# YOUNG PEOPLE, PLACE AND DEVOLVED POLITICS: PERCEIVED SCALE(S) OF POLITICAL CONCERNS AMONG UNDER 18S LIVING IN WALES

Dr Sioned Pearce
WISERD, Cardiff University
SRA May 2017

# PRESENTATION STRUCTURE

1. Background
2. Literature
3. Research Questions
4. Methods
5. Research Findings
6. Conclusions

# WELSH DEVOLUTION AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

Turnout remains low in devolved elections though rising with 45.4% in 2016 up by 4.0% points from 2011 (56% in Scotland up from 51%)

The difficulty of a *closer interface between state and society* in studies of devolution…. (Chaney 2002; 2016; Royles 2007)

And what about diffuse support? (Scully and Jones 2015)

After 18 years of Welsh devolution, the next generation of voters have never known a time before – but does diffuse support exist among this age group?

# SUPPORT FOR WELSH INDEPENDENCE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

*If there was a referendum asking 'should Wales become an independent country?', how would you vote?*

|  | Yes | No | Don't know | Would not vote |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 18–24 | 21% | 56% | 11% | 13% |
| 65+ | 10% | 76% | 10% | 4% |

Source: YouGov / Welsh Political Barometer Survey Results, June–July 2016 (N=1010)

# SUPPORT FOR WELSH INDEPENDENCE BASED ON EU MEMBERSHIP

*Imagine a scenario where the rest of the UK left the European Union but Wales could remain a member of the European Union if it became an independent country. If then there was a referendum asking 'should Wales become an independent country?', how would you vote?*

|         | Yes  | No   | Don't know | Would not vote |
|---------|------|------|------------|----------------|
| 18–24   | 28%  | 50%  | 7%         | 14%            |
| 65+     | 13%  | 73%  | 11%        | 3%             |

Source: YouGov / Welsh Political Barometer Survey Results, June–July 2016 (N=1010)

# SUPPORT FOR WELSH INDEPENDENCE BASED ON SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE

*Suppose that Scotland voted to become an independent country and a referendum was then held in Wales about becoming an independent country. If there was a referendum asking 'should Wales become an independent country?', how would you vote?*

|  | Yes | No | Don't know | Would not vote |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 18–24 | 28% | 50% | 7% | 16% |
| 65+ | 13% | 73% | 11% | 3% |

Source: YouGov / Welsh Political Barometer Survey Results, June–July 2016 (N=1010)

# YOUNG PEOPLE, WELSH DEVOLUTION AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

18 to 24 year olds are less 'dissatisfied' with democracy in Wales (38%) than in the EU (43%) and the UK (50%);
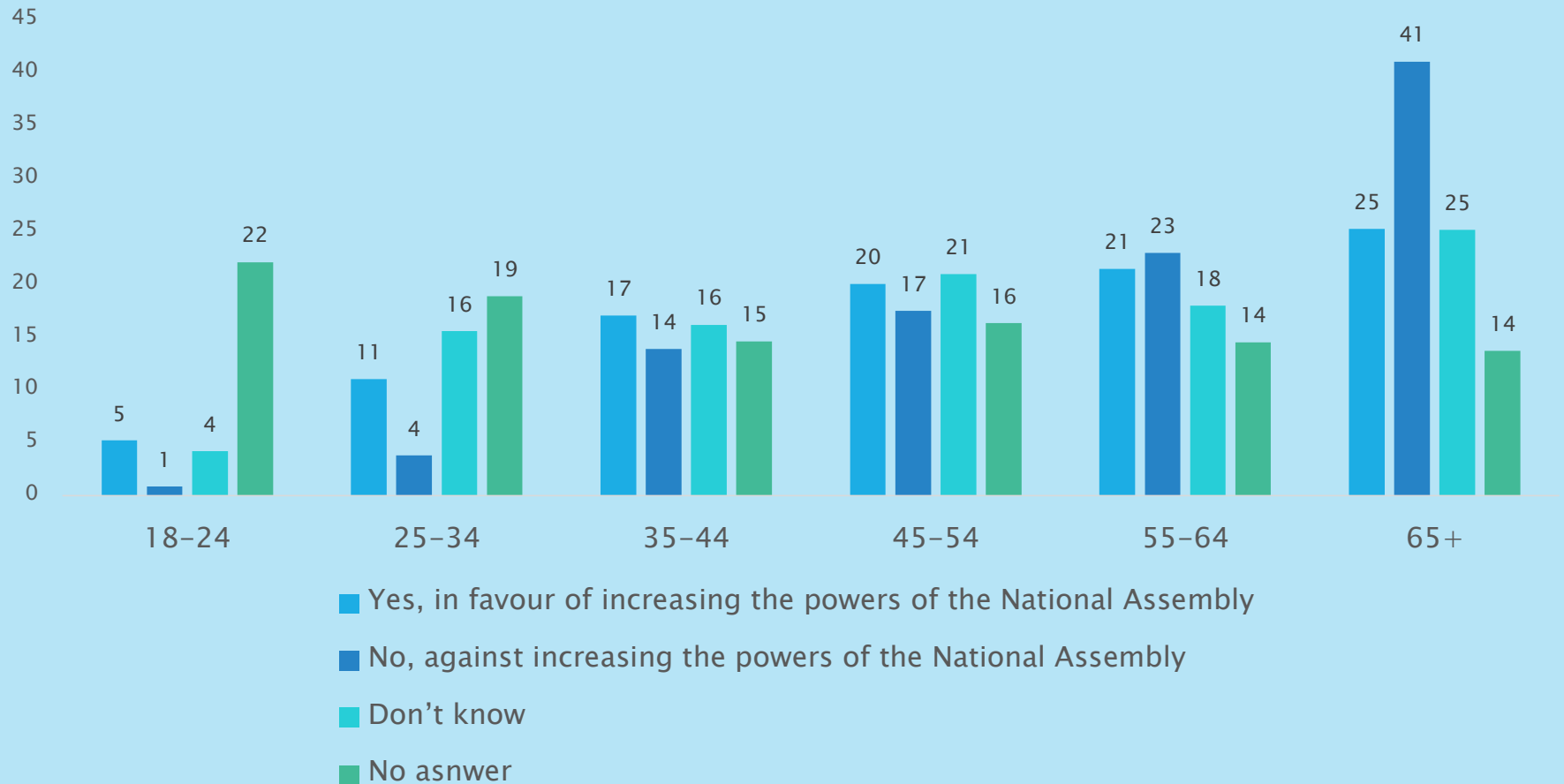
Those who feel very proud to be Welsh, are most dissatisfied with UK democracy (45%) followed by the EU (39%) then Welsh democracy (33%). The 18 to 24 year olds who are very proud to be British are most dissatisfied with the EU (38%) followed by the UK (34%) then Welsh democracy (30%);

