

Why Did the Valleys Vote Leave?

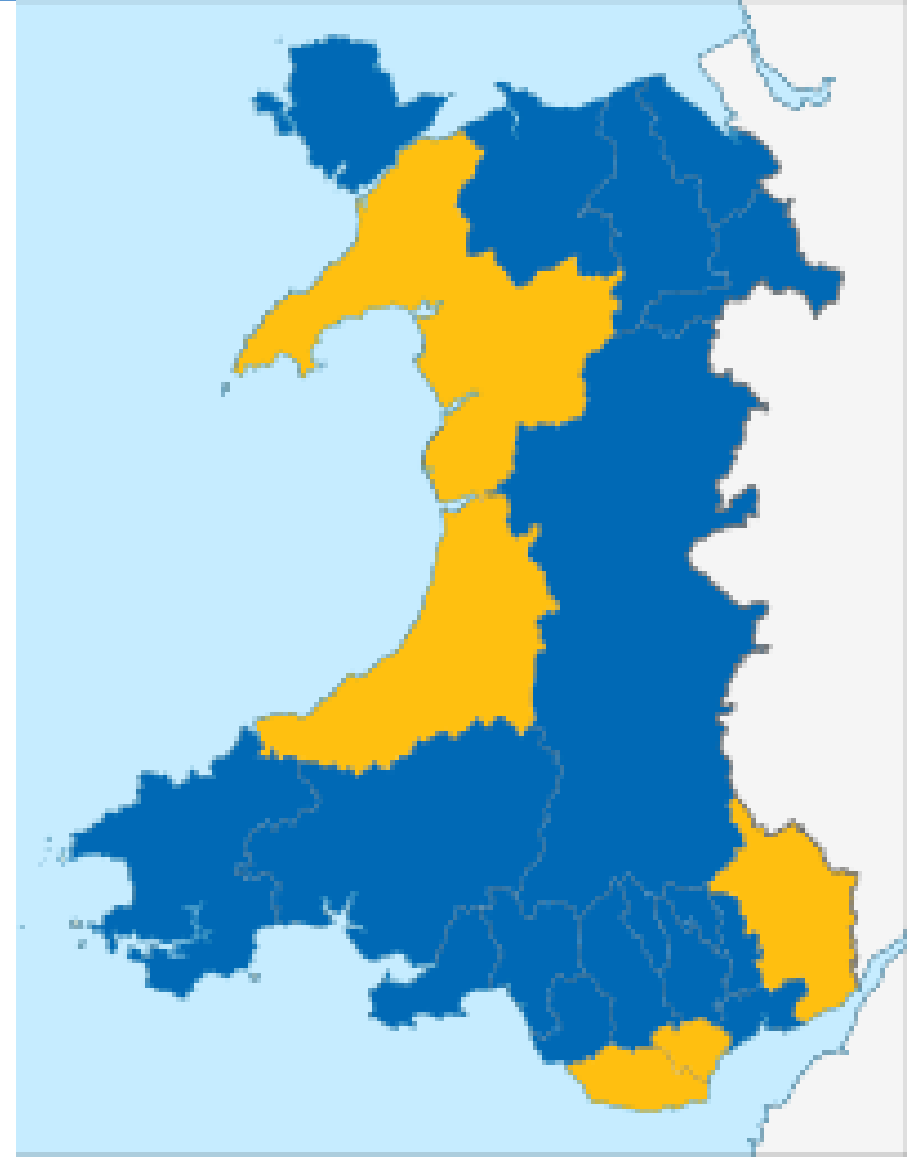
Roger Awan-Scully



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Wales and Brexit

- Wales voted Leave (52.5%-47.5%)
- 17 of 22 Local Authorities voted Leave
- All of the valleys voted Leave



The South Wales Valleys

- Former heavy industrial areas
- Long history of Labour hegemony
- Strong Welsh identity
- Substantial EU Aid since 2000 to valleys communities





Why Did the Valleys Vote Leave?

- Socio-economically similar to post-industrial areas that voted Leave in England

BUT

- Strong general economic interest in Welsh Membership of the EU
 - Net beneficiary of EU budget (Structural Funds, CAP)
 - High private-sector dependence on single-market links (Airbus, Ford, GE Aviation)
- Welsh political elites overwhelmingly behind EU membership; self-image of Wales as progressive and internationalist
- Long-standing Labour loyalty in valleys: Welsh Labour united against Brexit



Modelling the Vote in Wales

- British Election Study Internet Panel
- Wave 9, June-July 2016
- Wales $N = 2,141$
- Logit models of referendum vote choice (robust standard errors)



