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Turnout, Participation and Legitimacy in Post-Devolution Wales

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Low levels of voter turnout in the first election to the National Assembly for Wales in May 1999 brought into question both the ability of devolution to revitalize representative democracy and the legitimacy of the Assembly itself. But drawing wider implications from turnout requires that we understand why electoral abstention was so widespread. We examine three hypotheses about voter turnout in 1999: that non-participation simply reflected a general apathy towards politics; that it was based on a specific apathy towards the new Assembly; or that low voter turnout reflected antipathy towards an unwanted political institution. We find support for the first two hypotheses, but little evidence for the third. Devolution has failed to engage the interest and support of many in Wales, but low turnout has not been prompted by fundamental antagonism to the devolved institution among the Welsh electorate.

Low, and often declining, levels of voter turnout in elections are commonly – although not universally – considered a significant problem facing many Western democracies. Low voter turnout is often regarded as, at least in part, symptomatic of public alienation from, and declining trust in, politicians and the political system: attitudes that might, in turn, prompt greater public willingness to bypass formal mechanisms of representation in the expression of grievances.[1] Lower turnout also has the direct consequence of rendering political institutions less 'representative' of the population, and in turn might incline policy makers to neglect the interests of social groups among whom electoral participation is lowest. Viewed in a different way, of course, things may not be all bad: low turnout, it is suggested, can also indicate the absence of stark social and political cleavages within a society.[2] However, large-scale voter abstention cannot but be considered particularly problematic when it appears to undermine the very reasons for the existence of those political institutions that are being elected.

The latter has clearly been the case for the National Assembly for Wales (NAW), created as part of the devolution programme of the Labour government in the United Kingdom. Of all aspects in the government's agenda for constitutional change, devolution carries the greatest potential implications for the future of the British state. Critics have suggested – and some nationalists in Scotland and Wales have hoped – that devolution puts the United Kingdom on a 'slippery slope' towards eventual dissolution. In marked contrast, devolution's defenders argue that the process will safeguard the long-term integrity of the British state. By bringing government 'closer to the people' than was hitherto the case, it is suggested that devolution can undercut separatist arguments and, it is further argued,

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[1] For a discussion of turnout in the 2001 British general election that touches on some of these themes, see Harold Clarke, David Sanders, Marianne Stewart and Paul Whiteley, 'Britain (Not) at the Polls, 2001' (Working Paper, available at: www.essex.ac.uk/bes/Papers/pollsrev.pdf); for an excellent recent comparative account of trends in voter turnout and potential explanations, see André Blais, *To Vote or Not to Vote?* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000).

[2] This argument was often made in the wake of the 2001 British general election, when the only part of the United Kingdom in which voter turnout increased was Northern Ireland.

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generate a renewed sense of engagement and participation in the political process in the territories where it is established.

Such arguments from both sides, however, tend to make a common assumption: that the devolved institutions will not merely exist as another layer of government, but will engage the interest and support of citizens for their role as representative bodies within the emerging Scottish and Welsh political (sub)-systems. That the latter will occur remains particularly questionable in the case of Wales. Unlike in Scotland, the establishment of the National Assembly for Wales (NAW) did not reflect a clear 'settled will' of the populace, but substantial proportions of agreement, disagreement and apathy. The creation of the assembly was supported by barely half (50.3 per cent) of those voting in a low turnout referendum. The first Assembly election, in May 1999, saw turnout (at 45.9 per cent), at even lower levels than in the referendum. Such figures were particularly striking given that Wales has traditionally experienced higher turnouts than the average in Britain as a whole,[3] and that the Assembly poll was conducted using a proportional voting system (additional-member) usually associated with high electoral participation. As one set of commentators observed, 'the fact that Welsh turnout in the elections was lower than turnout in the previous round of local elections … was certainly an inauspicious start for the Assembly'.[4] By appearing to have so comprehensively failed to engage the interest and support of the Welsh people, the legitimacy of the devolved National Assembly was called into question.

However, while it is difficult to place a *positive* interpretation on the low turnout experienced in the NAW poll, the broader consequences that might be inferred for the future of the devolution project depend heavily on the reasons to which the high levels of electoral non-participation are ascribed. In the specific context of Wales in 1999, several plausible explanations for the low turnout exist, carrying with them rather different implications for devolution and the Assembly.

—One explanation is that the low turnout in the 1999 NAW election reflected, at least in part, a much wider sense of apathy towards the political process within Britain. Participation rates at other elections in recent years have been declining, and some have diagnosed a 'turnout time-bomb' – one that appeared to detonate on 7 June 2001 with the historically low participation rate in the British general election.[5] On this interpretation, the Assembly election was, for the most part, simply the victim of a much wider public apathy towards the political process.

—A second hypothesis locates the explanation for low turnout more specifically in the constitutional arrangements in the Government of Wales Act (1998): specifically the limited powers that the Assembly was granted compared to the Scottish Parliament. This is a classic 'second-order' explanation: in accordance with theories of second-order elections, where less is at stake, fewer people bother to vote.[6] If supported, this

[3] Between 1945 and 2001 turnout in Wales was on average 2.8 per cent higher than turnout across the United Kingdom.

[4] Jonathan Bradbury, David Denver and Iain MacAllister, 'The State of Two Nations: An Analysis of Voting in the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly Elections 1999', *Representation*, 37 (2000), 5–18, p. 9.

[5] See, for example, Patrick Dunleavy, Evidence to the House of Commons Select Committee on Public Administration, 15 March 2000.

[6] On 'second order' elections, see Karlheinz Reif and Hermann Schmitt, 'Nine Second Order Elections: A Conceptual Framework for the analysis of European Election Results', *European Journal of Political Research*, 8 (1980), 3–44; Cees van der Eijk and Mark Franklin, eds, *Choosing Europe? The European Electorate and National Politics in the Face of Union* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996).

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hypothesis would suggest that only if the Assembly receives greater powers or otherwise demonstrates its importance would more people become engaged by it.

—A third view, however, and potentially the most serious for the devolution project, is that non-participation reflected a fundamental hostility to devolution on the part of many electors. A significant proportion of people in Wales never wanted the Assembly, and abstention might therefore be seen as a conscious expression of alienation from, and hostility towards, an unwanted institution. This interpretation would suggest that the low turnout in May 1999 indicated the very existence of the Assembly to be, among much of the population, essentially contested rather than essentially ignored. Or in other words, low turnout is an indicator of antipathy rather than simply apathy.