18 to 24 year olds living in Wales were more interested in the EU referendum (71%) than in the National Assembly for Wales (NAfW) election of 2016 (50%);

While in Scotland political interest and democratic participation among young people does not differ greatly between 'types' of participation, interest in the NAfW election comes behind the EU referendum despite satisfaction levels being higher.
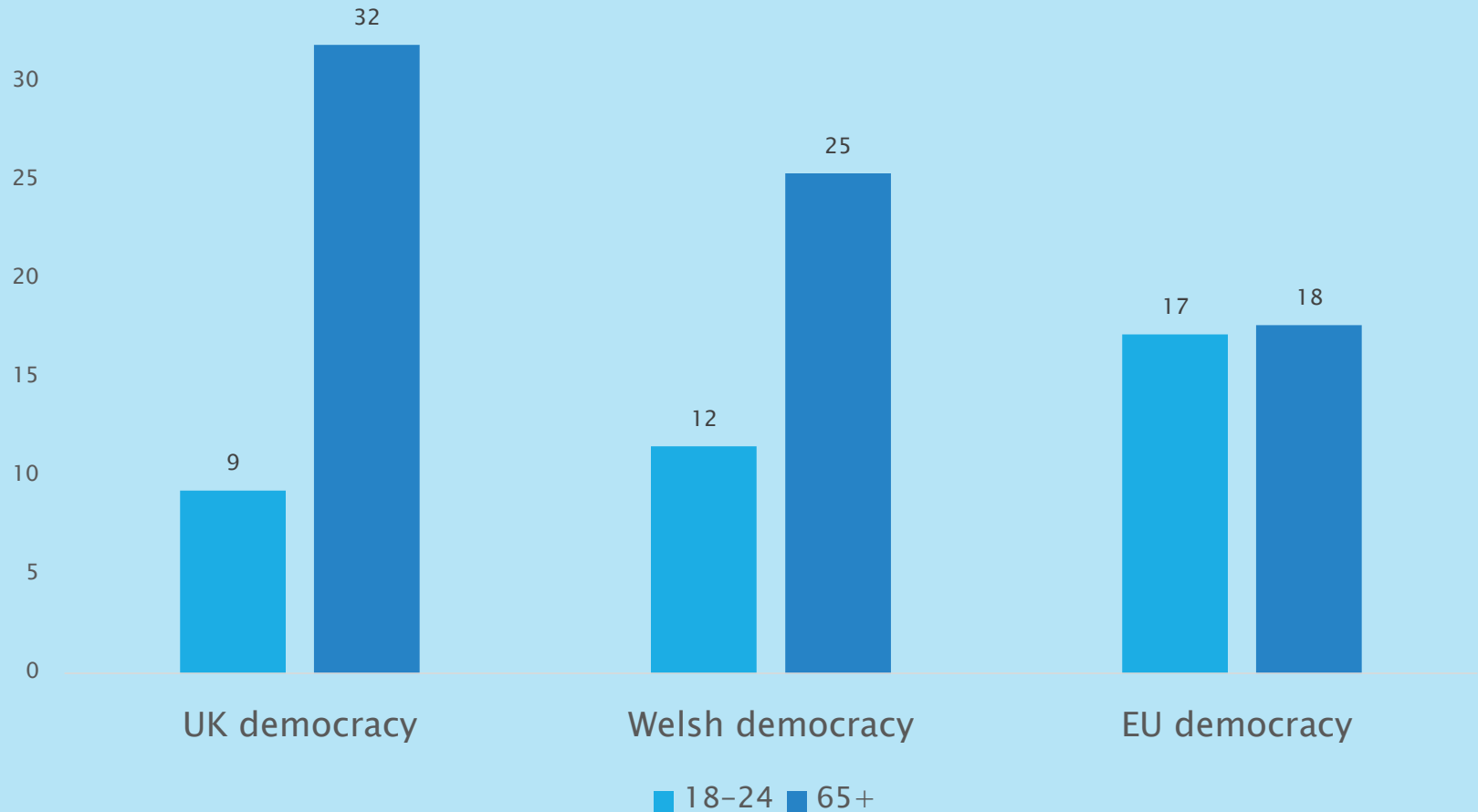
(Wales Election Study 2016)

