

The Public Legitimacy of the National Assembly for Wales

Roger Scully and Richard Wyn Jones
Wales Governance Centre
Cardiff University

Abstract: This article explores the public legitimacy of the National Assembly for Wales. Created in 1999, the Assembly initially enjoyed very limited public support. While support for devolution in general has risen subsequently, and some aspects of public attitudes towards the Assembly now appear distinctly positive, we show that ‘diffuse support’ for the chamber remains rather limited. We then examine what factors may explain diffuse support for the Assembly. Our analysis indicates that such support is best accounted for by variables associated with ‘non-material consequentialism’: i.e. perceptions of the impact of the Assembly on the *process* of government. The conclusion assesses the implications of our findings for the National Assembly, as well as for the study of devolution and legislatures more generally.

Key Words: Public Legitimacy; National Assembly for Wales; Devolution; Consequentialism; Deontologism.

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The relationship between government and people is a defining concern for political enquiry. Much political theory has addressed the proper limits of government authority and the rights that citizens should have. Important work has also approached the relationship from the opposite direction, considering the duties and obligations owed to authority by citizens, and the conditions under which authority should be granted acceptance and even loyalty.¹ This latter concern – the circumstances under which citizens accept government as legitimate – is also a persisting theme for empirical enquiry: one given renewed priority by the investigation of public attitudes to the new democratic regimes established since the early 1990s (Bratton et al 2004; Evans and Whitefield 1995), and the apparently declining public legitimacy facing many established democracies (Dalton 2004; Hay 2007).² Although the evidence is far from wholly unambiguous, a growing body of work suggests that the legitimacy of government matters, with low public support for government linked to specific behavioural consequences, such as lesser public compliance with taxation and census laws (Dalton 2004, ch.8; Kornberg and Clarke 1992; Schloz and Lubell 1998); greater enthusiasm for radical institutional change (Cain et al 2003; Dalton et al 2001; Shugart and Wattenberg 2001); and support for non-mainstream, even violent, political activism (Craig and Wald 1985; Muller and Seligson 1982).

What applies to government as a whole also seems true for specific governing institutions. A body of work in legislative studies has explored the relationship

¹ The duty owed to authority by citizens is a central theme for many theorists, but perhaps most prominent in the work of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. For important modern discussions of the legitimacy of political authority see Horton (1992) and Pateman (1985).

² Norris (2011) offers an important challenge to much of the literature discerning declining legitimacy in established democracies.

between support for an institution and the security of its status, suggesting that the former may be necessary for the latter (Mezey 1979). And a developed literature on higher Courts, particularly in the United States, has also argued for the importance of legitimacy: “Legitimacy provides courts authority; it allows them the latitude necessary to make decisions contrary to the perceived immediate interests of their constituents” (Gibson and Caldeira 1995: 460; Gibson et al 1998). In short, the legitimacy of political institutions with those over whom they are to exercise authority matters.

In 1999, the National Assembly for Wales (NAW) was created. The first ever all-Wales elected governing institution, the Assembly initially rested on a shallow foundation of public support. Referendums in September 1997 had confirmed that while devolved government was the ‘settled will of the Scottish people’, this was far from the case for Wales, with merely a quarter of the Welsh electorate actively supporting the Assembly’s creation.³ A major study of public attitudes towards government conducted in the early years of devolution confirmed that there was very limited public support for, or trust in, the Assembly (Pattie et al 2004: chapter 2).

Just over a decade on the picture appeared much changed. Surveys now suggested declining public opposition to devolution and the existence of the Assembly (Wyn Jones and Scully 2012, chapter 3). And a clear majority – albeit on a low turnout – endorsed enhanced powers for the NAW in a March 2011 referendum. Yet the breadth and depth of public support was far from clear; nor was the basis on which any such support was granted. In this article we investigate both issues. Contributing

³ The creation of the Assembly was endorsed by only 50.3 per cent of voters in the September 1997 referendum, on a 50.1 per cent turnout.

to the growing literature on the legislature-citizen relationship (e.g. Leston-Bandeira 2012), and extending it to the sub-national level, we examine whether the National Assembly for Wales has come to enjoy substantial public legitimacy. And we explore the basis on which any such legitimacy is derived. In addressing these questions, the article is structured as follows. First, we consider the concept of public legitimacy, and discuss how the legitimacy of an institution like the NAW might most appropriately be assessed. Second, drawing on recent evidence we examine the extent to which the Assembly enjoys substantial public support. Third, we then investigate the factors that shape public attitudes. We outline two main alternative routes – the consequentialist and the deontological – towards legitimation, and assess the extent to which variables associated with each underpin attitudes towards the Assembly. Finally, the conclusion considers the implications of the findings for the National Assembly, as well as for the study of devolution and legislature more generally.

Investigating Public Legitimacy

Institutions perceived to be legitimate are those with a widely accepted mandate to render judgments for a political community (Gibson et al 2003: 356).

As with many political concepts, legitimacy lacks a single, settled meaning or defined field of application. It has been understood in a variety of ways, and applied to a range

of political phenomena.⁴ Yet there is a definite core to the concept – a concern with the rightfulness of authority (Beetham and Lord 1998: chapter 1). And our use of the term here can be delineated fairly clearly.

