

Public attitudes towards the  
constitutional future of the UK:  
Analysis from the  
2023 State of the Union Survey

Ailsa Henderson and  
Richard Wyn Jones

A report for:

*The Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of  
Wales*

September 2023

**Ailsa Henderson** is a Professor of Political Science at the University of Edinburgh.

**Richard Wyn Jones** is Professor of Welsh Politics and Director of Cardiff University's Wales Governance Centre.

## Contents

1.	Introduction: The State of the Union Survey 2023	4
2.	Attitudes towards possible constitutional futures	7
2.1	Entrenched devolution	7
2.1.1	Reform Priorities	
2.1.2	The Sewel Convention	
2.1.3	A referendum guarantee?	
2.1.4	Should the UK government be able to block devolved legislation?	
2.1.5	Dispute Resolution	
2.1.6	Lords Reform	
2.1.7	A written constitution	
2.2	A federal UK	19
2.2.1	English Governance	
2.2.2	Shared Sovereignty	
2.2.3	Cooperation between different levels of government	
2.3	Independence/Reunification	23
2.3.1	Patterns of support for independence/reunification	
2.3.2	Attitudes towards the territorial integrity of the state	
3.	Challenges	27
3.1	Territorial grievance	
3.2	The perils of Muscular Unionism	
3.3	The English Question redux?	
4.	Conclusions	35
	Bibliography	38
	Appendix: Statistical Modelling	40

Appendix: Methodology . . . . . 49

# 1. Introduction: The State of the Union Survey 2023

This report draws on data from the Cardiff-Edinburgh State of the Union Survey, a survey of public attitudes directed by the current authors, designed to allow comprehensive, comparative analyses of the interplay between constitutional attitudes, political attitudes, social values and national identities across the four territories of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. In this Introduction we will provide a brief overview of the State of the Union Survey before going on to explain the nature of our cooperation with The Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales in preparing the 2023 iteration of the survey and, relatedly, our approach to questionnaire design. Finally, we will outline the structure of the remainder of the report.

## *A '360 degree' view of the Union*

The State of the Union Survey (SotU) builds on the pioneering Future of England Survey whose findings have been most comprehensively discussed in our book *Englishness: The political force transforming Britain* (Henderson and Wyn Jones 2021a. Also, Jeffery et al. 2014; Wyn Jones et al. 2012, 2013). SotU was established to address a significant gap in the UK social science infrastructure which we felt had become increasingly apparent (see Henderson and Wyn Jones 2021b).

Fundamental constitutional questions have dominated political discussion in the UK for a decade and more – with the future of the union that underpins that state either at stake throughout, be that directly (the 2014 Scottish Independence referendum) or indirectly (the 2016 Brexit referendum). Nonetheless, our ability to understand public attitudes towards that union has been constrained what we have termed the ‘siloes’ nature of the approach to data collection and analysis (Henderson et al 2020, Henderson and Wyn Jones 2021a, 2021b, 2023).

Broadly speaking, Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland each have their own individual survey infrastructures, meanwhile ‘British surveys’ – because of the weight of demographics – tend to become *de facto* English surveys, albeit ones that pay little attention to the specificities of England or indeed Englishness. This means that while we often have excellent data on attitudes in, say, Scotland, towards the constitutional future of that country, our knowledge about attitudes towards the future of Scotland in other parts of the state is far less certain. But clearly, in reality, the various constitutional debates are interlinked. First, they are interlinked in the sense that the debate over the UK’s relationship with the EU intersects with debates about the future of the UK’s domestic union. This applies to the current impasse in Northern Ireland but our earlier work on English attitudes likewise outlined connections between English identity, Euroscepticism and what we have termed devo-anxiety (a sense that England is being unfairly treated within the union

as are result of devolution to the non-English parts of the state). Second, they are linked also in the sense that preferences about the domestic union in one part of the state inevitably impact attitudes in other parts, and this in multiple and complex ways. To give a hypothetical example: even if attitudes in Scotland overwhelmingly favoured a federal UK, this would likely be completely undeliverable unless voters in other parts of the state were content with such an arrangement. Likewise, a Scottish or Welsh preference for achieving federalism by dividing England into regional constituent units does not mean that the English electorate would share the same view. Thus, understanding views in one part of the state provides only one – albeit, important – part of the picture.

The survey from which the current report derives its data is different, and deliberately so. It has been specially developed to allow for the comparative study of attitudes **both within and between** the four territories of the state (for more details see the Appendix) This involves, inter alia, ensuring large-enough sample sizes in each of the four territories to allow for proper analysis. But in addition, the questionnaires deployed in the four territories have been designed to generate what we term a ‘360-degree’ understanding of the union. In other words, we have asked questions not only about attitudes in Scotland towards Scotland’s place in the union, but also about attitudes in Scotland towards the relationship between Northern Ireland and Wales and the union, as well as of course towards England, its place in the union and its internal governance arrangements. Adopting this approach for all four territories generates unique insights into the state of attitudes towards the union across its constituent territories, allowing us to explore the relationship between constitutional preferences, political attitudes, social values and patterns of national identity.

We have recently published the first comprehensive analysis of findings from the 2021 iteration of the Survey under the title *The Ambivalent Union* (Henderson and Wyn Jones 2023). That report should be regarded as the foundation for what follows. For the sake of brevity, we have not sought to restate all the arguments made within its pages. Instead, we will assume a basic knowledge while referring to specific elements where particularly relevant.

#### *The Interim Report by The Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales*

Our 2023 survey was prepared in collaboration with and with the support of The Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales. While maintaining a core of questions from previous surveys, some of which we have been asking on a regular basis since 2011, the 2023 survey featured a number of new questions that were designed to generate a ‘360 degree’ understanding of attitudes towards the possible constitutional options highlighted in the Commission’s interim report (The Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales 2022). It is important to underline that, while we had several constructive conversations

with members of the Commission and its expert panel – for which we are grateful – all the final decisions relating to questionnaire design and data analysis were our own.

Following an analysis that concludes that the status quo is not serving Wales well and is unsustainable, the Commission’s interim report goes on to note that its future work would focus on the following potential options for the constitution of Wales:

- An **entrenched** version of devolution;
- A **federal** UK in which Wales would form a constituent unit; and,
- An **independent** Wales (The Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales: Interim Report, 2022: 8)

We have used the 2023 iteration of the survey to explore public attitudes towards these three potential options across the four constituent territories of the state to help inform the Commission’s final report.

In undertaking this work we have been conscious of two things. First, the importance of ‘adding value’. Some options – most obviously, Scottish and Welsh independence and Irish reunification – have been more widely canvassed than other possible changes, for example ‘entrenched devolution’. Unsurprisingly, this means in turn that more survey work has been undertaken to ascertain public attitudes towards the former than the latter. We have thus sought to focus our efforts on developing questions that will allow us to probe those aspects of union reform about which we know less. One implication of this is that the current report should also be read alongside other readily available data on public attitudes.