# Did you vote in March 2011 on increasing the powers of the National Assembly for Wales? (%)



| Age group | Yes, in favour | No, against | Don't know | No answer |
|-----------|----------------|-------------|------------|-----------|
| 18–24 | 5 | 1 | 4 | 22 |
| 25–34 | 11 | 4 | 16 | 19 |
| 35–44 | 17 | 14 | 16 | 15 |
| 45–54 | 20 | 17 | 21 | 16 |
| 55–64 | 21 | 23 | 18 | 14 |
| 65+ | 25 | 41 | 25 | 14 |

- Yes, in favour of increasing the powers of the National Assembly
- No, against increasing the powers of the National Assembly
- Don't know
- No asnwer

Wales Election Study (February 2016) Wales Governance Centre (n=2129)

Satisfied with democracy (% of all age groups)

Wales Election Study (February 2016) Wales Governance Centre (n=2129)

# MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES: 18-30S VS. 30+

| | Over 30s | Over 30s Rank | 18–30 | 18–30 Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Immigration | 65% | 1 | 38% | 2 |
| Health | 46% | 2 | 53% | 1 |
| Economy | 41% | 3 | 34% | 3 |
| Welfare | 25% | 4 | 17% | 7 |
| Europe | 23% | 5 | 18% | 6 |
| Housing | 16% | 6 | 18% | 5 |
| Pensions | 10% | 7 | 3% | 15 |
| Education | 10% | 8 | 21% | 4 |
| Environment | 9% | 9 | 15% | 8 |
| Crime | 9% | 10 | 5% | 14 |
| Tax | 6% | 11 | 8% | 9 |
| Power for Wales | 5% | 12 | 8% | 11 |
| Family & Childcare | 4% | 13 | 6% | 12 |
| Transport | 3% | 14 | 5% | 13 |
| Don't Know | 2% | 15 | 8% | 10 |

# YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE EU REFERENDUM

67% of young Welsh voters voted to remain, coming 8th of 11 regions in terms of the youth remain vote.

Showed a similar level of trust for the respective campaigns to other young people across the UK

Wales did vote to leave the EU (52%) *despite* young people.

(WISERD 2016)

# TRUST IN CAMPAIGNS

| | Under–30s in Wales | Under–30s in the UK |
|---|---|---|
| Don't trust either campaign | 34% | 31% |
| Trust remain more than leave | 34% | 34% |
| Trust leave more than remain | 17% | 16% |
| Don't know | 10% | 13% |
| Trust both equally | 5% | 2% |

# LITERATURE

1. Young people, devolution and political engagement

2. Spatially based claims to identity

# YOUNG PEOPLE, DEVOLUTION AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

Mills and Ducket argue that *most of the opportunities and challenges for young people living in the UK to engage 'politically' are increasingly influenced or shaped by the geographies of devolution... (2015: 2)*

These issues are closely tied to citizenship, national identity and discursive constructions of 'place', 'space' and 'scale'.

*'Geographers have illustrated and elucidated how discursive meanings around the 'place' of the nation are shaped by everyday representations, landscapes and sites of memory, for example...film, ceremonies, and material culture (Edensor, 2002), monuments (Johnson, 1995), architecture (Lorimer, 2001), streets and public space (Azaryahu, 1997)...in (post)colonial contexts (Phillips, 1997; Radcliffe, 1996)' (Mills and Duckett 2015: 3)*

Hopkins uses the Scottish independence referendum to argue the *benefits of opening up the vote to young people and the ways that a 'politics of hope' may be harnessed to maximise youth political participation' (2015: 1)*

# WELSH DEVOLUTION: A 'POLITICS OF HOPE'?

Young people in Wales are less sure of their views on devolution and politics compared with young people in Scotland and older generations (Scully 2013);

The majority are not supportive of Welsh independence (YouGov 2016);

Between 1975 and 2016 Welsh support for devolution has risen among the general population but gone from 20% in 1997 to 8% in 2013 among the under 30s (Wales Governance Centre 2013);

39% of 18 to 24 year olds voted in the 2011 devolved Welsh elections, the lowest turnout of all age groups;

A study by Drakeford, Scourfield and Holland (2009) with 8-11 year olds in Wales found notions of civic identity were present, in the form of *a shallowly -rooted sense of 'Welshness [that] is accompanied by sharper dimensions of civic awareness, in which localism matters most (2009: 263).*

# SPATIALLY BASED CLAIMS TO IDENTITY

- The collective image used to construct identity whereby political issues of concern can be based on shared behaviours or geo-historical reference points *(Paasi 2013)*