Our concern is with the public, normative legitimacy of the NAW. Thus, we focus on the mass public in Wales rather than some or other set of elites. We address *normative* legitimacy (subjective attitudes towards the rightfulness of the institution's authority) rather than *legal* legitimacy, or *formal* legitimacy in relation to pre-specified criteria (cf. Beetham and Lord 1998: 3-4). And in focussing on the devolved NAW we are concerned not with public attitudes to the boundaries of the *political community*, nor with those concerning a particular set of *political authorities* (a specific government), but with views about the *political regime*: the broad system and structures within and through which a particular set of political authorities wield political power (Dalton 2004; Easton 1965).⁵ In short, we are concerned with legitimacy in the sense defined by Lipset (1959: 77): “the belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for the society”.

Empirical investigations of the legitimacy of political institutions generally seek to distinguish between ‘diffuse’ and ‘specific’ support (Easton 1965). The latter concerns approval of particular actions, policies or office-holders. But it is the former,

⁴ Jurgen Habermas (1976) prompted one major debate when he famously posited the existence of a ‘legitimation crisis’ in modern societies. Clark (2005) provides an important application of the concept of legitimacy in modern international politics; Hurd (2007) consider legitimacy more specifically in the context of the United Nations Security Council.

⁵ Dalton further distinguishes three aspects of support for a political regime: support for the Principles of the regime, support for the Norms and Procedures under which it operates, and support for the Institutions of the regime. However, he acknowledges that, in practice, “it is often difficult to draw such fine distinctions” (2004: 7). Our study is primarily concerned with the third aspect: the legitimacy of the National Assembly for Wales as an institution through which substantial public authority is now being wielded. However, it also clearly incorporates elements of the first aspect as well: the legitimacy of the principle that Wales should be a partially self-governing entity within the UK.

understood as “support that is not contingent upon satisfaction with the immediate outputs of the institution”, that is typically viewed as synonymous with legitimacy (Gibson et al 2003: 356; see also Easton 1965: 273). In practice, attempts to investigate the degree of diffuse support enjoyed by a political institution are therefore concerned with something different from immediate approval or current popularity. Rather, researchers seek evidence of – or the absence of – a deeply-rooted institutional loyalty. Scholars exploring this topic may sometimes need to allow for levels of specific support (such as the popularity of office-holders within the institution, or public reactions to particular actions by the body) when exploring overall attitudes towards an institution. Alternatively, researchers have sought to develop methods of enquiry that explore attitudes to an institution within the context of disapproval of specific actions; to probe the degree to which “[c]itizens may disagree with what an institution does but nevertheless continue to concede its authority as a political decision maker.” (Caldeira and Gibson 1995: 357). In the following section, we will use such methods to gauge the legitimacy of the National Assembly for Wales.

Assessing the Legitimacy of the National Assembly

A substantial amount is already known about many aspects of public attitudes towards the government of Wales. A series of detailed surveys, conducted on representative samples of the Welsh population since 1997, have revealed much about public opinion. One of the most consistently employed approaches within these surveys has been the use of multiple-option ‘constitutional preference’ questions. Results from

one such question, employed in numerous surveys in Wales between 1997-2011, are presented in Table 1. This question asks respondents to select their most favoured option from a number of potential forms of government for Wales, with the options ranging between remaining within the UK without devolution at one end of the spectrum and independence for Wales at the other end.⁶ As the table shows, while a substantial plurality favoured the No Devolution option at the time of the 1997 referendum, support for this position declined substantially thereafter. At the same time, there has been no substantial or consistent growth in support for Welsh independence. Rather, from 1999, a (generally growing) majority of respondents have favoured some form of devolution within the UK: either of the limited kind granted Wales in the 1990s, or a more extensive form including greater legislative and some taxation powers.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

The evidence from this question, and from a number of others deployed in various surveys (Wyn Jones and Scully 2008; 2012, chapter 3), indicates that stable and secure majority support in Wales for devolution has developed subsequent to the 1997 referendum. Increasingly, devolution looks like the ‘settled will’ of the Welsh people. As the central institutional manifestation of devolution, the National Assembly would

⁶ The survey question asks respondents ‘Which one of these statements comes closest to your view?’. The options presented to respondents are:

- Wales should become independent, separate from the UK and the European Union
- Wales should become independent, separate from the UK but part of the European Union
- Wales should remain part of the UK, with its own elected parliament which has law-making and taxation powers
- Wales should remain part of the UK, with its own elected assembly which has limited law-making powers only
- Wales should remain part of the UK without an elected assembly
- Don’t know.

For ease of presentation, the table combines the two ‘Independence’ options.

thus appear to enjoy considerable public support. But by themselves responses to such constitutional preference questions may tell us rather little about institutional legitimacy as defined earlier. Support for some form of devolution does not, in itself, necessarily connote much in terms of attitudes to the NAW as an institution, other than not rejecting a form of government for Wales that includes the Assembly. We have little way of knowing whether support for devolution evinced via such a question format stems from diffuse support for the principle of the Assembly wielding significant government power within Wales; or whether it might spring from some other source, such as specific support for a particular party that is currently holding power within the Assembly. (The latter appears a particularly strong possibility for the period since May 2010, when different parties have held power in London and Cardiff.) Nor do multiple-option constitutional preference questions tell us anything in detail about public attitudes to the Assembly as an institution. To investigate the legitimacy of the Assembly more adequately we need measures that probe attitudes more deeply.