Secondly, we have been conscious of the dangers inherent in conducting survey work on matters about which public debate has been limited and, indeed, over which experts often disagree. Thus, even if the academic literature on the topic is vast, given that there is (as far as we are aware) no agreed vision of, let alone blueprint for, a federal UK, there is little point in asking directly about attitudes in the abstract towards, say, cooperative (‘marble cake’) vs dual (‘layer cake’) federalism. Absent even the semblance of a public debate on such matters, any responses to these types of questions are unlikely to be helpful. As will become clearer in the next chapter, our response to this challenge has been to explore attitudes towards some of the more general questions, issues or first principles that will inevitably arise in the context of any attempts to design alternative constitutional arrangements. We have also explored attitudes towards some of the individual elements that – together – might form a larger constitutional whole. Our strongly held view is that this approach to gauging public attitudes – one that is exploratory in nature, and which eschews what are almost-certainly spurious claims to certainty – is the most appropriate one in the current context.

Relatedly, the proportion of our respondents choosing the ‘Don’t Know’ option in relation to specific questions is also often revealing, reflecting as it does the wider political culture and context in which respondents are embedded. Respondents living in parts of the state where a given issue is raised regularly in political debate, discussed in news reports, and so on, are less likely to generate high levels of don’t knows responses when asked about that issue than inhabitants of other areas where the issue is largely absent from the public consciousness. High levels of don’t knows also suggest that there is the potential for volatility in public preferences. We therefore return to this matter throughout.

The remainder of this report is divided into two substantive chapters as well as a brief conclusion. Our next chapter focuses on public attitudes across the UK towards the three constitutional options cited in the Commission’s interim report as worthy of further consideration. This is followed that by a chapter that focuses on some of the challenges to those thinking about the constitutional future of Wales. Finally, in the Conclusion we summarise what we have gleaned about public attitudes towards the three options under consideration in the Commission’s current work programme.

## 2. Attitudes towards possible constitutional futures

As we have seen, the interim report of the Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales highlights three potential options for the constitutional future of Wales as being worthy of further consideration. These are:

- An entrenched version of devolution;
- A federal UK of which Wales form a constituent unit; and,
- An independent Wales.

Here we gauge public attitudes towards each option in turn.

### 2.1 Entrenched devolution

While the Independent Commission’s interim report – perhaps optimistically – intimates that this is the easiest to implement of the three options under consideration, it is also perhaps the most difficult on which to gauge public attitudes. This for several reasons. First, the term itself is a new and a remains relatively unfamiliar even, we suspect, to many constitutional aficionados. As a result, there is little point in probing attitudes towards it in any direct way. Furthermore, while the core idea may be straightforward enough – ensuring that Westminster and/or Whitehall cannot ride roughshod over devolved powers and prerogatives – what this entails in constitutional terms is far from clear. For example, what are the implications of entrenchment for parliamentary sovereignty? On the face of it, entrenchment would seem to be incompatible with its survival as



the central plank of UK constitutional dogma. Yet the report of the Commission on the UK's Future (2022), chaired by former Prime Minister Gordon Brown, proposes various mechanisms that seek to entrench devolution while making it clear that it does not propose a direct challenge to parliamentary sovereignty (Morgan and Wyn Jones 2023). Meanwhile the interim report of the Independent Commission leaves this fundamental question for further consideration (The Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales 2022: 75).

Given these various challenges, the approach adopted in our 2023 survey was to ask questions that probe public attitudes to a wide range of issues and/or potential reforms that might be considered germane to any attempt to entrench devolution. Here we report on the following:

**Reform priorities** Notwithstanding one's views on whether entrenchment would involve a direct challenge to the doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty, it would clearly require fundamental reform of the central institutions and practices of the UK state. This stands in contrast to the story of devolution-so-far which, as has been regularly pointed out, combines radical changes around the Celtic periphery of the UK with minimal changes to its central institutions. Thus, the Commission on the UK's Future envisages, inter alia, the replacement of the current House of Lords with an Assembly of the Nations and Regions charged with 'protecting the constitutional distribution of powers between Parliament at Westminster and the three devolved legislatures' (The Commission on the UK's Future 2022: 140).

Reform of the central state would almost certainly involve the expenditure of much time and effort as well as the investment of substantial political capital – all of which would inevitably incur considerable opportunity costs. A natural question to ask in this context is, therefore, to what extent is there evidence of a public appetite for reform of the UK's territorial constitution?

**The Sewel Convention** The Sewel Convention holds that the Westminster parliament will 'not normally legislate' in areas of devolved competence without the consent of the devolved legislatures themselves. It has therefore been regarded by some devolutionists as providing an important guarantee for the devolved level. Indeed, post-2014 Scottish Independence referendum attempts to render devolution 'permanent' – in the language of the now famous 'Vow' (Daily Record 2014) – included placing the Convention onto the statute book via the 2016 Scotland and the 2017 Wales Acts. The impact of this development was, however, shown to be nugatory by the subsequent determination of the UK Supreme Court in the Miller case that, despite its entry into the statute book, Sewel was not in fact justiciable. This means that the devolved legislatures have no way of resisting Westminster legislation that encroaches on their powers even if they withhold

consent from it. More recently, the UK government has regularly breached the Convention as part of its ‘muscular’ approach to the union.

Sewel surfaces in other contexts. A central feature of the Commission on the UK’s Future’s proposals for entrenching devolution is another attempt to place Sewel onto the statute book, this time modified to remove the ‘not normally’ qualification (for an analysis see Morgan and Wyn Jones 2023). Likewise, s26(5) of the Covid Act states that the Secretary of State ‘may not impose a requirement under s25 without the consent of an authority...if and to the extent that that authority could itself have imposed the requirement’. This is stronger language than Sewel by virtue of removing the ‘not normally’ preface. Given its salience, we therefore probe public attitudes to the Sewel Convention. Furthermore, following the provisions of the 2020 UK Internal Market Act, the UK Government is now spending money in the devolved territories in areas of devolved competence – in the name of ‘strengthening the union’ (Lamont 2020) – we have also included attitudes to UK engagement in devolved matters in terms of both legislating and spending.

**A referendum guarantee?** For many supporters of devolution, one of the key objections to recent UK government behaviour towards the devolved institutions is that devolution was established via democratic mandates, which means in their view that devolved powers and prerogatives should enjoy protection from the depredations of Westminster parliamentary sovereignty. In academic terms we might term this a debate between the relative weight that should be accorded to popular vs parliamentary sovereignty. Here we explore public attitudes to this issue through the prism of abolition: does the fact that devolved institutions were established via referendums mean that they should only be abolished via referendums rather than as simply as a result of a majority of MPs favouring abolition?

**Should the UK government be allowed to block the activities of the devolved level?** When, if at all, should the UK government be allowed to block the activities on devolved institutions? This is an issue that has recently been brought into sharp relief in Scotland by the UK’s decision to block the implementation of the Scottish Parliament’s Gender Recognition Reform Bill – a decision which both the Scottish and Welsh governments view as undermining the devolution settlements. Setting aside the specifics of the GRR case, we explore public attitudes across the constituent parts of the UK to the more general principles involved.