- The study of the meaning behind spatially based conceptions of identity *(Billig 1995)*

- **Material** and **imagined** coherence *(Jones, Orford, Heley, and Macfarlane 2015)*

- Devolution, territorial rescaling and scalar notions of identity *(Keating 2013; English 2007; English 2011 and Balsom 1985).*

*'Thus, rather than asking questions about what regional identity is, it is more relevant to scrutinize carefully what it means to claim (in speech and in written texts) that the notion of identity applies to a given territorial space'*

*(Billig 1995 in Paasi 2013: 1209)*

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

*At what scale do under 18s living in Wales locate their political issues of concern?*

*At what scale do they locate responsibility for the issues identified?*

*Do under 18s living in Wales, who have not known a time before devolution, have diffuse support for the Welsh Government?*

# METHODS

Mixed

Survey (3rd) sweep of the WISERD Education longitudinal cohort study funded by HEFCW;

Free text responses;

508 14–17 year olds in 13 secondary schools across Wales with 4 and 8 questions on politics (69.2% were aged 14 to 15 and 30.7% aged 16 to 17);

Qualitative focus groups with 28 14–17 year olds in Wales (and England).

# FOCUS GROUP RESPONDENTS

| | Focus group 1 (deprived urban area) | Focus group 2 (deprived valleys area) | Focus group 3 (affluent urban area) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Female | 1 | 5 | 7 |
| Male | 4 | 6 | 5 |
| Total | 5 | 11 | 12 |

# FOCUS GROUP RESPONDENTS

|  | Focus group 1 (deprived urban area) | Focus group 2 (deprived valleys area) | Focus group 3 (affluent urban area) |
|---|---|---|---|
| In school | – | 11 | 12 |
| Job seeking | 5 | – | – |
| Welsh speaking | – | 5 | 12 |

# SURVEY FINDINGS

*Is there one particular political issue that you are concerned about?*
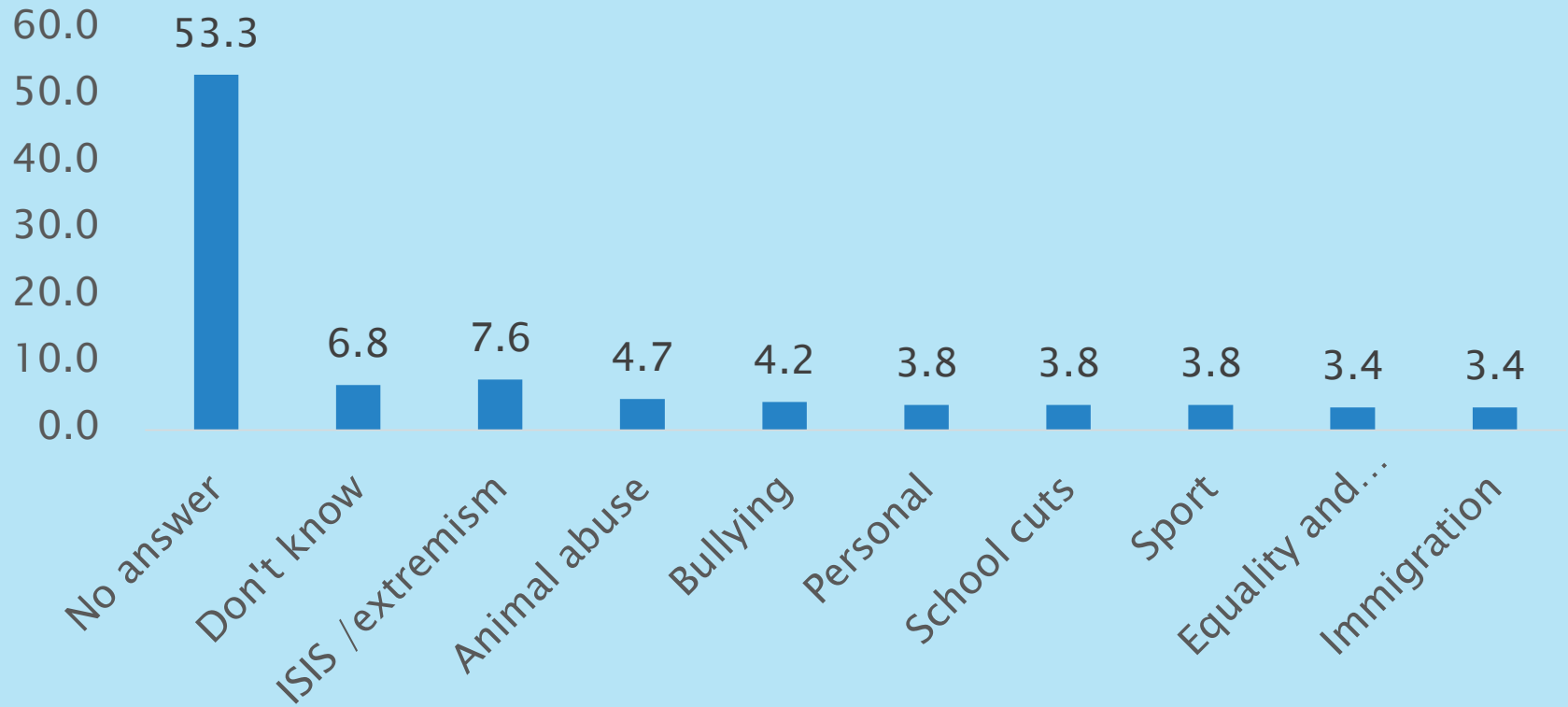
## 70 issues of concern (%)