A number of such measures were included in the 2011 Welsh Referendum Study (WRS).⁷ A first set concerns *trust*. Trust is recognised by many studies as a very important dimension of public attitudes to governmental institutions (e.g. Norris 2011): could an institution be said to be ‘legitimate’ if it were not generally trusted to wield public authority appropriately? Trust is also of particular relevance in the

⁷ The 2011 Welsh Referendum Study was funded by a grant from the Economic and Social Research Council of the United Kingdom (RES-000-22-4496). The Co-Directors of the Study were Roger Scully and Richard Wyn Jones. Survey fieldwork for the study was conducted by YouGov, via the internet. The pre-referendum wave of the study included 3029 respondents; 2569 of these (or 84.8 percent) also participated in the post-referendum wave. All data used in the analysis here are weighted for representativeness of the registered adult electorate in Wales, using YouGov’s standard weighting factor which adjust for a range of demographic and attitudinal factors, including age, gender, region, social class, newspaper readership and past vote. WRS data, as well as further details on the study, are available to download at: <http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/interpol/research/research-projects/welsh-election-study/about-the-study/>.

current context: as mentioned earlier, the Assembly in its early years appeared particularly lacking in trust from the people of Wales. WRS asked a series of questions about trust in members of the Assembly and of the Welsh Government, alongside equivalent questions probing trust in other institutions. Results are presented in Table 2. In general, they present a rather more positive picture than emerged from the earlier work of Pattie et al (2004).⁸ Politicians in Cardiff Bay are far from universally trusted. But they do fare rather more positively in public esteem than their counterparts at Westminster. Levels of trust in the institutions of devolved government, and those who work within them, appear somewhat higher than in the equivalent bodies at the UK level.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Another approach taken in the literature on the legitimacy of political institutions has been to probe whether people support the current role and status of the institution. In studies of the U.S. Supreme Court, for instance, respondents have been asked whether they favour reducing its jurisdiction (e.g. Gibson et al 2003). WRS did not include any equivalent questions directly asking whether the NAW's scope of responsibilities should be reduced. But some insight into such matters can be gained via a series of WRS questions that asked respondents about the level of government that they considered most appropriate to exercise authority over several policy areas. As shown in Table 3, absolute majorities endorsed the Assembly (rather than Westminster, local councils or the EU) controlling policy-making in largely devolved areas like

⁸ A direct comparison between the findings here and those of Pattie et al (2004) is hindered by the slightly different question formats used in the two studies. However, it is noticeable that while Pattie et al found trust in the NAW to be significantly lower than that in UK-level political institutions, the findings here suggest the opposite.

education and health. But a substantial plurality also supported the Assembly exercising primary responsibility in the non-devolved area of policy over the Police, although there was very limited support for extending the Assembly's reach into the (rather unrealistic) territory of defence and foreign affairs. There is certainly no indication in this evidence of substantial public support for reducing the scope of the NAW's responsibilities; if anything, the opposite is the case.

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

However, while data on constitutional preferences, institutional trust and attitudes to the role of the NAW tell us some useful things about public support for the Assembly, there is another question format that is regarded by much of the U.S. literature as probably the most directly insightful on matters of institutional legitimacy. This is one which attempts directly to distinguish between specific and diffuse support for an institution by locating respondents within a hypothetical context in which specific support for the body would necessarily be low.⁹ Adapted to the Welsh context for WRS, this question asks survey respondents to indicate their extent of agreement or disagreement with the following statement:

‘If the National Assembly for Wales started making lots of decisions that most people disagreed with, it might be better to do away with the National Assembly for Wales altogether.’

⁹ The question format adapted for use in the Welsh context here is used in the U.S. context in, for example, Caldeira and Gibson (1992), and in the study of the European Court of Justice in Gibson and Caldeira (1995).

In order to help assess the extent of support for the Assembly revealed by responses to this question, WRS respondents were also asked equivalent questions about their local authority, about the UK Parliament at Westminster, and about the European Union. Responses given are outlined in Table 4. These show that, on this measure, diffuse support for the National Assembly among the people of Wales is much greater than that for the European Union. But the Assembly appears in a weaker position than either local councils or the UK Parliament. Very nearly half of all WRS respondents disagreed with the notion that the UK parliament should be 'done away with' if it were making lots of unpopular decisions; more than a third offered a similar viewpoint with regard to their local council. This compares with comfortably under a third for the Assembly, and only one-in-five for the EU. And slightly over two-in-five agreed with doing away with the Assembly in the event of it making numerous unpopular decisions, double the proportion believing that about the UK parliament. These results suggest that public support for the NAW may still harbour some ambivalence and be rather conditional in nature. While there is currently substantial support for the Assembly to exist and to exercise a significant role in the government of Wales, the legitimacy of the institution appears far from absolute. In the event of the Assembly becoming associated with unpopular actions, many people in Wales find it quite possible to imagine life without it.

TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

In summary, the results presented in this section of the paper paint a rather mixed picture. Opposition to devolution and to the very existence of the Assembly has definitely fallen substantially since the 1997 referendum. Levels of trust in the

institution also appear to have improved and to now be higher than trust in UK-level political institutions; and there is clear majority support for the NAW to retain at least its current scope of responsibilities. On the other hand, a question directly probing the diffuse support enjoyed by the institution suggests that the status of the NAW is still rather more conditional in the minds of many people in Wales than that of either the local or UK levels of government. This suggests that a secure public legitimacy for the Assembly is yet to be wholly established.