**Dispute Resolution** For years, a key point of contention concerning the way that devolution had been implemented in the UK was that the UK Government could play

both judge and jury in the context of any disputes between it and the devolved governments. A recent high-profile example is the UK Government's refusal to provide a funding consequential to Wales from the investment in the HS2 rail project, this despite the urging of, inter alia, the Welsh Government and the House of Commons Select Committee on Welsh Affairs (for a summary of the various arguments see House of Commons Library 2021.) While recent reforms to the mechanisms through which intergovernmental relations are conducted have sought to address this concern, disputes over financial issues – which are arguably the most important and most contentious – have not been included in the new arrangements. Given that dispute resolution is therefore almost certain to remain a weak point in the current arrangement for the governance of the UK's territorial constitution, we have included consideration of public attitudes towards it in this report.

**Lords Reform** We have already noted that reform of Westminster's second chamber to enable territorial representation forms a key plank of the Commission on the UK's Future scheme for entrenching devolution. Lords reform has also played an important part in the Welsh Government's proposal for a reformed union (Welsh Government 2021: 14; also, Roberts 2012). Here we explore public attitudes to reforming the House of Lords to ensure territorial representation.

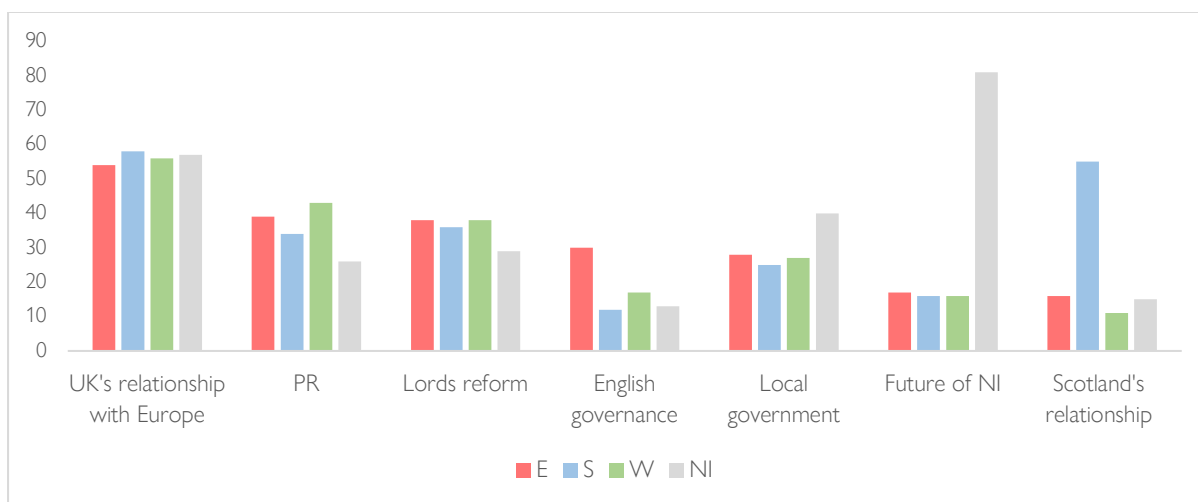
**Written Constitution** One way of entrenching devolution is by establishing a written (or perhaps more correctly, codified) constitution for the UK. A written constitution is also a prerequisite for the establishment of a federal UK, the subject of the next sub-section of this chapter. As such, we explore public attitudes to the prospect of a written constitution for the UK.

We present and analyse data on each of these issues in turn.

### 2.1.1 Reform priorities

From our earliest work on attitudes in England we have been asking respondents to note their three highest priorities for constitutional reform. Despite the absence of a distinctively Welsh constitutional response option, we have retained the response options for the 2023 of the SotU survey to provide the best possible time series of data. Reflecting the origins of the question, we have 'ranked' issue importance by order of importance to the English electorate, though note that the proportions in England prioritising PR, Lords reform and reforming English governance are very similar indeed (Fig. 2.1).

**Figure 2.1 Constitutional Reform Priorities (%)**

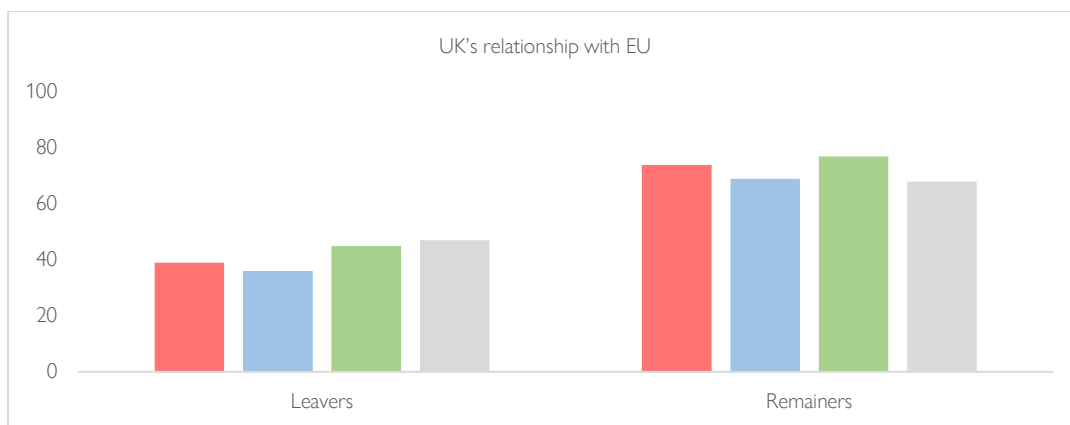


Question: Which THREE, if any, of the following areas do you think require urgent action or change at this time? (Please select up to three options): Strengthening local government; Reforming the House of Lords; Scotland's future relationship with the United Kingdom; The United Kingdom's relationship with the European Union; How England is governed now that Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have their own legislatures; The future of Northern Ireland; A more proportional system for electing MPs at Westminster; None of these; Don't know

There are several points to note. The first is the priority accorded to the UK's relationship with Europe. In this case, there is very little territorial variation across the territories: it is a key priority for a majority of the electorates in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In England and Wales, it is the most important priority. This is the case even though it is now 7 years since the Brexit referendum. What has changed in the interim, however, is *who* cares about Europe. As is clear from Figure 2.2, those most likely to cite the UK's relationship with Europe as one of their key priorities are not Leavers but Remainers, and this is true across the UK.

The second point is that when offered the option (cf. Wales), voters regard the arrangement for their own territory as a key priority. This is most obviously the case for Northern Ireland and Scotland where the fate of their respective territories is a priority for majorities, but it is also case – if to a more muted extent – in England. Conversely, in no part of the state are the arrangement for other parts of it regarded as key priority – a finding that will come as no surprise to readers of our report on *The Ambivalent Union*.

Figure 2.2 Those prioritising the UK's relationship with Europe by Brexit vote (%)



Finally, while in none of the four electorates do we find a majority prioritising what we might term all-UK constitutional reforms – PR and Lords reform – there are nonetheless relatively substantial minorities in each that do prioritise these issues. Given Lords reform, in particular, is cited as a central element of an entrenched scheme of devolution, supporters may draw some comfort from this, especially as there are clearly those who support such reforms for reasons that have little or nothing to do with the territorial constitution. That said, the range of response options provided to survey respondents was deliberately narrow and ‘high level’. It would perhaps be unwise to place too much weight even on these levels of support without knowing more about public responses to more detailed proposals for reform.