This article, therefore, examines voter participation in the 1999 NAW election and considers the implications low turnout has for the legitimacy of devolution in Wales. After reviewing extant literature on electoral participation and representative democracy, we explain how considerations of public participation and involvement were central to the ambitions of the devolution project. Then, drawing on data from the Welsh Assembly Election Survey (WAES),[7] we examine the extent to which the three hypotheses outlined above can account for the low turnout experienced in May 1999. The implications of our findings, both for the future of the Welsh National Assembly, and for the broader process of devolution and constitutional change in Britain, are then addressed in the conclusion.

TURNOUT, PARTICIPATION AND LEGITIMACY

Why Turnout Matters

Election turnout is not a self-evidently important marker of the legitimacy of political institutions. There are political systems where low turnouts persist without the legitimacy of core institutions or the system as a whole being fundamentally challenged. Some critics cast aspersions on the political system of the United States because of persistently low election turnouts, but few seriously doubt that the system enjoys widespread domestic legitimacy.[8] In Britain, local government has survived many years of low turnouts in local council elections without the basic legitimacy of local government itself being questioned. In practice, therefore, there is no simple correspondence between turnout and legitimacy; nor is there agreement about the relationship between them at the level of theory. Rather there are fundamental differences between theorists about the relative importance and desirability of the various possible forms of political participation in a democratic system, including voting. This in turn reflects different attitudes to the relationship between participation and legitimacy. While it is beyond the purview of this article to explore these theoretical disputes in detail, it is useful to clarify briefly some of the main lines of argument.

[7] The 1999 Welsh Assembly Election Survey was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC Grant No. R000 23 8070). It was conducted by the Institute of Welsh Politics at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, in collaboration with the Centre for Research into Elections and Social Trends. The fieldwork for the Survey was undertaken by the National Centre for Social Research. The Survey was co-directed by Richard Wyn Jones and Anthony Heath.

[8] For an interesting recent exchange on this issue, see Daniel Lazare, 'America the Undemocratic', *New Left Review*, 232 (1998), 3–40; Michael Lind, 'Why There Will Be No Revolution in the US: A Reply to Daniel Lazare', *New Left Review*, 233 (1999), 97–117; and Daniel Lazare, 'The Grand Illusion of Democratic Nationalism: A Reply to Michael Lind', *New Left Review*, 235 (1999), 135–52.

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In her classic study, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, Carole Pateman identified two broad attitudes towards participation in contemporary democratic theory – differentiating between the proponents of *representative government*, on the one hand, and the champions of *participatory democracy*, on the other.[9] The former advocate a rather limited notion of popular participation. This position is upheld by a diverse range of thinkers motivated by very different concerns – from fear of the expropriation of property to first-hand experience of the power of fascist demagoguery – and embraces classical liberal theorists, such as Jeremy Bentham and James Mill, post-war political scientists like Joseph Schumpeter and Robert Dahl, and left-leaning critical theorists such as Otto Kirchheimer and Franz Neumann.[10] Whatever their other differences, all view participation in relatively narrow, instrumentalist terms, and argue that while some participation is vital, its role and scope must be strictly limited. From this perspective, the function of public participation in the political system is a negative one. The ballot box and the resulting sanction of the possible loss of office, serve as the ultimate guarantor of public interests against any infringement by the arbitrary decisions of elected leaders. As such, theorists of representative government see no particular intrinsic merit in securing high turnouts at elections. All that is necessary is for turnout to reach 'the minimum necessary to keep the democratic method (electoral machinery) working'.[11] The success or otherwise of the system itself is judged on policy outputs rather than popular inputs via participation. Legitimacy is similarly closely linked with the stability and efficacy of the system.

In stark contrast, advocates of participatory democracy view ensuring the widest possible participation as an end in itself, and regard a system in which participation is limited to voting every few years as a rather hollow version of democracy. John Stuart Mill, for example, was keen to underline what he regarded as the deep limitations of the model of participation characteristic of modern liberal democracies: 'A political act, to be done only once in a few years, and for which nothing in the daily habits of the citizen has prepared him, leaves his intellect and his moral dispositions very much as it found him'.[12] This comment serves to underline a key aspect of the participatory democracy credo. For its advocates, a system based on broad democratic participation is not simply the most effective way of producing good government, although this is certainly claimed as one of its benefits. Rather, it is the means by which human capacities – our 'intellect' and 'moral dispositions' – can be developed. Participation plays a pedagogic role above and beyond any benefits accruing from efficacious decision making.

Another key point of contention is the type of elections found in contemporary liberal democracies. In the past, many of the more radical advocates of participatory democracy have tended to be hostile towards 'bourgeois democracy'. At best, their attitude has been one of indifference. Other advocates of participatory democracy, especially contemporary theorists, have, however, adopted a very different view. For them, the election of members to a parliament or constituent assembly is viewed as a necessary – although not sufficient – condition for a properly democratic society. While in their view there is more to democracy than simply elections, and more to participation than voting, these are the cornerstones of democratic society. So while democratic participation may well need to

[9] See Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

[10] On the first two groups, see Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*; for the latter see William E. Scheuerman, *Between the Norm and the Exception: The Frankfurt School and the Rule of Law* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994).

[11] Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, p. 14.

[12] Cited in Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, p. 30.

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be deepened, it is also important that it should be as wide as possible. In this context, ensuring high election turnout is viewed as crucial. High turnout is associated with a healthy political system – a system that is not only an effective deliverer for the public good but also enjoys a high degree of public legitimacy.

Devolution as an Exercise in Participatory Democracy

Whatever precise position is taken on the broader theoretical question of the importance of voter participation to representative democracy, the issue assumes particular importance in the context of contemporary Wales. Relatively low turnout strikes at the very heart of the official justifications given to sell devolution to the Welsh public. The rhetoric of participatory democracy (in a fairly modern and sophisticated guise) accompanied the establishment of the Assembly, as devolution was portrayed by the Labour party as a means by which the government of Wales would be made more 'accountable' and 'inclusive'. The participative goals of the devolution programme are clear in Ron Davies's *post hoc* account, *Devolution: A Process not an Event*. He argues, for example, that,

> It is incumbent on the members of the Assembly … to reach beyond the political classes and extend the sense of ownership to the many who currently feel excluded or alienated for the political process … . The support and involvement of the public at large is vital to the achievement of a new inclusive society in Wales.[13]

Similarly, Peter Hain's Tribune pamphlet, *A Welsh Third Way?*, explicitly linked devolution to the development of 'participatory democracy'.[14] While 'nationalist' concerns with giving institutional expression to national identity was certainly a sub-text to much of Labour's pro-devolution rhetoric, the stress was more on ensuring better governance through creating structures that are more inclusive, more transparent and more accessible – in a word, more participative.