Exploring the Bases for Public Attitudes

The previous section of the paper presented relevant available evidence on the public legitimacy of the NAW. What it did not attempt to do was to explain the factors that might shape public attitudes towards the institution. It is to this latter question that we now turn.

Potential Influences on Public Attitudes: Public attitudes to an institution like the Assembly might potentially be shaped by an infinite number of factors. But the extant literature on political legitimacy, and work on devolution in the UK, allows us to identify two principal types of influence. The first of these is what Kay's theoretical analysis of justifications for Welsh devolution terms *Consequentialism*: the notion that devolution, if it is to be valued, is to be "desired on the grounds that it is believed to have good or desirable effects" (2003: 51). The emphasis here is very much on the practical consequences of this constitutional innovation: what difference having a National Assembly might have.

There is little doubt that citizens' attitudes to political institutions can be shaped in a consequentialist manner. A much-celebrated example is the experience of West Germany after World War II, where success in delivering prosperity and political and social stability generated much broader public support for the institutions and principles of the Federal Republic (Boynton and Loewenberg 1973; Baker et al 1981). In the terminology discussed earlier, specific support for the successful policies of the Federal Republic appeared to generate diffuse support for the institutions of that republic.

Such factors may well be important in explaining public attitudes in Wales. The 1997 referendum campaign accorded great priority to consequentialist arguments, with the Labour party, in particular, very much underplaying any suggestion that devolution should be justified in terms of national recognition. Rather, the emphasis was much more on the practical consequences: "the stated purpose of devolution was to produce better government rather than, say, give 'proper' constitutional recognition to Welsh nationhood" (Wyn Jones 2001: 37).

The practical consequences of devolution can, in turn, be divided into two categories: material and non-material. The material consequences of devolution concern their impact on public welfare and the effective delivery of government policies. The comparative literature remains somewhat inconclusive about the extent to which perceptions of effective policy delivery are an *essential* ingredient for diffuse public support for political institutions to develop (e.g. Dalton 2004, ch.3). But even if not a necessary condition, it remains a distinct possibility.

However, Kay's (2003) articulation of consequentialism also points to potential non-material effects. The creation of a Welsh Assembly may well be associated in the public mind with specific policy consequences. But citizens may also perceive devolution to have impacted on the process and practices of government: how, and by whom, they are governed. 'How' themes were explicitly highlighted in debates in the 1990s, where devolution was linked with ideas of a 'New Politics'. The type of politics anticipated in the new Assembly was deliberately contrasted with how politics was alleged to be practiced at Westminster. The new politics of devolution, it was suggested, would not merely bring government physically closer to the people, but would also make political life more 'open', more 'inclusive' and less confrontational (Osmond 1998). There is considerable room for doubt as to whether these aspirations have been, or could ever be, wholly realised (Chaney and Fevre 2001). Nonetheless, they suggest one plausible source of influence on public attitudes: public perceptions of the impact of devolution on the *process* of government and politics, aside from any material consequences that devolution may be perceived to have had.

A related but distinct potential influence on public attitudes is the fact that devolution has served to bridge the 'democratic deficit' alleged to have been opened up during the pre-devolution era of Conservative government. Executive office in the Assembly has at all times been in the hands of political parties commanding a much more substantial electoral mandate than achieved by the Conservatives in Wales in the late-1980s or the 1990s. Aside from material consequences, or its impact on how people are governed, the Assembly may attract public support simply because it is controlled by parties reasonably well attuned to the political sensibilities of the Welsh people.

But while the perceived material or non-material consequences of devolution may well strongly influence public attitudes to the NAW, they do not exhaust the potential influences. Such is the lesson of much comparative political research, which finds that “the satisfactions that members of a system feel they obtain from the perceived outputs and performance of the political authorities... is only indirectly relevant, if at all, to the input of support for the regime” (Easton, 1975: 437). Similarly, an early examination of public reactions to the performance of the devolved institutions in Scotland and Wales found that public preferences on how these nations should be governed were only modestly associated with consequentialist evaluations: “support for the principle of devolution has not been closely related to perceptions of the performance of the devolved institutions” (Curtice 2005: 122).

An alternative approach to understanding the factors shaping public attitudes towards the National Assembly is given by Kay’s notion of *Deontological* justifications for devolution. This, put simply, is the idea that devolution is not justified or valued primarily for its material consequences; instead, “devolution is thought to be inherently valuable” (2003: 51). As so defined, deontology is the direct (indeed, tautologous) converse of consequentialism: virtue attached to devolution that does not arise from its consequences must, by definition, be innate.

The clearest reason why the existence of a National Assembly could be regarded as having deontological virtue is in the institution offering political recognition, as well as substantial autonomy, to Wales as a nation. By raising the political standing of the Welsh to a similar level as that enjoyed by other prominent non-state nations (such as

the Basques and Catalans in Spain), the Assembly may be fulfilling a valuable function in the eyes of many people. The converse is also true: some may be hostile to the NAW precisely because, by giving political recognition to Welshness, it may appear to downplay the unifying importance of Britishness. The general point is that there is substantial scope for public attitudes to the National Assembly to be shaped by the politics of national recognition.

Empirical Analysis: In this section of the paper we attempt to explore the extent to which factors associated with consequentialism and deontologism shape the level of diffuse public support for the NAW. The dependent variable for our analysis is responses to the ‘do away with’ question measuring diffuse support for the Assembly encountered earlier; the analysis will explore the association between WRS respondents’ answers to this question and a set of explanatory variables derived directly from the hypothesised sources of influence on public attitudes outlined immediately above.