### 2.1.2 The Sewel Convention

Our approach to exploring attitudes towards the Sewel convention was direct – even if we avoided the use of the term ‘Sewel Convention’ itself! We asked respondent when, if at all, they thought the UK Parliament should legislate in devolved areas providing 5 response options (see Table 2.1). These were: whenever it wants (what we might term the ‘muscular unionist’ position); not normally without the permission of the devolved level (the Sewel convention wording – highlighted here in blue, although not in survey itself); only with permission of the devolved level (the position advocated in the report of the Commission on the UK’s Future); never; and don’t know.

The first point to note is that the level of ‘don’t knows’ are relatively high, ranging from around one in five to one third of the electorates. Secondly, we find in both Wales and especially Scotland, considerable support for **more** than Sewel. In these cases, the total choosing the ‘only with permission’ and ‘never’ options is greater than total choosing the Sewel and the ‘whenever it wants’ options. Even in the cases of England and Northern Ireland, the balance of views tends towards what might be termed an ‘at least Sewel’ position.

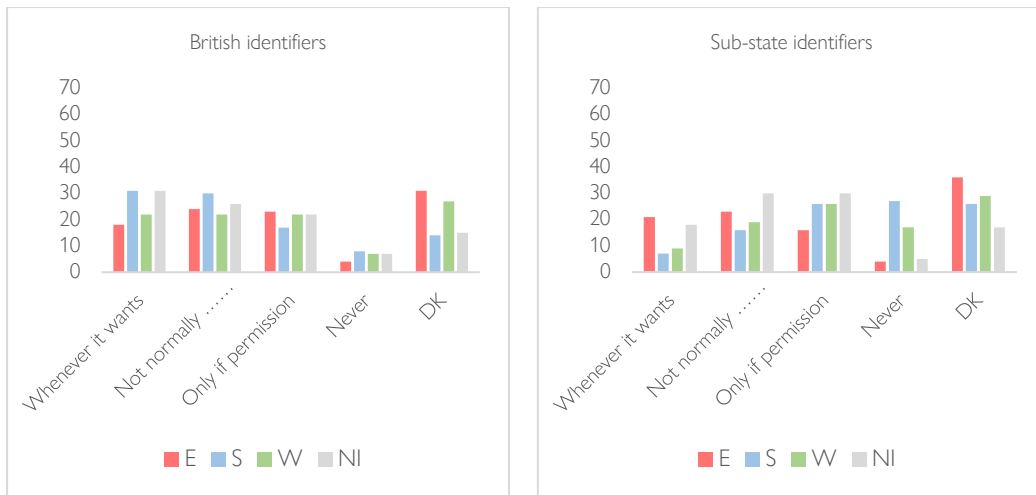
Table 2.1 When should the UK Parliament legislate in devolved areas? (%)

	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
Whenever it wants	17	12	14	17
Not normally without consent	24	19	20	28
Only with permission	21	24	24	28
Never	5	21	13	9
Don't know	33	23	29	18

Question: The current devolution settlements allow the UK parliament to **legislate** on devolved matters for Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. Which of the following statements comes closest to your view? The UK Parliament should legislate on devolved matters **whenever it wants**; The UK Parliament should **not normally** legislate on devolved matters without the consent of the devolved legislatures; The UK Parliament should **only** legislate on devolved matters if it has the permission of devolved legislatures; The UK Parliament should **never** legislate on devolved matters; Don't know [words in bold appeared in bold to the respondents.]

Further breaking down these responses by national identity (Fig. 2.3), perhaps predictably, we find that British identifiers (especially in the devolved territories themselves) prefer options towards the 'whenever it wants' or 'Sewel' end of the response spectrum. Conversely, those in the devolved territories (though not in England) who emphasise their sub-state national identity prefer options towards the 'only with permission' and 'never' end of the response spectrum.

Figure 2.3 Sewel (legislation) by National Identity



Given the controversy generated by the UK Internal Market Act as well as the UK Government's decision to remove the devolved level from any significant in the follow-on schemes that have replaced EU structural funding (Gething 2022) – previously, an important area of devolved competence – we also explored public attitudes to UK Government spending in devolved areas. Using our Sewel-based response options to allow us to identify any differences in attitudes to UK engagement in devolved activities through legislation or spending.

As is clear from Table 2.2, this is another case where we find relatively high levels of don't know responses. More substantively, it is only in Scotland that we find the total choosing either the 'only with permission' or 'never' options is higher than the 'not normally without consent' or 'whenever it wants' options in combination. Yet in the other three territories the preponderance of views is best characterised as 'at least Sewel'. With regards both legislation and (to a slightly more muted extent) spending, public attitudes across the state favours an 'at least Sewel' approach to the respecting of devolved competences. In the case of legislation – that is, the territory of Sewel Convention proper – the balance of opinion in both Scotland and Wales supports the view that Westminster should *only* legislate in areas of devolved competence with the express consent of the devolved parliaments themselves.

Table 2.2 When should the UK Government spend in devolved areas?

	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
Whenever it wants	14	15	17	22

Not normally without consent	21	18	19	23
Only with permission	21	28	27	29
Never	11	12	6	4
DK	33	27	32	22

Question: The current devolution settlements allow the UK government to **\*\*spend\*\*** on devolved matters in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. Which of the following statements comes closest to your view? The UK Government should spend on devolved matters **whenever it wants**; The UK Government should **not normally** spend on devolved matters without the consent of the devolved legislatures; The UK Government should **only** spend on devolved matters if it has the permission of devolved legislatures; The UK Government should **never** spend on devolved matters; Don't know [words in bold appeared in bold to respondents.]

### 2.1.3 Should referendum mandates protect devolution?

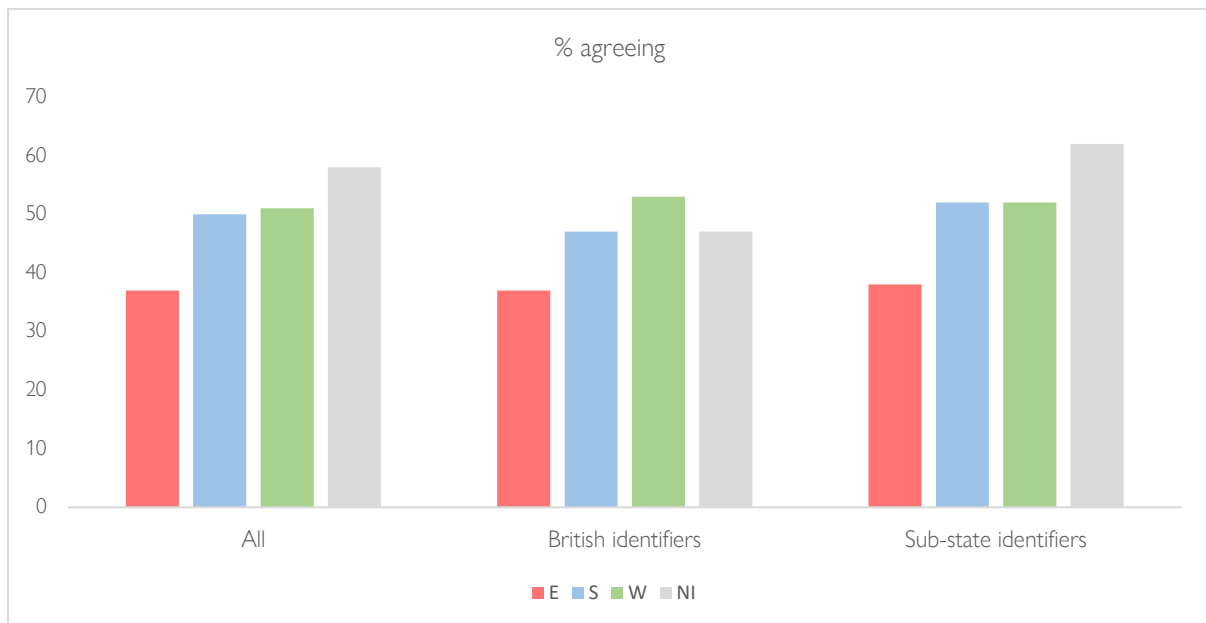
There can be no doubt that one of the most obvious constitutional impacts of Brexit has been to reinvigorate the doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty, this in both political and judicial terms. For the devolved level this had already meant the removal of previous powers and prerogative against the will of the devolved legislatures themselves. Proponents of entrenching devolution believe that the fact that the devolved institutions were established on the basis of referendum-derived democratic mandates means that their powers and prerogatives of these bodies should enjoy protected status, this notwithstanding parliamentary sovereignty. All of this could be interpreted as a disagreement over the relative weight that should be attributed to popular as compared to parliamentary sovereignty.