This concern with participation has not been merely a rhetorical trope. The desire to facilitate public participation and involvement was a key influence in designing the structures and practices of the National Assembly.[15] Efforts were made, for instance, by three of the four main political parties in Wales to encourage individuals from backgrounds not well represented in Westminster to put themselves forward as candidates for election.[16] To support this effort, the Assembly's procedures embrace 'family-friendly' working hours, while recesses are timed to coincide with school holidays. Elsewhere, the Assembly's complex committee structure is designed, in part at least, to give ordinary Assembly Members greater input into policy making than do backbench MPs at Westminster. But the committee structure is also important in that its openness and transparency is intended to allow civil society groupings to be far more intimately involved in the policy-making process than is usually the case at the Westminster level. And the use of a more proportional electoral system for Assembly elections than the traditional

[13] Ron Davies, *Devolution: A Process Not an Event* (Cardiff: Institute of Welsh Affairs, 1999), p. 15.

[14] Peter Hain, *A Welsh Third Way?* (London: Tribune Publication, 1999) *passim*, but especially pp. 14–15.

[15] See National Assembly Advisory Group, *National Assembly for Wales: Have Your Say in How It Will Work* (Consultation Paper), (Cardiff: Welsh Office, 1998); I. B. Rees, 'Cynulliad Cenedlaethol: "Plus ça change" ynteu Cychwyn Proses', *Contemporary Wales*, 12 (1999), 107–29.

[16] See Jonathan Bradbury, David Denver, James Mitchell and Lynn Bennie, 'Devolution and Party Change: Candidate Selection for the 1999 Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly Elections', *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 6 (2000), 51–72.

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first-past-the-post method was also intended to encourage public participation in terms of voter turnout by reducing the number of 'wasted' votes.

Of course it would be naïve to view a desire for a more participative political system as the sole driver of the institutional arrangements made in Wales. Self-interest and short-term political expediency were clearly present as well. For example, no intellectually satisfactory explanation has ever been advanced to justify Wales being granted a less proportional electoral system than that introduced in Scotland, although this is readily explicable in terms of political expediency. More fundamentally, the very constitutional underpinnings of the National Assembly militate against the kind of participative polity desired by the champions of devolution.[17] The chronic lack of clarity in the division of powers between the National Assembly and Westminster/Whitehall, and the Assembly's ambiguous status as a 'body corporate', make it extremely difficult for citizens to know who is responsible for what, and who, therefore, to hold accountable.

Be that as it may, it is clear that on the basis of the arguments used to justify its establishment, turnout in Assembly elections is of vital significance. For whatever the results of the various measures designed to attract candidates and members from 'non-traditional' backgrounds, or of attempts to draw various civil society groups, or indeed business, into the work of the Assembly, election turnout remains the starting point for any assessment of the National Assembly's success as a body encouraging political participation in Wales. In a context in which participation is particularly prized, the voting booth is the clearest point of interaction between the Assembly and the citizen *qua* citizen. The act of voting is inevitably, therefore, interpreted as an act that legitimizes the institution itself, whether the voter is conscious of this or not; conversely, non-voting is perceived as its denial.

UNDERSTANDING ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION: THREE HYPOTHESES

We explore three principal hypotheses concerning participation levels in the 1999 NAW election. These are:

(1) That the low turnout experienced was primarily a reflection of a broader public apathy, and possible disillusion, with the political process in Britain;
(2) That the low turnout experienced was principally a function of widespread public apathy towards an Assembly seen as relatively powerless; and
(3) That the low turnout experienced was the result of widespread public antipathy towards the National Assembly.[18]

The purpose of this section is to explain why each of these is a plausible explanatory hypothesis for participation rates in the NAW election, to outline the observable implications we could expect to be associated with each hypothesis, and indicate the measures we specify in seeking to test our hypotheses.

[17] For the most penetrating account of the constitutional settlement, see Richard Rawlings, 'New Model Wales', *Journal of Law and Society*, 25 (1998) 461–509.

[18] Our three hypotheses are not, of course, a comprehensive set of potential explanations for voter turnout at the NAW election. Indeed, some of our independent variables could be seen as linked not only to the hypotheses specified but also to other common explanations of electoral participation – such as 'rationalist' and 'habitual' explanations. However, the purpose of the analysis here is not a comprehensive explanation of turnout *per se*, but rather to assess the implications of turnout for the legitimacy of devolution in Wales.

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Apathy Towards or Disillusion With Politics

It is quite plausible to suggest that the low turnout experienced in the 1999 NAW election said little about how voters in Wales felt about the Assembly in particular. Low levels of public participation may well have been principally a function of more general feelings of apathy about or disillusion with, representative politics in Britain. Such factors have been highlighted as potential causes of non-voting in recent British general elections,[19] and this hypothesis assumes a high degree of plausibility given the low and falling electoral turnouts experienced across Britain in recent years. Examining Table 1, turnout in the National Assembly election appears part of a wider pattern indicating that many voters in Britain are sufficiently apathetic about the political process not to bother participating.

TABLE 1 *Turnout Rates in Recent Elections in the United Kingdom*

Election	Turnout
Scottish Parliament elections, 1999	59%
National Assembly for Wales elections, 1999	46%
Welsh Unitary Authority elections, 1999	50%
European Elections, Wales, 1999	28%
European Elections, United Kingdom, 1999	24%
Referendum, London Mayor, 1999	34%
London mayor election, 2000	35%
UK general election, 2001	59%

That turnout levels in the 2001 British general election were, though at historically low levels, nonetheless higher than at the NAW election, indicates that this hypothesis is unlikely to be the sole explanation of turnout levels in 1999; however, it may contribute much of the explanation. Moreover, specific to Wales in 1999 was a further reason for many voters, and particularly Labour supporters, to be disenchanted with politics, that had little to do with the Assembly *per se*. This was the acrimonious party leadership battle between Alun Michael and Rhodri Morgan, with Michael widely seen as having been foisted on the Welsh Labour party against the will of most party activists by the Labour leadership in London. Several Labour-identifying interviewees volunteered this to WAES as a reason for not voting.[20]

This hypothesis would, if supported, probably carry the least negative implications for devolution in Wales, as it locates the principal explanation for voter apathy in the Assembly election with problems relating to the whole of Britain or the short-term problems of the Labour party. On this interpretation, devolution in Wales may yet have done little to revitalize public support for the political process, but the broader problem appears as one reaching well beyond the borders of Wales. However, drawing such conclusions requires

[19] Anthony Heath and Bridget Taylor, 'New Sources of Abstention?' in Geoffrey Evans and Pippa Norris, eds, *Critical Elections: British Parties and Voters in Long-Term Perspective* (London: Sage, 1999); Charles Pattie and Ron Johnston, 'Voter Turnout at the British General Election of 1992: Rational Choice, Social Standing or Political Efficacy?' *European Journal of Political Research*, 33 (1998) 263–83; Charles Pattie and Ron Johnston, 'A Low Turnout Landslide: Abstention at the British General Election of 1997', *Political Studies*, 49 (2001), 286–305.