Three broad categories of explanatory variable are used. The first category comprises several basic socio-demographic control variables: these specify the Age, Gender and Social Class of respondents. Previous work on general public attitudes to devolution in Wales has suggested that these factors may be significantly related to public attitudes (Wyn Jones and Scully 2003).¹⁰

The second category of explanatory variables comprises several linked to the different forms of possible consequentialist influences on public attitudes. In relation to

¹⁰ Members of younger age cohorts, members of the working class, and women have all been found in previous work to be somewhat more favourable towards devolution in Wales.

material consequentialism, we specify three pairs of dummy variables that measure the perceived impact of the creation of the National Assembly on outcomes in three key areas of public policy: Health, Education, and the economic Standard of Living. But we also develop several variables directly linked to non-material consequentialism. First, we include two dummy variables measuring respondents' perceptions that having a National Assembly had or had not 'improved the way Wales is governed', and two more such variables related to a question about whether having an Assembly was 'giving ordinary people more say in how Wales is governed'. Second, to assess the hypothesis that individuals' attitudes to the NAW might be shaped by their sense that it has helped deliver government more in tune with their political preferences, we include a series of variables for the Partisan Identification of respondents. If this hypothesis is well-founded, would expect support for the Assembly to be particularly high among identifiers with Labour and with Plaid Cymru, who held office as a coalition government in Wales at the time that the survey data was gathered.

The final category of explanatory variables specified is directly related to the deontological justification for devolution outlined above. To gauge the extent to which public attitudes towards devolution are shaped by the politics of national recognition, we include a series of dummy variables recording the National Identity of respondents – measured on the now-standard 'Moreno' scale which allows for varying degrees of identification with Scotland/Wales and Britain. (Precise codings for all variables used in the analysis are set out in the Appendix).

Results and Discussion: A series of OLS regression models were specified for each of the major groups of independent variables outlined above; in addition, we ran an aggregate model that included all the variables.¹¹ Table 5 presents outline findings for the series of different models.¹² Model 1 includes only our socio-demographic control variables for the age group, sex and social class of WRS respondents. This model has a very limited fit to the data, indicating that these factors have little ability to account for differences in respondents' levels of diffuse support for the NAW, although the individual coefficients indicate institutional support to be somewhat higher among those from younger age groups.¹³

TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE

Model 2 includes the national identity variables specified in an effort to assess the impact of the politics of national recognition on diffuse support for the NAW. Perhaps surprisingly, the variables in this model also have a collectively very limited fit to the data. Although the individual coefficients do suggest, as expected, that a stronger

¹¹ Given that there is not a clear interval-level relationship between the categories of our dependent variable, it might be objected that OLS regression is not an appropriate functional form for the analysis. We therefore re-ran all analyses using ordered logistic regression (O'Connell 2006). This produced substantively very similar findings (details available from authors). Given the similarity of the findings, we have chosen to present the more readily interpretable OLS results.

¹² The 'AIC' figures presented in Table 5 are Akaike Information Criteria statistics. The AIC is a general indicator of model performance which penalises models with unnecessary variables, and thus encourages analysts not to run 'kitchen sink' models with every conceivable explanatory variable included (Burnham and Anderson 2002).

¹³ One interpretation that has been suggested to us of the differences in levels of diffuse support enjoyed by the different levels of government (as shown in Table 4) is simply that the relative newness of the NAW means that it has yet to become as established a part of the political framework of government as local councils and the Westminster parliament. On this interpretation, simply existing for an extended period of time will make the NAW appear more 'natural' and tend to raise levels of diffuse support. Were this interpretation to be correct, one would probably expect to see marked differences in levels of diffuse support by age group, with younger voters – who have little experience of the pre-devolution period – being more likely to offer support to the NAW than older age cohorts. This would appear consistent with the findings of our Model 1. But, as shown in Table 6 below, these findings are not robust within a fuller explanatory model, suggesting that the interpretation outlined here has limited validity.

Welsh identity is positively related to institutional support, while more British forms of national identity are negatively correlated with such support, the overall relationship is weak. Diffuse support for the NAW, or indeed the refusal to grant such support, does not appear to be substantially related to or influenced by differences in the national identities that people in Wales affirm.

Model 3 includes the three sets of ‘material consequentialist’ variables that, as outlined above, are concerned with the perceived impact of the NAW on living standards, the NHS and education standards in Wales. The fit of this model is rather better than the previous ones, with the individual coefficients all in the expected direction (i.e. those perceiving improvements in all three policy areas tended to offer greater support for the NAW than those who associated the institution with declining performance in public policy) and many attaining statistical significance. However, even the impact of these material consequentialist variables rather pales when considered alongside the non-materialist consequentialist variables specified in Model 4. Those variables specified for the party identification of respondents have a generally limited association with levels of institutional support for the NAW. Although Plaid Cymru identifiers are, rather unsurprisingly, strongly supportive of the elected Welsh institution, identifiers with the Labour party are not significantly more supportive of the NAW than those who identify with other parties or with none. Overall, the findings for partisan identification indicate that attitudes towards the NAW are not greatly influenced by which party is in power within the institution. The findings are much stronger, however, for the other variables specified in this model. The variables concerned with public perceptions that the NAW had or had not ‘improved the way Wales is governed’, and ‘given ordinary people more say’, are

very strongly related to levels of diffuse support for the Assembly, with all the individual coefficients being in the expected direction and many being highly significant. This suggests a close relationship between diffuse support for the NAW and attitudes towards *how* Wales is governed, with the Assembly receiving particularly strong support from those who regard its impact on the process of government as having been positive.