(n=503)

# SURVEY FINDINGS

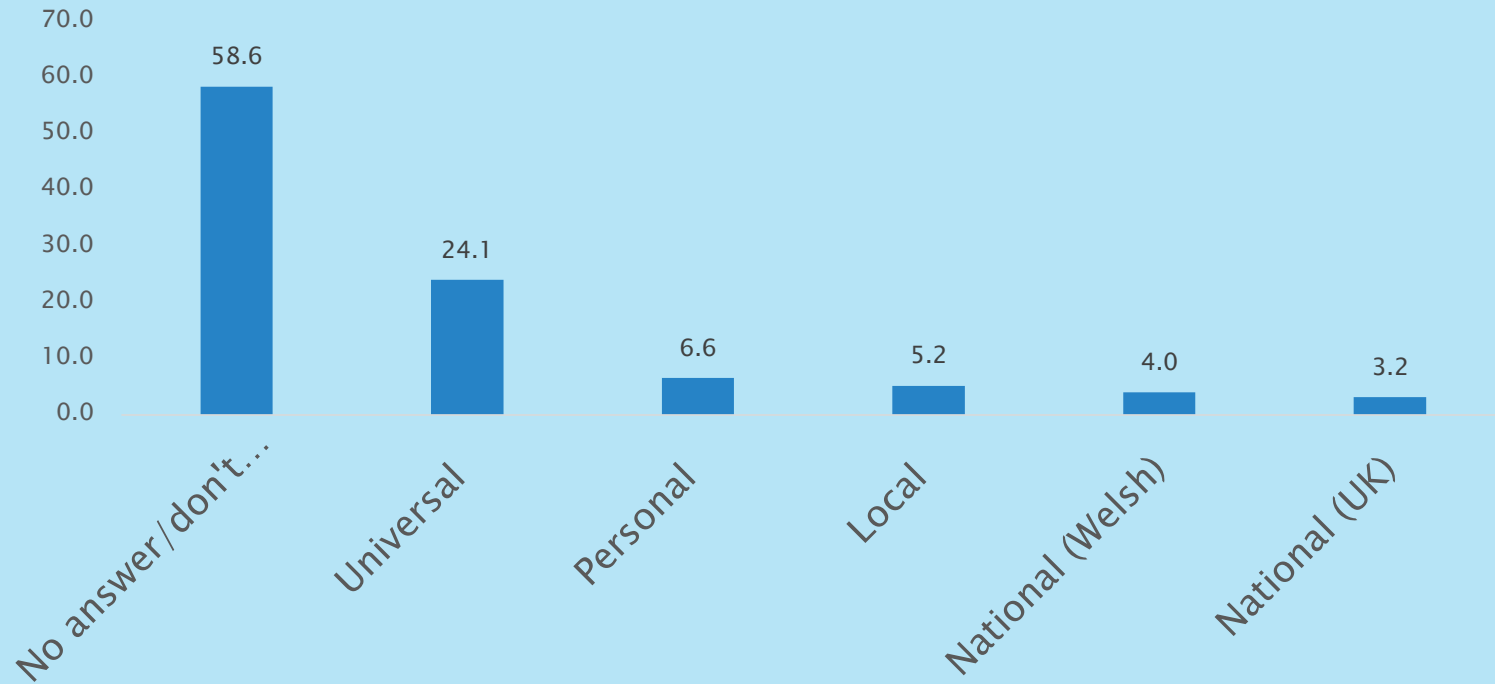*Is there one particular political issue that you are concerned about?*

Top 10 issues of concern (%)