[20] Responses received from Labour identifiers to an open-ended question concerning reasons for not voting included sentiments like: 'I didn't feel anybody represented my socialistic Labour feelings', and 'Don't like Alun Michael'.

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that we find support for at least some observable implications of this hypothesis. The clearest implication of the hypothesis is that participation in the NAW poll should be predicted by *general* measures of interest in politics and political efficacy, i.e. measures that relate to politics in Britain as a whole rather than to Wales and the Assembly. The more disinterested or disillusioned a voter in general terms, the less likely they should be to vote. To test this hypothesis we specify two sets of measures that tap into voters' *general* levels of political efficacy, but that are unrelated to devolution and the Assembly. The first reports (dis)agreement with a statement claiming that 'It doesn't really matter which party is in power, in the end things go on much the same'; the second taps directly into voters' perceptions of the importance of the outcome of British general elections.[21]

A Second-Order Election

The low turnout experienced in the NAW election may have been a partial reflection of broader trends across Britain. However, as we have seen above, turnout in May 1999 was still lower than for the British general election two years later. The explanation for this, and for the decision of many individual voters not to participate in the Assembly poll, may well be that large numbers of voters saw little at stake in the NAW election, and that as of May 1999 the establishment of the Assembly had done little to engage public interest. In short, the NAW election may well have been a 'second-order' election for many voters.[22]

In contrast to the previous hypothesis, therefore, this hypothesis locates the 'blame' for the low turnout in May 1999 with factors specific to Wales, i.e. widespread voter non-participation is seen as reflecting an indifference to devolution and the Assembly, rather than wider public views on the political process in general. Thus, if supported, this hypothesis would carry more problematic implications for the current devolution settlement in Wales. If nothing else, confirming this hypothesis would raise doubts about the long-term viability of the current devolution settlement: to succeed in revitalizing representative democracy in Wales, devolution may have to go further than the current 'half-way house' position of an elected Assembly with only limited powers.

What evidence would support this hypothesis? A first implication is that non-participation in the Assembly poll should be predicted by the most obvious indicator of lack of interest in devolution – non-participation in the referendum held in September 1997. The initial evidence about this is supportive: of those who did not, or could not, vote in the referendum, 72.0 per cent reported non-participation in 1999. But to investigate this hypothesis more fully, we must consider other indicators that indicate interest in, and the importance accorded to, devolution and the National Assembly. In particular, we should

[21] Perceptions on the importance of British general elections were measured directly via a question which asked respondents whether they thought it 'Makes a difference who wins elections to the House of Commons'. Responses were coded on a five-point scale running from 'Strongly agree', through 'Agree, 'Neither agree nor disagree', 'Disagree' and 'Strongly disagree'. In the analysis reported in Tables 3 and 4, the latter four response categories are entered as a series of dummy variables, coded '1' if a respondent gave this response, '0' otherwise.

[22] For further examination of the applicability of 'second-order' approaches to the NAW election, focusing on the dynamics of party choice among those who did vote, see Dafydd Trystan, Richard Wyn Jones and Roger Scully, 'Explaining the Quiet Earthquake: Voting Behaviour in the First Election to the National Assembly for Wales', *Electoral Studies*, 22 (2003), 635–50; for an investigation of the applicability of second order theory to the understanding of the 1997 devolution referendums in Wales and Scotland, see Anthony Heath and Bridget Taylor, 'Were the Welsh and Scottish Referendums Second-Order Elections?' in Bridget Taylor and Katarina Thomson, eds, *Scotland and Wales: Nations Again?* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), pp. 149–68.

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expect voting turnout to correlate with indicators of interest in Welsh politics, and to stand in a positive relationship with perceptions of the importance of the Assembly election.

Unfortunately, direct measures of interest in Welsh politics are not available in our data. However, as an indicator of potential awareness of and interest in news coverage of Welsh politics we have included a dummy variable for whether or not respondents' viewed programmes transmitted by BBC Wales.[23] We also include, in one version of our model, scores gauged from a four-item quiz on political knowledge related to the National Assembly.[24] In addition, and in line with the discussion above, we include a dummy variable for whether an individual participated in the 1997 devolution referendum (coded '1' for those who participated, '0' for those who did not). To measure voters' perceived importance of the Assembly, we measure voters' perceptions of the importance of the result of NAW elections.[25]

Antipathy to Devolution

Although the low turnout experienced in the NAW election may plausibly be attributed to the factors identified by our first two hypotheses, there remains a third possibility that demands investigation. This is that, for significant numbers of people, non-participation in the May 1999 poll did not reflect disillusion with politics in general, or a lack of interest in the National Assembly, but was a gesture indicating hostility to the establishment of the devolved institution. In the immediate aftermath of the election, the then leader of the Welsh Conservative party sought to lend credence to this interpretation of events: 'A lot of Conservative voters who didn't want devolution in the first place made the positive decision not to vote. This was their second opportunity to demonstrate their dissatisfaction with the Assembly' (Rod Richards).[26] Though Richards's statement might be viewed as a rather crude attempt to excuse the Tories' poor performance in the NAW poll, the WAES's open-ended question responses revealed some supporting evidence for this hypothesis from non-voters:

'I didn't agree with the Assembly and so I refused to vote.' (Labour identifier)

'Didn't agree with the Assembly in the first place. A con from start to finish.' (Labour identifier)

'Enough government in London. We do not need another.' (Conservative identifier)

[23] A very substantial proportion of the Welsh population live in so-called 'cross-over' areas (generally near the border with England), where they can choose to receive terrestrial television output from either Welsh or English transmitters. Between 25 per cent and 30 per cent of respondents consistently report receiving their television output from transmitters outside Wales and thus do not watch Welsh regional programmes that cover Welsh politics in some detail; there is, of course, minimal coverage of Welsh politics in news programmes broadcast to the United Kingdom as a whole.

[24] The political knowledge scores run from 0 to 4, and comprise an additive index based on respondents' answers to questions concerning the tax, budget and defence powers (or lack thereof) of the National Assembly, and the voting system employed for the Assembly elections. Respondents score '1' for each correct answer, '0' otherwise. Unfortunately, the knowledge quiz was only administered to part of the WAES sample (those interviewed face-to-face, as opposed to those interviewed by telephone), and multivariate analysis that includes this variable therefore loses large numbers of cases. Consequently, we report (binomial and multinomial) logit analyses both with and without this variable.