The final model, Model 5, includes all the individual variables in an aggregate model. Goodness-of-fit statistics show that this model has the best fit to the data, indicating that the aggregate model, including several different types of explanatory variable, accounts for variation in the dependent variable more effectively than a simpler model based only on one of the types of explanatory variable. Detailed results from this model are presented in Table 6, which displays unstandardized OLS regression estimates (with robust standard errors) for all variables. These results confirm the major findings from the individual models reported previously. In particular, the aggregate model confirms that, even after other factors are controlled for, the variables most strongly associated with respondents' levels of diffuse support for the NAW are the non-material consequentialist variables concerned with the process of government. Although there are a number of other variables which attain statistical significance in this aggregate model – with middle-class respondents, Plaid Cymru identifiers and those with a strong sense of Welsh national identity all reporting greater levels of institutional support, while those perceiving the Assembly to have had negative impacts on the standard of living and the NHS reporting lower levels of such support – the majority of the explained variance is accounted for by attitudes to

the impact of the Assembly on the standard of governance of Wales and on the relationship of ‘ordinary people’ to how Wales is governed.

TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE

A more intuitive sense of the implications of the findings of Table 6 can probably be gained from Figure 1. This presents estimated average levels of diffuse support for the NAW (on the 1-5 scale of the dependent variable used in the OLS regression analysis) for the different categories of each of our explanatory variables, with all the other variables in the aggregate model controlled for and set at their mean values.¹⁴ The figure shows quite small differences across most of the explanatory variables, but rather greater ones for the main non-material consequentialist variables. Even after the impact of all other variables is controlled for, those believing that the creation of the NAW had improved the government of Wales averaged more than one whole category higher on the five-point scale in their level of diffuse support for the Assembly than those believing that the institution had led to a decline in the government of Wales. Those regarding the Assembly as having given ordinary people more say in the government of Wales similarly averaged almost half a category higher in diffuse support levels than those believing that devolution had given ordinary people less say. Differences across of all the other variables are (with the singular exception of those between Conservatives and Plaid Cymru identifiers) much smaller in nature.

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

¹⁴ The estimates presented in Figure 1 were computed using the Clarify programme available from Gary King’s web-site (<http://gking.harvard.edu>). (See also Tomz et al (2003)).

The previous section of this article demonstrated that, notwithstanding some positive aspects of public attitudes towards the NAW, the level of diffuse support enjoyed by the institution still appeared rather limited. This section has explored the factors that may influence the levels of such support. The findings have shown that diffuse support is largely unrelated to basic social background variables, and also to the form of national identity that individuals affirm. Our results have also shown a rather limited relationship between diffuse support for the NAW and either individuals' party identification or their assessment of the 'material' consequences of devolution for policy delivery in Wales. Rather, the main influence suggested by our findings is perceptions of the implications of devolution for how Wales is governed.

Conclusions

The creation in 1999 of a National Assembly for Wales, even with very limited powers, was a major innovation in the government of Wales, and part of a substantial change to the government of the UK as a whole. Yet the NAW initially rested on a very limited basis of popular support. The evidence presented in this article has shown that support for devolution has grown substantially in Wales since the late-1990s; in other respects too, attitudes towards the Assembly now appear distinctly positive. Yet the 'diffuse support' enjoyed by the institution remains fairly low. In that sense, the public legitimacy of the NAW remains limited and conditional. Examining the factors underpinning the degree of diffuse support enjoyed by the Assembly, we have found that diffuse support has little relationship to people's senses of national identity; nor is

it very strongly associated with perceptions of the material impact of devolution on public policy outcomes. Rather, it is those who perceive the Assembly having had a positive impact on the process of government in Wales who appear most willing to grant diffuse support to the chamber; and, conversely, those who do not perceive these positive consequences from devolution who are most likely to withhold such support.

A number of broader implications may follow from the findings of this study. For the NAW, the findings here suggest that while support for Welsh devolution has grown, and attitudes towards the Assembly have in some ways become distinctly more positive than they appeared in the early days of devolution, the status of the institution remains somewhat conditional. Many people are currently quite favourable towards the Assembly, yet nonetheless appear to find it very possible to imagine life in Wales without the body if it fails to 'deliver the goods'. For a significant proportion of the Welsh people, our findings suggest, the NAW is an optional feature of how they are governed, rather than a fundamental, non-negotiable one. And, in the short- to medium-term at least, the Assembly may need to retain the widespread impression among the public that it has a positive impact on the process of government in Wales in order to attract wider support for its status.

It would be valuable to be able to compare the findings of this study directly with ones for the Scottish Parliament. It is distinctly possible that the nature of public support for the Scottish Parliament is quite different to that for the NAW. More generally, this study demonstrates the need for scholars of politics in both nations to move beyond the analysis simply of public attitudes towards 'devolution', or

comparing support for a number of broad constitutional options, towards a more differentiated and multi-dimensional analysis of public opinion. A similar moral can be drawn for the study of political institutions, including legislatures. There are very good grounds for believing that public attitudes towards such institutions are important. In the case of legislatures, such as the NAW, study of attitudes towards them need to be developed as part of a broader research agenda investigating the links between parliament and citizens (Leston-Bandeira 2012). Our findings here reinforce the point that people do not simply have a singular attitude towards political institutions. How people think about the institutions that govern them can be complex and multi-faceted, our strategies for investigating public attitudes must therefore be so as well.