(n=503)
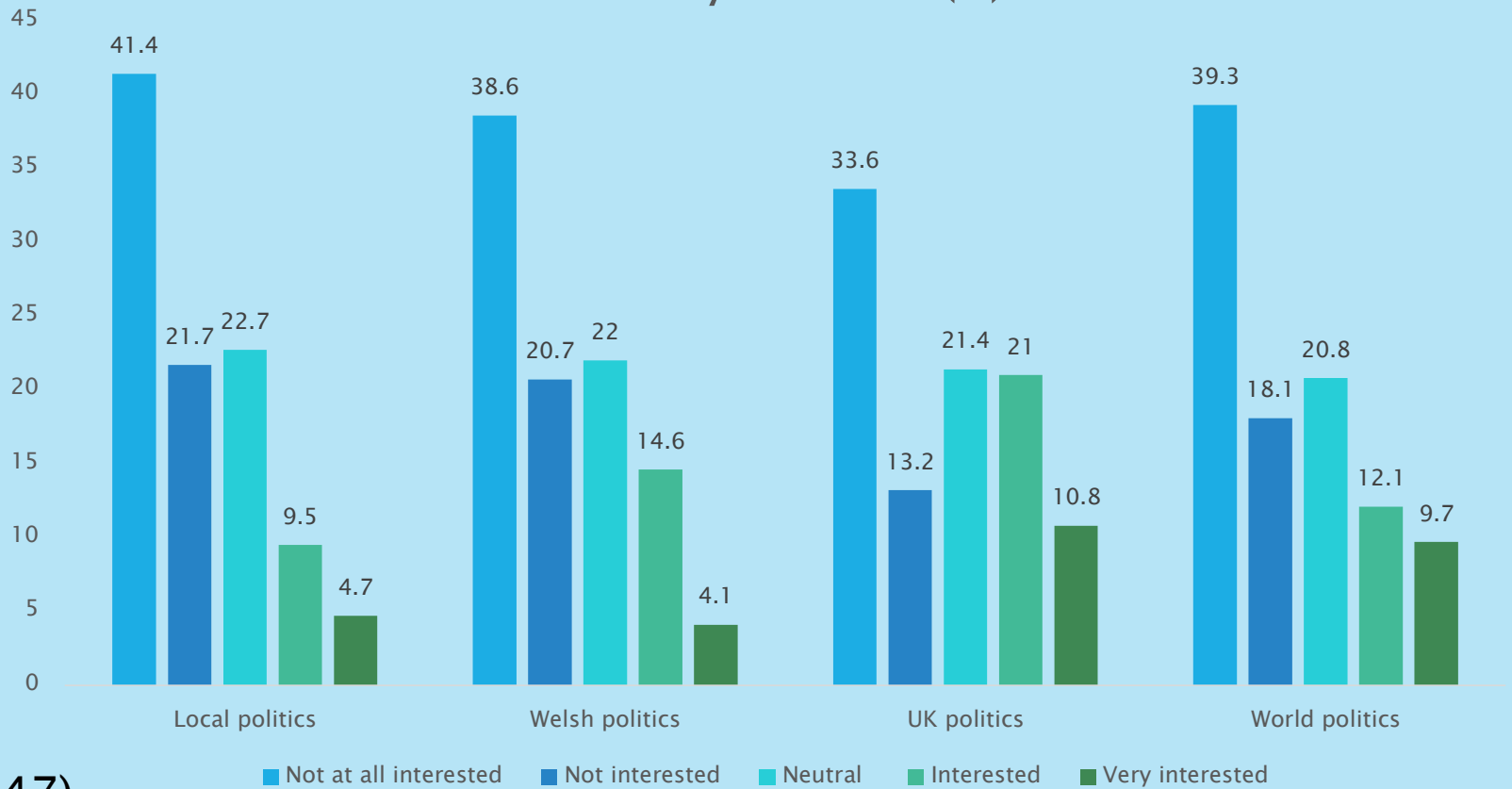
# SCALES OF POLITICAL CONCERN(S)

(%)



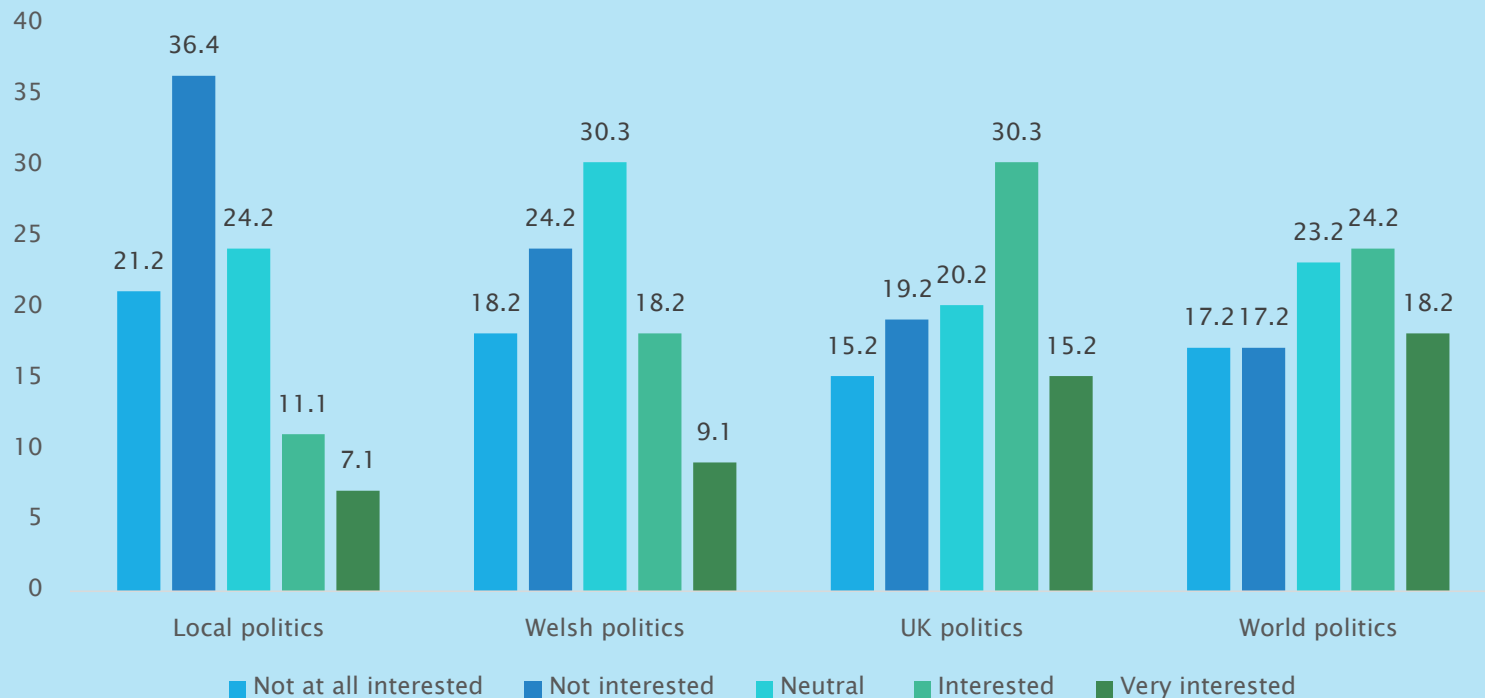(n=503)