[25] Perceptions on the importance of NAW elections were measured directly via a question which paralleled that on British general elections, i.e. respondents were asked whether they thought it 'Makes a difference who wins elections to the National Assembly for Wales'. The response categories, and specification of variables in the models reported, are identical to that for the British general elections question (see fn. 21).

[26] *Western Mail*, 8 May 1999, p. 5.

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This hypothesis, if supported, would carry the most serious implications for the future of devolution. Wales has long been known for its divisions, with cleavages of region, language and identity occupying a significant place in the Welsh landscape. The antipathy hypothesis suggests that, far from uniting Wales behind new, national-level political institutions, devolution may have sharpened previous divisions, or at least given them a new focus. English-speakers and those not identifying themselves primarily as 'Welsh' (compared to 'British', 'English' or some other label), were significantly less likely to support the establishment of the Assembly in the 1997 referendum:[27] it could well be that such people felt, quite simply, that the new institution was 'not for them', and thus chose not to participate in the elections. In this case, low voter turnout would indicate that devolution remains of questionable legitimacy for much of the Welsh population.

The most immediate implication of this hypothesis, in line with Rod Richards's suggestion, is that electoral abstention in 1999 should be positively correlated with opposition to devolution in the 1997 referendum. In fact, this is not immediately supported by the evidence: as Table 2 demonstrates, self-reported 'No' voters in the referendum were not much less likely to vote in the Assembly elections than were supporters of devolution in the 1997 plebiscite.

TABLE 2 *Turnout in Wales: 1997 Referendum and 1999 Assembly Election*

	Voted 1999 (%)	Didn't vote 1999 (%)	*N*
Did not vote/Not eligible 1997	34.6	65.4	439
Voted 'Yes' 1997	74.0	26.0	453
Voted 'No' 1997	68.4	31.6	291

Source: WAES, 1999.

Nonetheless, while this initial evidence may not be favourable, the substantive importance of this hypothesis renders it worthy of further investigation. Thus, and in line with the discussion above, the following analysis will consider whether non-voting in 1999 was associated with opposition to devolution. Accordingly, we specify a dummy variable for respondents' referendum vote (coded '1' for those who report having voted 'No', '0' otherwise), and a set of dummy variables for respondents' constitutional preference (measured on a four-point scale running from independence to remaining as part of the United Kingdom without devolved institutions). As a direct test of the interpretation put forward by Rod Richards (which would predict Conservative identifiers being disproportionately likely to abstain from voting in the NAW election),[28] we also examine the relationship between turnout and party identification by including a set of dummy variables for party identification (the comparison category being those without an identification with any of the major parties). Finally, we include variables relating to central cleavages in contemporary Welsh society – place of birth (a dummy variable coded '1' for Wales, '0' for elsewhere), language (coded '1' for a Welsh-speaker, '0' otherwise), and national

[27] See Richard Wyn Jones and Dafydd Trystan, 'The 1997 Welsh Referendum Vote', in Taylor and Thomson, eds, *Scotland and Wales*, pp. 65–93.

[28] As explained earlier, Labour identifiers might have had a specific reason for not voting in the context of the 1999 NAW election, namely disillusion engendered by the Michael/Morgan leadership contest.

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identity (measured using dummies based on the five-point 'Moreno' scale)[29] – to assess whether such traditional divisions in Welsh society are also associated with electoral participation.

SPECIFYING OUR MODEL

In this section of the article we explain how we specify the model used to test our three hypotheses. Before identifying additional explanatory variables deployed in our analysis, we clarify exactly what they are seeking to explain.

The Dependent Variable

Given the concern of this study with understanding the reasons for the low turnout experienced in the 1999 NAW election, the specification of a dependent variable for multivariate analysis would appear to be simple: did an individual vote or not? This dichotomy would then imply the use of particular statistical techniques (such as logistic regression). However, in the context of our enquiry, a more complex form of analysis is warranted. A turnout level of 46 per cent in the NAW poll was regarded as low because it fell so far below expectations generated by previous Westminster elections (although it was, of course, not so far behind the turnout for the Westminster election in 2001). Therefore, in addition to a simple distinction between those who voted in May 1999 and those who did not, an important comparison is between their behaviour at the NAW poll and their behaviour in a Westminster contest. We therefore develop our analysis in two stages, based on alternative specifications of the dependent variable:

—The first stage involves specification of a logistic regression model, with the dependent variable coded as voted/did not vote in the NAW election;
—In a second stage, we distinguish between three types of voter: those who report having voted in 1999 and in 1997 ('Voters'); those who report having voted on neither occasion ('Non-voters'); and those who indicate voting in 1997, but did not participate in 1999 ('NAW abstainers', the category of greatest interest).[30] This analysis is conducted by means of multinomial logistic regression.

Additional Independent Variables

In addition to variables associated directly with our three hypotheses, we include a number of variables in our multivariate analysis that tap into factors identified as important by previous studies of electoral turnout.[31] Thus, we include a variable measuring the age (in

[29] The Moreno scale was developed initially in the Spanish context and was subsequently applied in Scotland by Luis Moreno – see Luis Moreno, 'Scotland and Catalonia: The Path to Home Rule', in David McCrone and Alice Brown, eds, *The Scottish Government Yearbook* (Edinburgh: Unit for the Study of Government in Scotland, 1988), pp. 166–81. Moreno's scale is a particularly appropriate method of measuring national identity in contexts where there are significant degrees of overlap between competing identities.

[30] The analysis here thus excludes a small number of voters ($N = 44$) who report having voted in the NAW election but not doing so for the previous Westminster poll. The use of data on how voters recall behaving two years prior to the NAW election has certain inherent problems. However, there are good reasons for believing that these problems are not excessive for our current purposes. Voter turnout in May 1997 is over-reported, but by no greater degree than it is for May 1999.

[31] There is a vast empirical literature examining factors shaping electoral turnout. For good general discussions, see, in the American context, Steven J. Rosenstone and John Mark Hansen, *Mobilization, Participation and Democracy in America* (New York: Macmillan, 1993); in European Parliament elections, Jean Blondel, Richard Sinnott and Palle Svensson, *People and Parliament in the European Union: Participation, Democracy and Legitimacy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), and in British general elections, Pattie and Johnston 'Voter Turnout' and 'A Low Turnout Landslide', and Heath and Taylor, 'New Sources of Abstention'.

