3.
13. Nonvoters are excluded from the analysis; as above, in coding electoral support for devolved elections, reported first (i.e., constituency) vote is used.
14. Age is coded in years; sex is a dummy variable coded “1” for female, “0” for male; social class is coded as a series of dummy variables for each class categorization, with those not classified used as the comparator category.
15. In addition to Prime Minister Tony Blair, UK leader of the Labour Party, the leaders included were Iain Duncan-Smith (then leader of the UK Conservative Party) and Charles Kennedy (UK leader of the Liberal Democrats) at the United Kingdom level. For the Welsh analysis, relevant leaders were Rhodri Morgan (Welsh Labour leader and first minister), Ieuan Wyn Jones (leader of Plaid Cymru), Nick Bourne (Welsh Conservative leader), and Mike German (Liberal Democrat leader in the Welsh Assembly and deputy first minister before the election). In Scotland, relevant leaders were Jack McConnell (Scottish Labour leader and first minister), John Swinney (leader of the SNP), David McLetchie (Scottish Conservative leader), and Jim Wallace (Scottish Liberal Democrat leader and deputy first minister). Because evaluations for Duncan-Smith and Kennedy were not reported in the Scottish data, they are omitted from the Scotland analysis.
16. The absence of many significant coefficients despite the fairly high pseudo R^2 figure can be partly attributed to the relatively low number of cases in the different categories of “nonsupporter,” “loyalist,” and “switcher.” On the goodness-of-fit measure, see Nagelkerke (1991).

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