To test public attitudes, we asked people whether they thought that, since devolved legislatures were created through referendums, they should only be removed through referendums. The responses are set out in Fig. 2.4 where we find strong endorsement of the view that devolution should not be removed without a referendum, with agreement topping 50% in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland even with the don't know respondents included in the overall totals. If we strip out the don't knows, agreement ranges from a low of 51% in England through the low 60% in Scotland and Wales (61% and 63% respectively) to over two thirds (67%) of our Northern Ireland respondents.

Fig. 2.4 also highlights the differences in response between British identifiers and Sub-state identifiers. While the differences in England and Wales are relatively small, the margins are larger in Scotland and Northern Ireland. In both the latter cases, sub-state identifiers are more supportive of requiring a referendum to remove devolution than those who choose a British identity.



**Figure 2.4** Remove devolution only with referendum, all and by national identity (Strongly Agree and Tend to Agree combined)



Question: Since the devolved legislatures in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland were established through referendums, the only way to get rid of them should be through another referendum: Strongly agree; Tend to agree; Neither agree or disagree; Tend to disagree; Strongly disagree; Don't know.

#### 2.1.4 When should the UK be allowed to block the activities of devolved governments?

Another point of contention between the UK and devolved governments – and something that serves to add further fuel to demands for the entrenchment of devolution – is the decision of the UK government to exercise its powers under section 35 of the Scotland Act to block the implementation of the Scottish Parliament's Gender Recognition Reform Bill. Moving away from the particulars of this decision, we asked our respondents under what circumstances (if any) they believed the UK government should be able to block the activities of devolved governments. In this case, the poles of the response options were similar to those deployed when exploring attitudes to the Sewel convention, namely 'whenever they want' and 'never'. The two interim options were necessarily different. They were 'if they believe that the devolved body is acting within its powers but if they disagree with its policy aims' and 'if they believe the devolved body is acting outside their allotted powers' (that is, if it is acting ultra vires.)

As is clear from Fig. 2.5, support for the don't know option is relatively high, ranging from 17% in Northern Ireland to 30% in England. This reflects a more general trend, namely that respondents in England are typically more tentative than those in the devolved territories. That said, the most important point to note is that a clear plurality of respondents in each of the 4 territories choose the 'vires' option – that is, support the view that UK Government should block the devolved level

only if the latter is acting beyond its powers. In every case, support for this option is much greater than support for ‘if they disagree with policy aims’ response option (43 vs 8% in England, 38 vs 5% in Scotland, 38 vs 6% in Wales, and 43 vs 8% in Northern Ireland.)

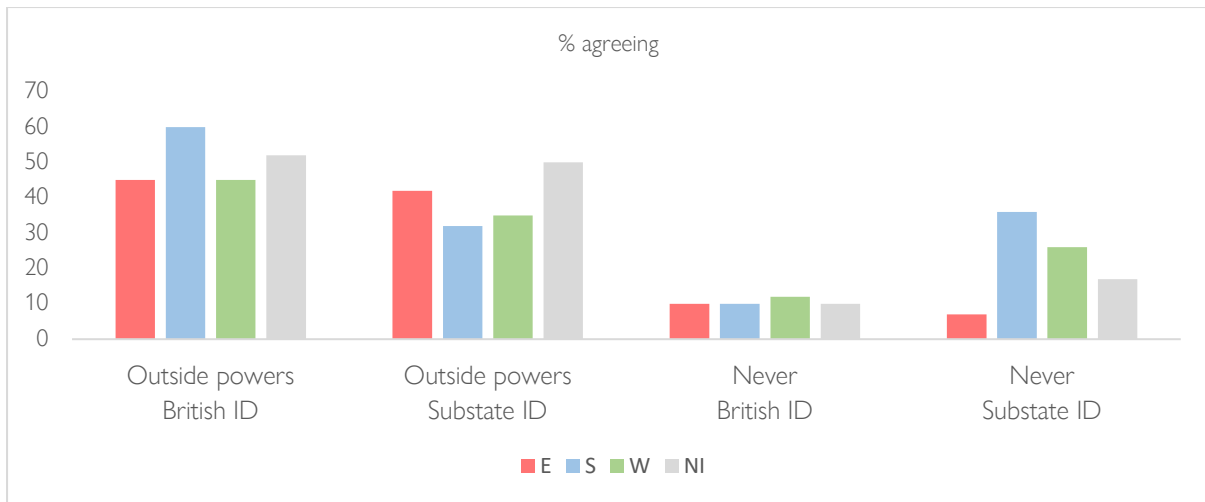
**Figure 2.5** When should UK Government be able to block the activities of devolved governments?



*Question: The current devolution settlements allows the UK government to block various activities of the devolved legislatures under certain conditions. In which circumstances, if any, should the UK Government attempt to block the activities of devolved administrations? If they believe that the devolved body is acting outside its allotted powers; If they believe that the devolved body is acting within its allotted powers but they don't agree with the policy aims; Whenever they want, the UK Parliament is supreme; Never, the devolved bodies have their own democratic mandates; Don't know.*

Another point to note is that breaking down responses by national identity discloses interesting differences in responses to the ‘never’ and ‘acting outside their allotted powers’ options (Fig. 2.6). Those respondents outside England with the strongest sub-state identities are more likely than English identifiers to prefer the ‘never’ option – it has plurality support among them in Scotland. Support for this option is, however, substantially lower among British identifiers.