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TABLE 3 *Logit Estimates (Standard Errors) for Voting/Non-Voting in National Assembly Election*

	Model 1	*Model 2*	*Model 3*
Age	0.03 (0.00)**	0.03 (0.01)**	0.04 (0.01)**
Gender (female)	− 0.03 (0.13)	− 0.08 (0.15)	0.02 (0.29)
Social class			
Salariat	0.33 (0.22)	0.09 (0.25)	0.14 (0.53)
Routine non-manual	0.31 (0.22)	0.23 (0.25)	0.57 (0.50)
Petty bourgeoisie	0.18 (0.27)	− 0.07 (0.30)	0.61 (0.56)
Foremen etc.	0.23 (0.29)	0.39 (0.34)	0.84 (0.69)
Working class	− 0.18 (0.21)	− 0.23 (0.23)	0.06 (0.49)
Highest educational attainment			
University level	0.42 (0.18)*	0.16 (0.21)	0.14 (0.44)
A-level (or equivalent)	0.41 (0.21)	0.20 (0.24)	− 0.02 (0.51)
Lower school	0.18 (0.17)	0.13 (0.20)	0.42 (0.37)
Doesn't matter which party is in power			
Agree		− 0.14 (0.19)	0.82 (0.45)
Neither agree nor disagree		− 0.18 (0.30)	0.72 (0.63)
Disagree		− 0.09 (0.23)	0.89 (0.51)
Strongly disagree		0.69 (0.29)*	2.07 (0.83)*
Makes a difference who wins UK election			
Agree		0.14 (0.19)	− 0.22 (0.36)
Neither agree nor disagree		0.14 (0.24)	0.10 (0.48)
Disagree		0.03 (0.23)	− 0.12 (0.45)
Strongly disagree		− 0.89 (0.36)*	− 1.85 (1.05)
Voted in 1997 Referendum		1.00 (0.17)**	1.18 (0.31)**
Viewer of BBC Wales		0.52 (0.16)**	1.37 (0.33)**
Knowledge about Assembly			0.40 (0.14)**
Makes a difference who wins NAW election			
Agree		− 0.03 (0.21)	− 0.09 (0.40)
Neither agree nor disagree		− 0.71 (0.22)**	− 1.15 (0.44)**
Disagree		− 1.00 (0.22)**	− 1.09 (0.46)*
Strongly disagree		− 0.87 (0.31)**	− 0.97 (0.77)

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Voted 'No' in 1997 Referendum		−0.10 (0.20)	0.57 (0.39)
Born in Wales		−0.11 (0.20)	−0.04 (0.39)
Party identification			
Conservative		0.09 (0.26)	−0.27 (0.53)
Labour		−0.16 (0.22)	−0.37 (0.46)
Lib. Dem.		0.94 (0.32)**	0.21 (0.66)
Plaid Cymru		0.88 (0.28)**	0.38 (0.56)
Welsh Speaking			
Fluent		0.01 (0.24)	0.20 (0.46)
Non-fluent		0.09 (0.18)	0.64 (0.40)
National Identity			
More British than Welsh		−0.20 (0.29)	−0.38 (0.53)
Equally British and Welsh		0.10 (0.23)	0.14 (0.46)
More Welsh than British		−0.05 (0.27)	−0.69 (0.52)
Welsh, not British		0.45 (0.29)	0.14 (0.54)
Constitutional preference (base = 'No Assembly')			
Assembly with limited powers		0.15 (0.18)	1.03 (0.40)**
Parliament		0.44 (0.20)*	1.01 (0.40)*
Independence		−0.19 (0.28)	0.48 (0.57)
Constant	−1.53 (0.28)	−2.19 (0.46)	−5.36 (1.09)
Initial −2 log likelihood	1,715.53	1,708.75	610.72
Model improvement	108.51	368.87	409.73
Significance	0.000	0.000	0.000
% Correctly classified	61.5	73.4	78.1
N	1,256	1,250	446

Source: WAES, 1999.

Notes: Data are weighted. Comparison categories: Social Class – Unclassified; Education – No qualifications; 'Doesn't matter which party is in power'/'Makes a difference who wins UK election'/'Makes a difference who wins NAW election' – Strongly agree; party identification – No party identification; Welsh speaking – Non-Welsh speaking; National identity – British, not Welsh; Constitutional preference – No assembly.

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

years) of WAES respondents, and another measuring gender (coded '0' for male, '1' for female). In line with innumerable previous studies, we would expect younger voters to be less likely to vote; some studies have also found gender differences in turnout levels.[32] We also specify a series of dummy variables for social class, based around the standard Goldthorpe–Heath categorization (with unclassified respondents as the comparison group), and a similar series of dummy variables for educational attainment (the comparison group being those without such qualifications). Higher social status and educational attainment levels have, of course, frequently been linked to a greater propensity to vote.[32]

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 3 reports estimates from our binomial logistic regression analysis.[34] Results are reported for three alternative models. The first model includes only our socio-demographic variables, and none of the measures specified in relation to our three hypotheses; the second includes the socio-demographic measures and all of the other variables, except for the political knowledge scores. This latter variable is included in the third model. We are thus able to see from the results not only the absolute 'fit' of the final model, and compare the relative importance of each of the variables specified in relation to our three hypotheses; we can also assess the improvement in explanatory power produced by moving beyond a simple socio-demographic explanation of voting turnout.

Results from the first model indicate that socio-demographic factors can contribute relatively little to an explanation of individual voting participation in the NAW election. Age stands in the expected positive relationship with voting; so also, although less strongly, do higher levels of educational attainment. Our social class measures are statistically insignificant, while the overall fit of the model is poor. When we enter the variables linked to our three hypotheses, however, a more interesting picture emerges. The model fit improves substantially in Model 2, and further when our measure of political knowledge is included in Model 3. Age remains a strong predictor of turnout, but once other factors have been accounted for, educational attainment is not significantly associated with electoral participation in either Models 2 or 3.

In relation to Hypothesis 1, mixed findings emerge. Labour identifiers were not significantly more or less likely than other voters to participate, despite any general disillusion occasioned by the party leadership fiasco. The more specific indicators included to test this hypothesis, however, evince some (modest) support: those most strongly

[32] On gender differences in turnout, see, for example, Pattie and Johnston, 'A Low Turnout Landslide'.

[33] Further socio-demographic variables were considered for inclusion in the model. However, variables related to housing status made a minimal explanatory contribution, and data on household income is not available in WAES. For a number of reasons we also do not include a measure of electoral marginality, which has sometimes been suggested as associated with greater turnout (see, for example, David Denver and Gordon Hands, 'Marginality and Turnout in Elections in the 1970s', *British Journal of Political Science*, 15 (1985), 381–8. WAES does not include specific measures of voter perceptions of the closeness of the electoral contest; it is, anyway, not entirely clear how voters would understand the concept of electoral marginality in relation to the mixed-member electoral system used in the NAW poll; and, furthermore, Pattie and Johnston, 'Voter Turnout at the British General Election of 1992', find that constituency-level associations between marginality and turnout are insignificant once individual voter characteristics are controlled for.