Modelling the Vote in Wales

Table 9.5: Summary Stats on Multivariate Models

| <i>Model</i> | <i>Pseudo R2</i> | <i>% Correctly Predicted</i> | <i>AIC</i> | <i>BIC</i> |
|-----------------------------|------------------|------------------------------|------------|------------|
| 1. Welsh Language | .00 | 51.5 | 1703 | 1720 |
| 2. Model 1 + Education | .05 | 61.4 | 1637 | 1676 |
| 3. Education | .05 | 61.6 | 1635 | 1663 |
| 4. Age | .02 | 56.7 | 1683 | 1716 |
| 5. Income | .01 | 54.6 | 1699 | 1732 |
| 6. All social background | .06 | 61.7 | 1638 | 1762 |
| 7. Ideological scales | .15 | 67.7 | 1260 | 1277 |
| 8. National identity scales | .05 | 59.4 | 1566 | 1583 |
| 9. Political alienation | .05 | 61.5 | 1593 | 1604 |
| 10. Models 7 + 8 + 9 | .20 | 70.8 | 1141 | 1173 |
| 11. Composite model | .23 | 74.3 | 1131 | 1279 |



Modelling the Vote in Wales

- Expected relationships for Age and Education; no robust relationship with Welsh language competence
- Little relationship with Welsh identity
- Little relationship with economic left-right attitudes
- Strong relationship with: British identity; social libertarian-authoritarian attitudes; political alienation



Focus Groups, 1

- Five groups conducted late August 2017
- Groups conducted in **Merthyr and Rhondda Cynon Taf**
 - 18-44 year olds, Merthyr
 - 45-64 year olds, Merthyr
 - 65+, Merthyr
 - 18-44 year olds, RCT
 - 45-64 year olds, RCT
- All participants working-class Leave voters from June 2016



Focus Groups, 2

Discussions explored...

- Reasons for voting Leave (particularly given benefits to their communities of EU Aid etc)
- Had participants changed minds since June 2016?
- Perceived implications of Brexit for to their communities
- Views on Brexit process: how was it going so far?



Focus Group Findings: Changed Minds?

Nobody had changed their mind!

No participants suggested they would vote differently in August 2017 from June 2016.

Some concerns with handling of Brexit (see later) but not → changed views on basic issue



Focus Group Findings: Immigration, 1

Immigration a key factor behind Brexit support

But concerns **not** articulated as generalised xenophobia or racism

Specifically working-class concerns, and concerns for community outlined.



Focus Group Findings: Immigration, 2

Working-class concerns...

- Making labour market more competitive, driving down wages for locals
- Good for employers and big business, not for ordinary workers



Focus Group Findings: Immigration, 3

Concerns for community...

- Pressure on public services
- Impact of immigrants willing to work for low wages: → town-centres having to cater for low-wage economy: proliferation of pound and charity shops etc (Merthyr 65+ group)



Focus Group Findings: Economic Implications, 1

Very sceptical of alleged economic benefits of EU membership

Simply didn't believe Wales is beneficiary of EU budget: believe figures wrong, or true 'for accounting purposes' only

Some thought little EU money spent in their communities:

"I know they done the roads round here but that's it" (18-44 group, Merthyr)



Focus Group Findings: Economic Implications, 2

Others recognised EU money spent on valleys, but very critical:

‘White elephants’; ‘Vanity projects’

Projects seen as spending money on outside contractors and consultants without understanding communities: ‘It was done *to* us, not *with* us’

Example of person employed on EU-funded project, which created over 60 local construction jobs, but all staff laid off two years later once project finished (45-64 group, Merthyr).



Focus Group Findings: 'Difficult But Worth It'

Concerns about how Brexit process being handled (even by August 2017)

Expected Brexit process to be difficult, and possibly to have short-term economic costs

But staying in EU would be 'vote for things as they are now'; and feeling that, in the valleys, things could not get much worse

Believed it would be worth it in the longer-term; older voters particularly concerned about sovereignty and independence of UK, and articulated dislike of the EU and how it worked



Conclusions, 1

“The British public may be wrong... but they are logical in the consequences that flow from their beliefs” (Cowley 2014: 174).

- Clear articulations of positions on issues like immigration and how the EU works: premises possibly flawed, but clear reasoning from those premises



Conclusions, 2

- Failure of EU Aid to visibly eradicate poverty, and alleged inefficiencies meant little credit to EU for spending
- Risk Acceptance in the Domain of Losses: i.e. ‘people feeling they had little left to lose rolled the dice’.



Conclusions, 3

- Dogs that Didn't Bark:
 - Welshness
 - Labour

Chapter 9 in: Roger Awan-Scully, Elections in Wales: Democracy in a Semi-Sovereign Nation (University of Wales Press, 2019)

Diolch / Thanks

scullyrm@caerdydd.ac.uk

<http://blogs.cardiff.ac.uk/electionsinwales/>



@Roger_Scully