Table 1: Constitutional Preferences 1997-2011, Wales

<i>Constitutional Preference</i>	<i>1997</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>2003</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2007</i>	<i>2009</i>	<i>2011</i>
Independence	13	10	12	13	11	12	15	13
Parliament	18	28	37	36	40	42	34	34
Assembly	25	33	25	25	24	26	27	28
No elected body	37	24	23	20	20	16	17	18
Don't Know	7	5	4	5	5	5	6	8
<i>Number of Respondents</i>	686	1256	1085	988	1000	884	1078	2359

Sources: 1997 Welsh Referendum Study, 1999 Welsh Assembly Election Study, 2001 Wales Life and Times Survey, 2003 Wales Life and Times Survey, 2006 Survey by NOP for the Electoral Commission, 2007 Welsh Election Study, 2009 YouGov poll for Aberystwyth and Cardiff Universities, 2011 Welsh Election Study (pre-election wave).

Table 2: Measures of Trust, Wales 2011

a. 'How much do you trust the following to work in Wales best interests?' (%)

	Just about always	Most of the Time	Only Some of the Time	Almost Never	Don't Know
UK Government	5	22	44	22	7
Welsh Government	21	45	21	6	7
Westminster MPs	3	18	51	21	8
National Assembly Members	18	45	23	6	7

b. 'How Much do you Trust [X] to...?' (average on 0-10 scale)

	'Tell the Truth'	'Do What is Right'
UK Government	3.74	3.88
Welsh Government	5.19	5.31
Westminster MPs	3.53	3.72
National Assembly Members	5.04	5.20
Your local council	4.31	4.38
The European Union	3.40	3.28
The Courts	6.49	5.94
The Police	5.42	5.60

Number of respondents = 2569

Source: 2011 Welsh Referendum Study (post-referendum wave)

Table 3: Public Attitudes to Institutional Responsibilities, Wales 2011

'For each of the following issues, please indicate which level of government you think *ought* to make most of the important decisions for Wales' (%)

	NHS	Schools	Police	Defence and Foreign Affairs
Welsh Government	54	53	48	13
UK Government	32	23	32	73
Local Councils	5	14	10	2
European Union	1	0	0	3
Don't Know	9	9	10	10

Number of respondents = 3029

Source: 2011 Welsh Referendum Study (pre-referendum wave)

Table 4: Institutional Loyalty, Wales 2011

‘If [X] started making lots of decisions that most people disagreed with, it might be better to do away with the [X] altogether’

	Strongly Agree / Agree	Neither / Don't Know	Strongly Disagree / Disagree
My local council	36	29	35
The National Assembly for Wales	41	30	29
The UK Parliament at Westminster	21	31	48
The European Union	55	24	20

Number of respondents = 3029

Source: 2011 Welsh Referendum Study (pre-referendum wave)

Table 5: Goodness-of-Fit Measures for Models of NAW Institutional Support, 2011

<i>Model</i>	<i>R²</i>	<i>AIC#</i>
1. Age, Sex & Social Class	.01	9907.75
2. National Identity	.07	9725.75
3. Material Consequentialist variables	.23	9155.60
4. Non-Material Consequentialist variables	.34	8668.34
5. Aggregate Model	.37	8578.18