[34] The analyses in Tables 3 and 4 report unstandardized logistic regression coefficients. Although – unlike with OLS coefficients – the substantive interpretation of such estimates in terms of probability changes is notoriously difficult, the principal interest in the analysis here is in the strength and direction of relationships with the dependent variables, not in the absolute values implied by the coefficients.

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disagreeing with the proposition that 'it doesn't matter which party is in power' were more likely to participate in the NAW election (as, in Model 3, were those indicating both moderate support for and opposition to this statement); those most strongly convinced of the unimportance of British general elections were disproportionately unlikely to vote in May 1999 (although the strength of this relationship is mildly attenuated in Model 3). While it is hardly surprising that some measures of political cynicism are associated with non-voting, such factors clearly do not provide a complete explanation. Strong support is also found for Hypothesis 2. The relationship between participation in the devolution referendum and voting in the NAW poll remains highly robust. Those exposed to greater levels of information about Wales and Welsh politics were also substantially more likely to vote in May 1999, and our measure of knowledge about the Assembly also stands in a strong and positive relationship to electoral participation. Those less than convinced about the importance of the Assembly, however, were substantially more likely than others to abstain (although here, again, the relationship is mildly attenuated in Model 3).

More encouraging for supporters of devolution in Wales, however, is the limited support found for Hypothesis 3. Contrary to the suggestions quoted above, opponents of devolution in 1997, and Conservative supporters, were not significantly more likely to abstain from voting than others (there are significant positive coefficients for participation among identifiers with Plaid Cymru and the Liberal Democrats in Model 2, although these disappear once political knowledge is accounted for). Moreover, several other measures – national identity, place of birth and language – have no discernible impact on individual turnout, while constitutional preference enters only modestly into the picture, with those favouring the Assembly becoming a more powerful parliament for Wales, and in Model 3 those favouring an Assembly with limited powers (but not those favouring Welsh independence from the United Kingdom) more likely to participate. This initial test thus suggests that the antipathy hypothesis be rejected: non-voting in Wales in 1999 does not appear to have sprung from opposition to the devolved National Assembly or to greater Welsh political autonomy.[35]

As a second stage in our analysis, and in line with the discussion above, we specified a multinomial logit analysis, comparing reported behaviour at the NAW election with that at the Westminster poll of two years previously. Thus, in contrast to those who did vote in 1999, we analyse two groups of voters: those who voted neither in 1999 nor in the 1997 Westminster election ('Non-voters'), and those who voted in 1997 but abstained for the NAW poll ('NAW abstainers'). Findings from this analysis are reported in Table 4 (results are reported for two models: one for the full sample, and the second for that part of the sample for whom we have the political knowledge measure). The models attain a satisfactory fit, and the results indicate that non-voters differ substantially from NAW abstainers. Generalized non-voting is significantly associated not only with age, but also (though not at conventional significance levels) social class. By contrast, while younger members of the electorate are notably more likely also to fall into the category of NAW abstainers, social class is not a predictor in this direction.

In several other respects, related to our hypotheses, the results demonstrate that NAW abstainers differ from general non-voters. As with the logit analysis reported previously, our findings indicate some support for Hypothesis 1. Strongly disagreeing with the proposition that 'it doesn't matter which party is in power' is negatively related to

[35] As a further check on the robustness of our results, we re-ran the model for voted/not voted without the party dummies. This made minimal differences to the findings other than reducing the goodness-of-fit measure.

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TABLE 4 *Multinomial Logit Estimates (Standard Errors) for Voting in 1999 Assembly Election and 1997 Westminster Election*

	Model 1		*Model 2*	
	Non-voters†	NAW abstainers	Non-voters	NAW abstainers
Age	−0.07 (0.01)**	−0.03 (0.01)**	−0.06 (0.02)**	−0.03 (0.01)**
Gender (female)	−0.43 (0.28)	0.08 (0.16)	−0.35 (0.54)	−0.00 (0.30)
Social class				
Salariat	−0.86 (0.45)	−0.02 (0.27)	−1.27 (0.93)	0.10 (0.57)
Routine non − manual	−0.76 (0.45)	−0.10 (0.27)	−0.68 (0.89)	−0.23 (0.56)
Petty bourgeoisie	−0.42 (0.55)	0.03 (0.33)	−1.61 (1.07)	−0.34 (0.61)
Foremen etc.	−0.81 (0.59)	−0.34 (0.37)	−1.60 (1.18)	−0.31 (0.74)
Working class	−0.07 (0.40)	0.25 (0.26)	−0.70 (0.83)	0.23 (0.54)
Highest educational attainment				
University level	−0.59 (0.39)	−0.13 (0.23)	−0.58 (0.78)	−0.17 (0.46)
A-level (or equivalent)	−0.84 (0.43)	−0.07 (0.26)	−0.66 (1.03)	0.18 (0.54)
Lower school	0.09 (0.33)	−0.19 (0.22)	−0.08 (0.64)	−0.65 (0.39)
Doesn't matter which party is in power				
Agree	0.09 (0.34)	−0.02 (0.22)	−0.96 (0.74)	−0.79 (0.47)
Neither agree nor disagree	0.84 (0.48)	−0.42 (0.36)	−0.06 (0.98)	−1.10 (0.73)
Disagree	−0.01 (0.44)	−0.05 (0.25)	−1.03 (0.91)	−0.75 (0.53)
Strongly disagree	−0.64 (0.62)	−0.76 (0.31)*	−0.22 (1.52)	−1.80 (0.95)
Makes a difference who wins UK Election				
Agree	0.04 (0.37)	−0.12 (0.20)	0.71 (0.73)	0.24 (0.38)
Neither agree nor disagree	−0.45 (0.44)	0.08 (0.26)	−0.04 (0.87)	0.29 (0.53)
Disagree	−0.57 (0.43)	0.09 (0.24)	0.24 (0.80)	0.24 (0.48)
Strongly disagree	0.90 (0.61)	0.72 (0.39)	2.50 (1.48)	1.83 (1.14)
Voted in 1997 Referendum	−2.84 (0.37)**	−0.82 (0.19)**	−2.56 (0.62)**	−1.03 (0.34)**
Viewer of BBC Wales	−0.50 (0.27)	−0.41 (0.17)*	−1.52 (0.54)**	−1.10 (0.35)**
Knowledge About Assembly			−0.55 (0.24)*	−0.35 (0.16)*
Makes a difference who wins NAW Election				
Agree	−0.92 (0.47)	0.17 (0.22)	−1.19 (0.94)	0.35 (0.42)
Neither agree nor disagree	0.57 (0.41)	0.64 (0.24)**	1.61 (0.79)*	1.03 (0.47)*
Disagree	1.19 (0.42)**	1.03 (0.24)**	1.34 (0.84)	1.27 (0.49)*
Strongly disagree	0.86 (0.54)	1.04 (0.33)**	0.67 (1.22)	1.40 (0.82)