# SCALES OF POLITICAL INTEREST

## 14–15 year olds (%)



(n=347)

Legend: Not at all interested, Not interested, Neutral, Interested, Very interested

| | Local politics | Welsh politics | UK politics | World politics |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Not at all interested | 41.4 | 38.6 | 33.6 | 39.3 |
| Not interested | 21.7 | 20.7 | 13.2 | 18.1 |
| Neutral | 22.7 | 22 | 21.4 | 20.8 |
| Interested | 9.5 | 14.6 | 21 | 12.1 |
| Very interested | 4.7 | 4.1 | 10.8 | 9.7 |

# SCALES OF POLITICAL INTEREST



16–17 year olds (%)

(n=156)

# DETAILED VS RHETORICAL RESPONSES

**Detailed**

*The one particular issue I feel strongly about is people bullying other people about the way they look or the fact that they have special needs.*

*ISIS! I wish someone would go in a blow the hell out of them and so I feel strongly about it ….this is the one thing in the world I feel fed up about and wish the UK government would do something about it!*

*I feel that schools don't get enough PSE lessons on mental health and the warning signs of them.*

**Rhetorical**

*'terrorism'*

*'gun crime'*

# 'WALES' OR 'BEING WELSH'

8.6% of issues were directly associated with Wales or being Welsh

10 related to Welsh language

4 on lack of high quality sport and sport coverage in Wales

4 on allowing the Welsh flag to remain on driving licences

4 on Welsh identity and Welsh nationalism

1 on LGBT rights in Wales

*The fact that because Wales is part if the UK people think that Welsh people think that they are British when most Welsh people don't like the idea of being British because they are Welsh*

# ISSUES OF CONCERN AND SCALES OF RESPONSIBILITY (FOCUS GROUP 1)

- Participants based in the deprived urban area had all left school and were seeking employment or working part-time contracts;

- Their biggest concern was unemployment and the lack of practical skills taught in school;

- Responsibility was placed on UK government and blame assigned to immigration;

- The group had little to no knowledge of devolution in Wales.

# FOCUS GROUP 1: EMPLOYMENT AND IMMIGRATION

*It's free money and then they send it back to their country and half of them haven't got kids they build houses over there and make their countries better while ours is getting shitter…stop so many refugees and foreigners that are doing nothing in this country and get them out, keep Britain British basically (participant 3)*

*Do you know us as Wales people (respondent 3: Welsh people!) (laughter)… I still don't understand it. I don't know how to put it, you know? England and David Cameron they get more of a say than our Welsh Government? (participant 2)*

*… I left school and I don't know anything I forget what I've learnt. You leave knowing about the 'pyathogram' theorem for maths and I don't know how to do my bills, to do a mortgage, don't know how to prepare myself for a job…we don't know nothing (participant 1)*

# ISSUES OF CONCERN AND SCALES OF RESPONSIBILITY (FOCUS GROUP 2)

All members of this group were in school of college and around one third spoke Welsh;

This group's main issue of concern were at UK level (MP expenses and abolition of the House of Lords);

They linked Welsh devolution only with 'identity' and were aware of the Welsh Government but did not feel represented by it.

# FOCUS GROUP 2: UK GOVERNMENT AND WELSH IDENTITY

*As a young person… [and] as a Welsh person too I don't feel represented. If you look at Scotland there is a huge rise in representation in Scotland and England but in Wales…we're just cast aside (participant 1)*

*It's more the culture and how the Welsh language needs to be separated from English, when a government puts legislation through they won't think about how Welsh culture needs to be protected… …the Welsh language is protected now but that's due to devolution (participant 5)*

*You would think having English votes for English laws would affect Wales but it affects all Britain, I had to read it in my work experience, Wales was mentioned 13 times on the 13 pages and about 10 of those was because it said 'England and Wales', we're counted as England, brushed aside (participant 3)*

# ISSUES OF CONCERN AND SCALES OF RESPONSIBILITY (FOCUS GROUP 3)

Those based in the affluent urban area, were still in school, spoke Welsh and were aware but critical of Welsh devolution;

Participants also made links between different aspects of being 'Welsh' and wanting Wales to be represented politically on a range of issues, many reflecting the survey results (farming and immigration), but also more complex issues not mentioned in the survey responses such as the instrumentalisation of the Welsh language;

Some went farther by laying the blame for Welsh specific problems on the Welsh Government.