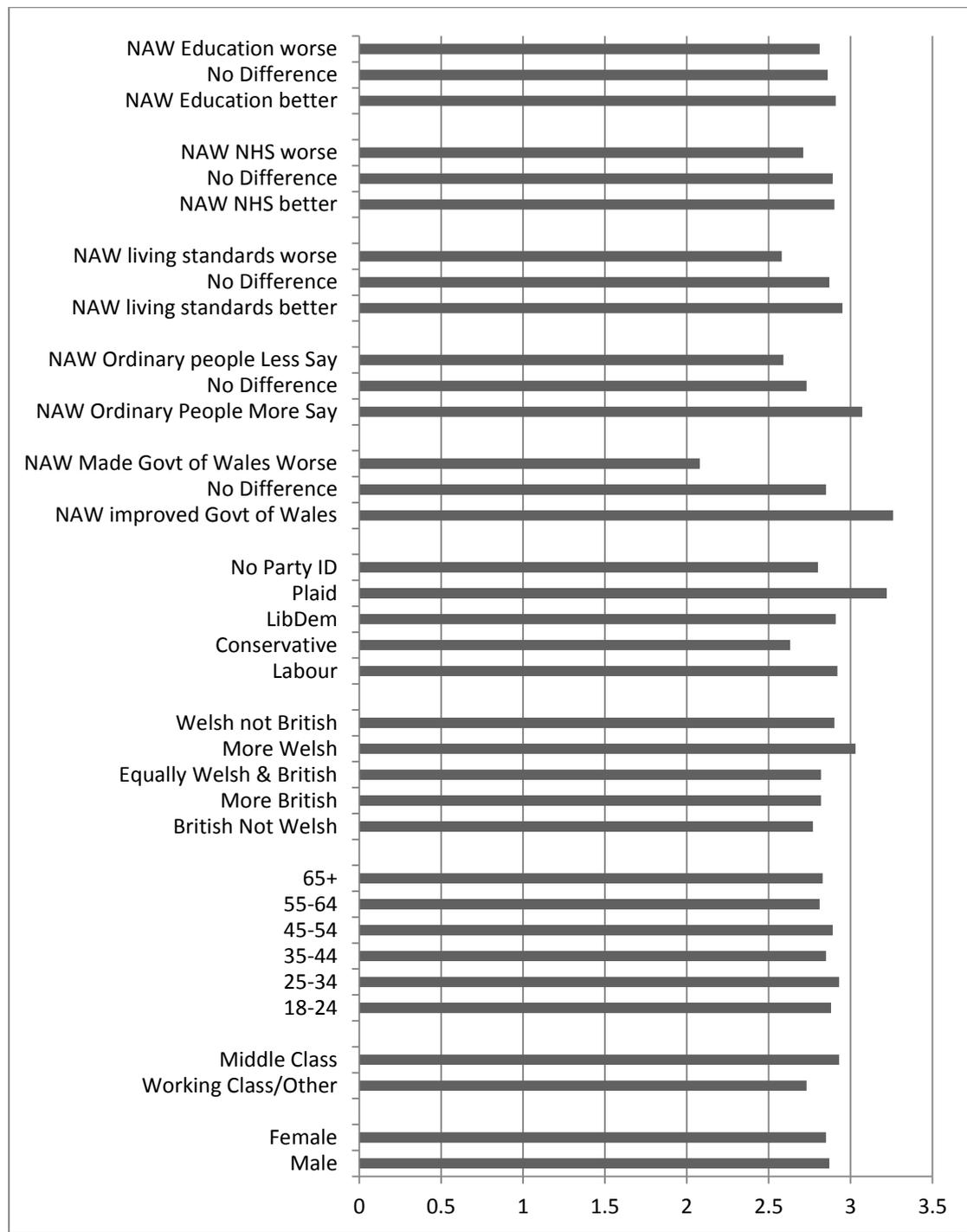
Smaller AIC figures indicate superior model performance.

Table 6: OLS Results for Aggregate Model of NAW Institutional Support, 2011

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (Robust Standard Error)</i>
Female	.01 (.05)
<i>Age:</i>	
18-24	-.04 (.09)
25-34	.02 (.08)
35-44	-.08 (.08)
45-54	.01 (.08)
55-64	-.03 (.07)
Middle Class	.17 (.05)***
<i>National Identity:</i>	
Welsh not British	.10 (.07)
More Welsh than British	.26 (.07)***
More British than Welsh	.01 (.09)
British not Welsh	-.07 (.06)
<i>Party Attachments:</i>	
Labour	.04 (.06)
Conservative	-.11 (.07)
LibDems	.11 (.09)
Plaid Cymru	.44 (.10)***
<i>Material Consequentialism:</i>	
NAW improved living standards	.14 (.07)
NAW worsened living standards	-.27 (.08)**
NAW improved NHS	.03 (.07)
NAW worsened NHS	-.18 (.08)*
NAW improved education	.03 (.08)
NAW worsened education	-.11 (.07)
<i>Non-Material Consequentialism:</i>	
NAW Improved how Wales Governed	.39 (.07)***
NAW Worsened how Wales Governed	-.78 (.07)***
NAW given ordinary people more say	.23 (.06)***
NAW given ordinary people less say	-.13 (.08)
(Constant)	2.57 (.09)***
N = 3029	

* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Figure 1: Average NAW Diffuse Support Levels (1-5) across Categories of Explanatory Variables



Appendix: Variables Used in Empirical Analysis

Dependent Variable:

'If the National Assembly for Wales started making lots of decisions that most people disagreed with, it might be better to do away with the National Assembly for Wales altogether'

- 1 – Strongly disagree
- 2 – Tend to Disagree
- 3 – Neither agree nor disagree / Don't Know
- 4 – Tend to Agree
- 5 – Strongly Agree

Independent Variables:

Sex: Reference category = male

Age: Reference category = 65 and older

Social Class: Reference category = working class or unclassified

National Identity: ('Which, if any, of the following best describes how you see yourself?'); reference category = Equally Scottish/Welsh and British, Other or Don't Know

Party Attachments: reference category = non-identifier or identifier with another party

Material Consequentialism: ('Do you think that having a National Assembly for Wales has...?')

- Led to an improvement in living standards in Wales
- Led to a decline in living standards in Wales
- Reference category: Neither – it has made no difference / Don't know

- Led to an improvement in NHS standards in Wales
- Led to a decline in NHS standards in Wales
- Reference category: Neither – it has made no difference / Don't know

- Led to an improvement in education standards in Wales
- Led to a decline in education standards in Wales
- Reference category: Neither – it has made no difference / Don't know

Non-Material Consequentialism:

'To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements ... Having a National Assembly has improved the way Wales is governed'

- Improved = Strongly Agree / Agree
- Worsened = Strongly Disagree / Disagree
- Reference category = Neither agree nor disagree / Don't Know

'Do you think that having a National Assembly for Wales has...?'

- Given ordinary people more say in how Wales is governed

- Given ordinary people less say in how Wales is governed
- Reference category: Neither – it has made no difference / Don't know

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