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Voted 'No' in 1997 Referendum	−0.23 (0.55)	0.22 (0.21)	−1.93 (1.34)	−0.34 (0.40)
Born in Wales	0.41 (0.39)	0.01 (0.22)	1.48 (0.79)	−0.18 (0.41)
Party identification				
Conservative	−1.14 (0.42)**	0.35 (0.30)	−0.85 (0.90)	1.02 (0.62)
Labour	−0.97 (0.35)**	0.72 (0.26)**	−0.18 (0.70)	1.12 (0.57)*
Lib. Dem.	−1.93 (0.58)**	−0.44 (0.37)	−1.42 (1.24)	0.53 (0.74)
Plaid Cymru	−1.66 (0.49)**	−0.37 (0.33)	−0.90 (0.91)	0.72 (0.69)
Welsh Speaking				
Fluent	−0.17 (0.33)	−0.09 (0.26)	1.03 (0.73)	−0.81 (0.57)
Non-fluent	0.22 (0.45)	−0.05 (0.20)	−0.16 (0.76)	−0.54 (0.44)
National Identity				
More British than Welsh	0.30 (0.55)	0.10 (0.31)	−0.75 (1.01)	0.56 (0.55)
Equally British and Welsh	−0.57 (0.43)	0.00 (0.25)	−1.87 (0.85)*	0.24 (0.51)
More Welsh than British	−0.58 (0.49)	0.11 (0.29)	−1.19 (0.89)	0.88 (0.57)
Welsh, not British	−1.08 (0.54)*	−0.15 (0.31)	−1.63 (0.95)	0.18 (0.61)
Constitutional preference (base = 'No Assembly')				
Assembly with limited powers	−0.18 (0.34)	−0.07 (0.20)	−0.51 (0.73)	−1.05 (0.42)*
Parliament	−0.28 (0.36)	−0.46 (0.22)*	−0.56 (0.71)	−1.09 (0.43)*
Independence	0.69 (0.47)	0.22 (0.31)	0.03 (0.96)	−0.45 (0.64)
Intercept	5.03 (0.82)	1.14 (0.54)	6.84 (1.73)	3.50 (1.19)
Initial –2 log likelihood	2,316.64		848.18	
Model improvement	646.20		321.68	
Significance	0.000		0.000	
Nagelkerke Pseudo R^2	0.49		0.61	
N	1,207		430	

Source: WAES, 1999.

Notes: Data are weighted. Comparison categories as Table 3.

†The comparison category for the dependent variable is those who voted in 1999; 'non-voters' are those failing to vote in both 1999 and the 1997 Westminster election; 'NAW abstainers' voted in 1997, but not 1999.

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

abstention in the NAW election. The results also show that while all party identifications have a strong negative relationship with generalized electoral non-participation (although this relationship attenuates once we allow for political knowledge levels in Model 2). Nonetheless, Labour identifiers were strongly inclined not to vote in the NAW election. Once again we also find support for Hypothesis 2. Those voting in the devolution referendum were not only unlikely to be non-voters in general, but also to have been NAW abstainers. Those exposed to news about the Assembly and Welsh politics were also substantially more likely to vote in the NAW election, as were those with greater levels of knowledge. Conversely, those believing that the Assembly election was unimportant were substantially less likely to turn out for this poll.

In contrast with the findings concerning our first two hypotheses, however, but consistent with the results from the logit analysis, there is little support for Hypothesis 3 in these findings. Voting 'No' in the 1997 referendum, and being a Conservative identifier, were not significantly associated with failing to participate in the Assembly election. Nor are our variables related to language, place of birth or national identity significant predictors of turnout in May 1999 (although exclusive Welsh identifiers are somewhat less likely to be non-voters in general). Once again, however, supporters of a Welsh parliament were less likely to have abstained in the 1999 election.

Thus, the findings of our multinomial analysis, distinguishing between those who are more general non-voters and those who failed to participate specifically in the NAW election, lead to similar conclusions to the more simple logit analyis reported previously. Socio-demographic factors other than age contribute little to explaining individual voter turnout in May 1999. There is some support for our hypothesis that general attitudes to politics explain electoral abstention, and for the idea that low turnout was prompted by the internal problems of the Wales Labour party. There is stronger support for the notion that low turnout in the NAW poll followed from specific views about, and awareness of, the new devolved institution. However, there is little in our findings to indicate support for our third hypothesis. Long-standing social and political cleavages in Wales, and previous opposition to the establishment of the chamber, had little to do with electoral turnout in May 1999.

CONCLUSION

The findings of our analysis offer some important implications for the legitimacy of devolution in Wales. They also suggest certain broader conclusions about the devolution project of the Blair government. The implications for devolved politics in Wales are moderately positive. The onset of devolution in Wales, the 1997 referendum, witnessed a mixture of dissensus and apathy among the public of Wales. The first Assembly elections showed that this apathy persisted. However, there is little in our findings to indicate the perpetuation of sharper political divisions. Those who originally opposed the Assembly being established have not continued their opposition by disproportionately refusing to participate in elections for the devolved institution, and the Assembly has not provided a new focus point for the divisions that, historically speaking, have been a major part of the Welsh political landscape. Just as the major political opponents of devolution, the Conservatives, have now reconciled themselves to making the new institutions work, so a certain degree of acceptance appears to exist among the public.

There is, however, a clear difference between acceptance and enthusiasm. Devolution might not have generated a new cleavage in Welsh politics and society, or reinforced old

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ones. But we see in Wales, as is observable elsewhere,[36] that creating new, elected political institutions does not necessarily engage the interest of the public or revitalize the democratic process. The status of devolution as part of a process of democratic renewal in the whole United Kingdom must currently remain, in the terminology native to one of the territories where it has been applied, 'not proven'.

[36] Another classic example is the European Parliament, would-be 'Voice of the People' in the EU, but largely a failure in generating any sense of connection to or public involvement in the politics of the EU. See Blondel *et al.*, *People and Parliament in the European Union*; and Roger Scully, 'Democracy, Legitimacy and the European Parliament', in Maria Green Cowles and Michael Smith, eds, *The State of the European Union, Vol. 5: Risks, Reform, Resistance and Revival* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 228–45.

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