**Figure 2.6** ‘Outside allotted powers’ and ‘never’ responses, by national identity



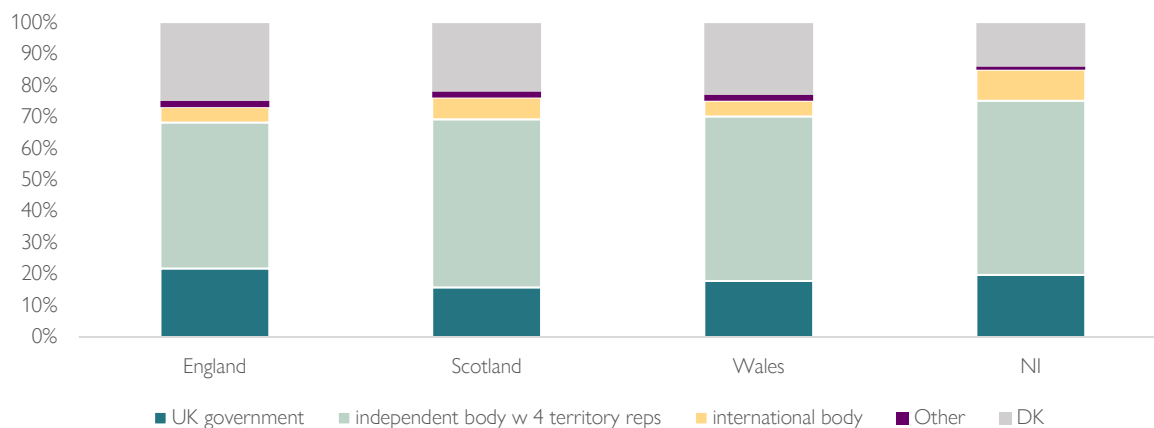
Turning our focus to those who say that the UK should intervene if the devolved legislatures are acting beyond their powers, British identifiers are generally very supportive of this view. Indeed, it is the plurality preference among British identifiers in Wales and the majority preference among British identifiers in Scotland, and Northern Ireland. By contrast, sub-state identifiers take a dimmer view in Scotland and Wales and are more supportive of the ‘never’ option.

### 2.1.5 Dispute Resolution

Dispute resolution has long been a key point of contention between the UK and devolved governments. It is likely to remain so given that the new arrangements introduced in early 2022, even when functioning (they ceased to function during the Truss premiership later that year), have done little or nothing to address devolved concerns over how financial dispute are resolved. We asked respondents in all four territories for their views offering the following response options: that disputes be resolved by the UK government; that disputes be resolved by an independent body consisting of representatives of the four territories; the disputes be resolved by an international body; or that disputes be resolved in some other (unspecified) way. A ‘don’t know’ option was also included while we asked respondents who selected the ‘something else’ option to write in their preferred solution.

As is clear from Fig. 2.7, there is very strong support for the proposition that disputes between devolved and central UK government be resolved by an independent body whose members consist of representatives from all four constituent territories. Support is remarkably consistent across UK, ranging from a low of 47% in England to a majority of voters in Scotland (54%), Wales (53%) and Northern Ireland (56%). Moreover, it is a preference that is equally popular across all national identity groups. It is worth noting explicitly that this response option – the one that is closest to the spirit of entrenchment – is very much more popular than what might be termed the parliamentary sovereignty option, namely that in the case of any disputes the UK government should decide. Support for the latter option ranges from a low of 16% in Scotland to a high of 22% in England, with support in Wales at 18% and Northern Ireland at 20%.

Figure 2.7 How should disputes between different levels of government in the UK be resolved?

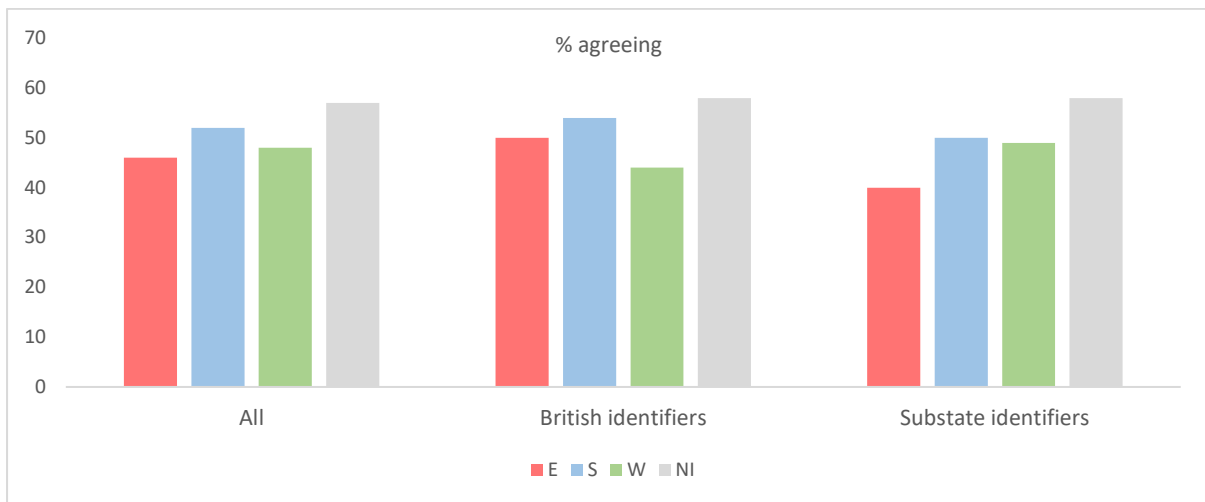


Question: When people talk about changing the way the UK is governed, this sometimes includes a body that can resolve disputes between levels of government. Thinking about possible arrangements for managing disputes between different levels of government in the UK who do you think should have the final say? The UK government; An independent UK body with equal representation from England, Scotland, Wales and NI; An independent international body; Something else; Don't Know.

### 2.1.6 Lords Reform

Reforming the second chamber at Westminster to allow for territorial representation has long been a staple of proposals to reform the UK constitution and ensure what is now known as the entrenchment of devolution. We asked respondents if they thought the House of Lords should be reformed to enable formal representation from the four constituent parts of the UK? Their responses are set out in Fig. 2.8. Given that we include don't know responses in the overall totals, it is clear that there is a high level of support for the idea of securing territorial representation in a reformed second chamber, ranging from 46% in England to 57% in Northern Ireland. This is also another relatively rare example of British identifiers and sub-state identifiers in the devolved territories having broadly similar (positive) views. England is something of an outlier in that its British identifiers are notably more supportive (at 50%) than English identifiers (at 40%), yet even the latter represents a clear plurality of views among that group of voters.