# FOCUS GROUP 3: WELSH GOVERNANCE

*Because the Welsh Government is in charge of education when they come round to inspect the schools we have to say 'bore da' ('good morning' in Welsh) when they come into the classroom because otherwise you get marked down conversationally if you don't speak in Welsh as a school. Which I don't like (participant 6)*

*One of the things the Welsh government has power over is education and we in Wales are nearly last in every ranking, that's why I don't like devolution because we obviously don't know how to make decisions properly. We're not so far away from England but we're bottom of everything (participant 3)*

# FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY

**Employment/education status** had direct links with issues of concern and issues of concern had direct links with the scale at which responsibility for said concerns were located;

National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Government strongly linked with **Welsh language and national identity;**

Where awareness of existed participants were **critical of the process of devolution** rather than the decisions made by the Welsh Government (low diffuse support).

# CONCLUSIONS 1

**Survey results**

Value in allowing young people to define their concerns, as issues are different from the 'drop-down' results;

Concern with and interest in politics is low;

Issues of concern located mostly at 'universal', then 'personal' then 'local' level;

More detailed answers relate to day to day issues over which young people have some degree of contact OR issues in the popular media;

Where responses relating to Wales are given, detailed answers are more common;

None connect their issues of concern directly with the NAfW;

Elements of pragmatism in the responses problematising direct, practical, often tangible 'political' issues rather than expressing dissatisfaction with governing forces

# CONCLUSIONS 2

**Focus group findings** show a clear distinction between political concerns and scales of governance, most notably between those based in the deprived urban area who had left school, and those based in the affluent urban and deprived valleys areas, still in school;

For those living in deprived areas, the issues facing them personally (material coherence) were their main concern. Again, as with the survey results these tangible issues were articulated in detail based on personal experiences of job applications, zero hour contracts and not being ready for the world of work, rather than the more rhetorical terminology used to describe the issues such as 'labour market changes' and 'unemployment', for example;

Among the respondents in the two other groups still attending school, issues of concern were at regional (or national) level (imagined coherence), such as education, language and farming. These were not discussed in detail by the majority of the group but put forward in one or two words as rhetorical contributions.

Lack of diffuse support among under 18s where awareness exists.

# CONCLUSIONS 3

In response to Paasi's (2013) work and Billig's (1995) call to scrutinise claims of territorial identity, the tangible day to day (material) are less well connected with perceptions of devolution in this research than universal issues (imagined) in this study.

# Thank you for listening
## Any questions?

# REFERENCES

Bakker, T. P., & de Vreese, C. H. (2011). Good news for the future? Young people, Internet use, and political participation. *Communication Research*, 0093650210381738.

Bergh, J. (2013). Does voting rights affect the political maturity of 16-and 17-year-olds? Findings from the 2011 Norwegian voting-age trial. *Electoral Studies*, *32*(1), 90–100.

British Future (2015) Voice of a Generation: what do 2015's first time voters think? British future

Chan, T. W., & Clayton, M. (2006). Should the voting age be lowered to sixteen? Normative and empirical considerations. *Political Studies*, *54*(3), 533–558.

Drakeford, M., Scourfield, J., Holland, S. and Davies, A. (2009) Welsh children's views on government and participation. Childhood, 16 (2), 247–264.

Eichorn (2014) How lowering the voting age to 16 can be an opportunity to improve youth political engagement: Lessons learned from the Scottish Independence Referendum

Electoral Commission (2004) Voting age should stay at 18 says The Electoral Commission

# REFERENCES

Mycock, A. and Tonge.J. (2015) Some progress made, still much to do: Youth political engagement since the Youth Citizenship Commission. In: Mycock, A. & Tonge, J. (2015) *Beyond the Youth Citizenship Commission: Young People and Politics*, Political Studies Association. PP, 8-13.

Henn, M., & Foard, N. (2012) Young people, political participation and trust in Britain. *Parliamentary affairs*, *65*(1), 47-67.

Henn, M., Weinstein, M., & Wring, D. (2002). A generation apart? Youth and political participation in Britain. *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations*, *4*(2), 167-192

Henn, M., Weinstein, M., & Forrest, S. (2005). Uninterested youth? Young people's attitudes towards party politics in Britain. *Political studies*, *53*(3), 556-578.

Kimberlee, R. H. (2002) Why Don't British Young People Vote at General Elections?, Journal of Youth Studies, 5, 1, 85-98

Mair, P. (2013) Ruling the Void: the hollowing of western democracy, Verso, London

Mills, S. & Duckett, J. (2015) Representing, reproducing and re-configuring the nation: geographies of youth citizenship and devolution.

Scully, R. & Jones, R.W. (2015) *The Public Legitimacy of the National Assembly for Wales*. The Journal of Legislative Studies. 21, (4).

White (2006) Power to the People: the report of Power, an Independent Inquiry into Britain's Democracy

Wring, D., Henn, M. and Weinstein, M., (1999). Young people and contemporary politics: committed scepticism or engaged cynicism? British Parties and Elections Review, 9, pp. 200-216.

Youth Citizenship Commission (2009) *Old enough to make a mark? Should the voting age be lowered to 16?* Youth Citizenship Commission response to consultation submissions