**Figure 2.8 Territorial representation in Lords, all and by national identity (Strongly agree and Tend to Agree combined)**

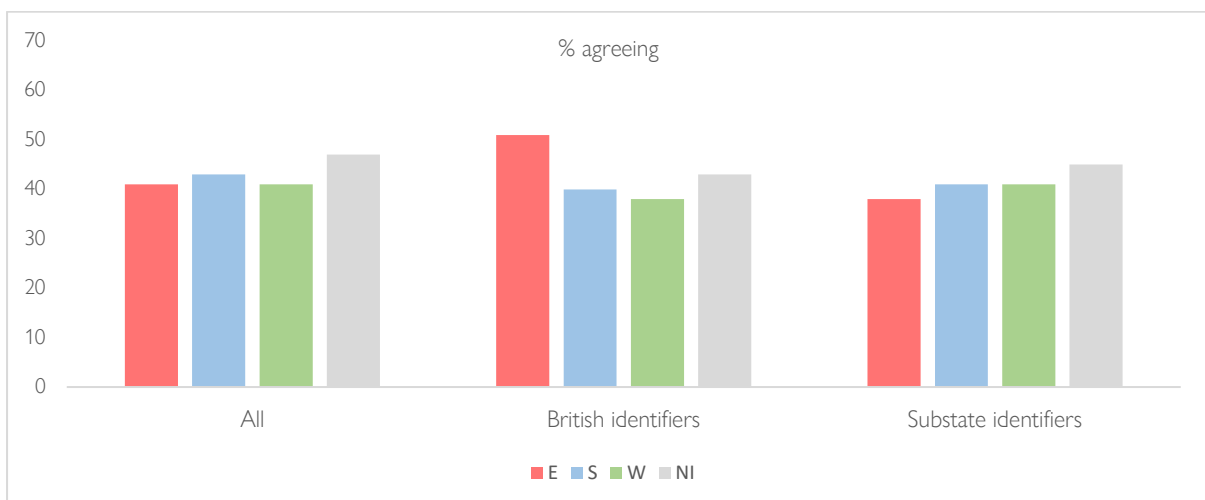


Question: When people talk about changing the way the UK is governed, this sometimes includes reforming the House of Lords to formally represent the four territories of the UK. To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree that this would improve the governance of the UK? Agree strongly; Tend to agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Tend to disagree; Disagree strongly; Don't know.

#### 2.1.10 A Written Constitution

One way of entrenching devolution would be to introduce a written or codified constitution that does precisely that. Such a constitution would certainly be required if the UK were to become a federal state. As such, we include consideration on public attitudes to a written constitution at the end of this section.

**Figure 2.9 Support for a written constitution for the UK, all and by national identity**



Question: When people talk about changing the way the UK is governed, this sometimes includes a written constitution that identifies the rights and responsibilities of citizens as well as the powers of different levels of government. To what extent, if

*at all, do you agree or disagree that this would improve the governance of the UK? Agree strongly; Tend to agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Tend to disagree; Disagree strongly; Don't know.*

Fig. 2.9 demonstrates the existence of significant support for what would be a revolutionary departure from English/UK constitutional tradition – especially as ‘don’t know’ responses are included in the overall totals. Overall support for a written constitution ranges from a low of 41% in England to a high 46% in Northern Ireland. Disaggregating responses by national identity we find particularly strong support from British identifiers in England. That said, a plurality of both British and sub-state identifiers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland support a written constitution for the state.

## 2.2 A federal UK

The idea of federalising the UK has long antecedents (Kimble 1997), is a long-standing policy commitment for the Liberal Democrats, has featured in various forms in recent debates within the Labour party (e.g. Griffin 2022), and also received support from the right-wing, free market think tank the Institute of Economic Affairs (Booth 2015). Yet while various blueprints have been put forward, there is no consensus on the form that such a state should take. In the following section, therefore, we consider public attitudes to three issues that are germane to *any* discussion of a federal UK. The first is the question of how England should be governed. It has long been argued that – perhaps most famously in the report of the Kilbrandon Commission – that England is simply too big to be incorporated as a single unit into any viable federal structure. With England home to around 85% of the state’s population, it is argued that an English parliament and government would inevitably compete for legitimacy and status with the state-wide, federal equivalents. Yet the alternative approach – dividing England into smaller regional units – is bedevilled by both the absence of consensus over their boundaries, as well as the legacy of many centuries of what can only be considered (is in comparative terms, at least) highly-centralised governance. Here we take a further look at attitudes to **English governance** (as previously discussed in Wyn Jones et al. 2012, 2013; Henderson and Wyn Jones 2021a), considering also the views of the electorates in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

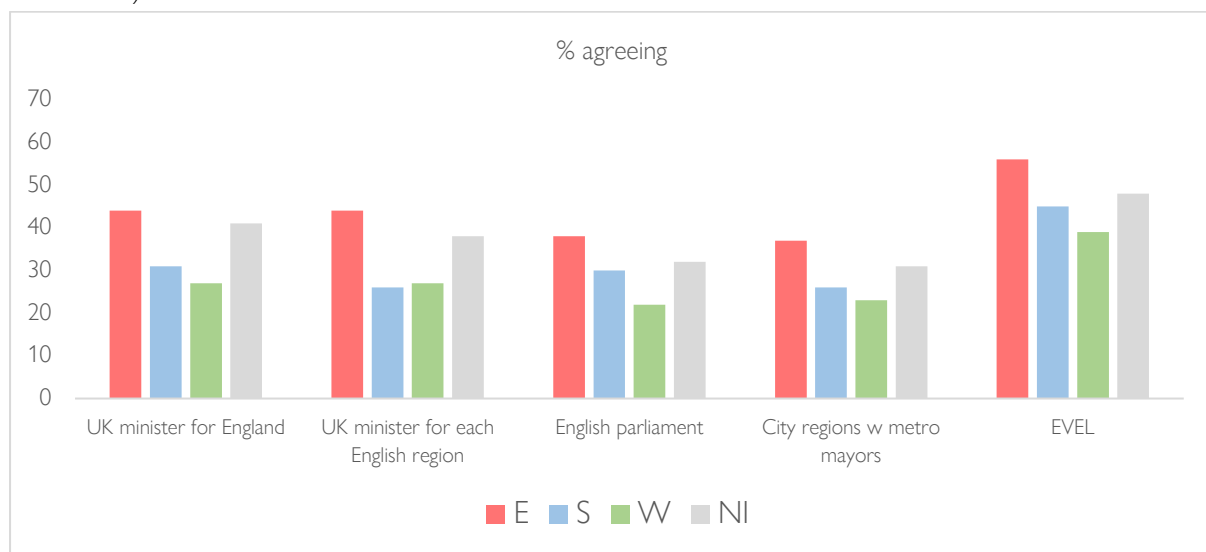
Whatever the units involved, **shared sovereignty** lies at the heart of any federal arrangement. Secondly, therefore, we gauge attitudes towards shared sovereignty. We do this by exploring views across the UK about the prospect of the UK parliament sharing sovereignty with the devolved legislatures. While this is, of course, not exactly analogous with a properly federal arrangement, absent an agreed blueprint for a federal UK this approach has the virtue of allowing us to render concrete what might otherwise be a very abstract question.

As already noted, much of the discussion around federalism revolves around the balance between ‘shared rule’ and ‘self rule’. Given this, in the third and final part of this section, we explore public attitudes towards **cooperation between different levels of government**. Again, we have attempted to render this question concrete by focusing on relationships between the UK and devolved governments.

### 2.2.1 English governance

We begin by exploring general preferences for English governance. As response options we have included the various options that have been canvassed in recent years, namely: a UK Minister for England; UK Ministers for each English region; an English Parliament; city regions with metro mayors; and English Votes for English Laws. While this is an issue that we have polled regularly in England for over a decade, this is the first time we have been able to analyse findings alongside comparable data from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (Fig. 2.10).

**Figure 2.10** How should England be governed? (Strongly Agree and Tend to Agree combined)



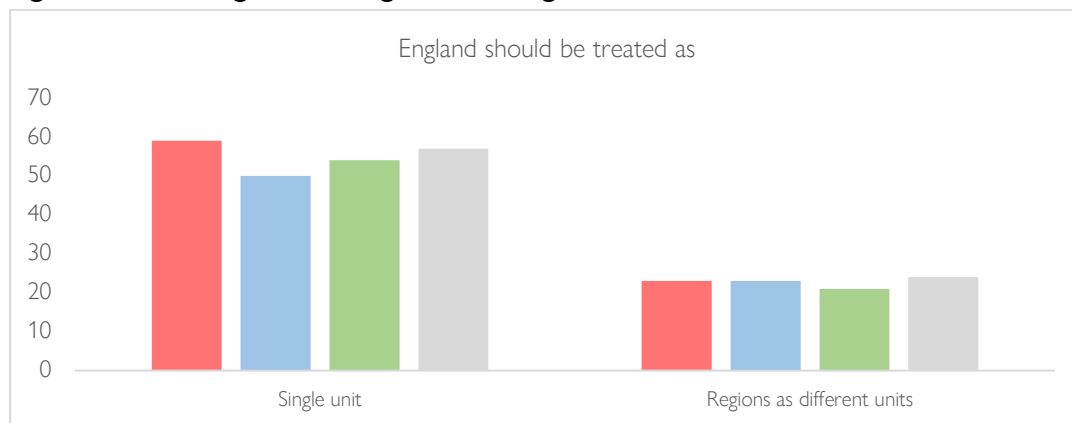
*Question: In the past five years the following ideas for changes to how England is governed have been proposed. Please indicate to what extent, if at all, you agree or disagree with each idea: A UK government minister for England; UK government ministers for each of the regions of England; An English Parliament; Regional authorities based around the major cities in England (sometimes called city-regions led by metro mayors); Changing the rules in the UK parliament so that only English MPs can vote on laws that would apply only in England (sometimes called English votes for English laws). Strongly agree; Tend to agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Tend to disagree; Strongly disagree; Don't know.*

As is clear, EVEL is the most popular option for English governance. This has been the case in England since we began asking about it (Wyn Jones et al. 2012), but it is also the most popular option for England in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. As we are primarily interested in

federalism in the current context, we shall seek to discuss EVEL in any more detail here (we return to this matter in Chapter 3 below) beyond making two points. The first is to point out that, when a minimalist version of EVEL was enacted (between 2015 and 2020 – it was finally abolished in 2021), our research suggests that only a tiny proportion of the electorate noticed (Henderson 2021). Secondly, despite the very, very hostile response to EVEL from MPs from Scotland and Wales, who claimed that it created ‘two classes of MP’ (BBC 2014), this hostility was not shared by the electorates outside England.

More generally, in England itself we have consistently found, for more than a decade, that support for what might be termed regionalist solutions is low. Our 2023 data demonstrates that support for city regions with metro mayors, namely the preferred policy for both the Conservative and Labour parties, ties with support for an English parliament as the least popular option. The lack of popularity of either option among the English electorate is an obvious problem for advocates of a federal UK, but is also striking that they are even less popular in the non-English parts of the UK.

**Figure 2.11** England - a single unit or regionalised?



*Question: Thinking about possible arrangements for making laws for England, two options are often mentioned. If you had to choose, which ONE would you prefer? For the whole of England to be treated as a single unit; For each English region to be treated as a different unit; Other; Don't know.*

Given that the relative size of England is cited as one of the key barriers to a workable scheme of federal government for the UK, we asked our respondents whether they thought that England should be treated as a single unit or there should be different regional units within England. When framed in this way (see Fig. 2.11), it is clear that not only do a majority of voters in England believe that England should be treated as a single unit (57%), this is also the strong preference in Scotland (50%), Wales (54%) and Northern Ireland (57%). It is also worth noting that in England, this view commands majority support not only among those who identify as English (72%) but also among British identifiers (53%). Herein lies a considerable obstacle to proponents of reform. The option that is usually regarded as least destabilising for the state as a whole – dividing England into regions



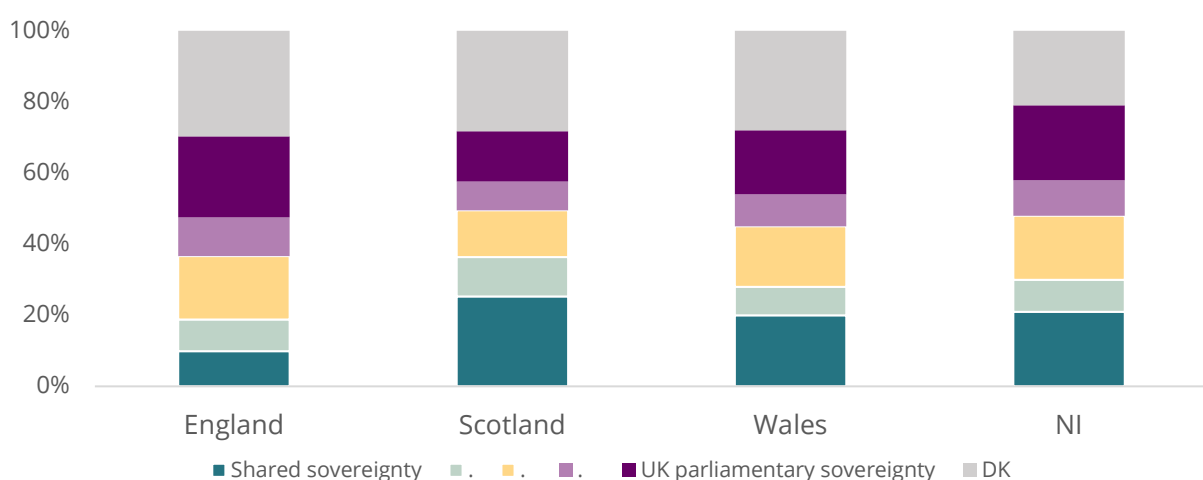
that are more comparable in size to the existing devolved territories – is not the preferred option in England itself.

### 2.2.2 Shared sovereignty

Federalism – a system of shared sovereignty – would clearly represent a fundamental rupture with the English constitutional tradition of parliamentary sovereignty and, relatedly, many of the structures and practices of the UK state as currently constituted. Yet even accepting this, to seek to explore public attitudes towards sharing sovereignty purely in the abstract – in the context of hypothetical relationships between hypothetical or at least radically reconstituted bodies – seems unlikely to provide much purchase on real world political views across the UK. Instead, therefore, we questioned respondents on their attitudes to the sharing of sovereignty between the UK parliament and the devolved legislatures, with our question also seeking to clarify in straightforward terms what is meant by sovereignty. Even accepting the inherent limitations of this approach, the responses (set out in Fig. 2.12) are illuminating.

The first thing to note is that proportion of respondents choosing the don't know option is relatively high at around 3 in 10 of our respondents in England, Scotland and Wales – though around 2 in 10 in Northern Ireland. In addition, the proportion choosing the mid-point of the 5 point scale between shared and UK parliamentary sovereignty is also relatively high in England (18%), Wales (17%) and Northern Ireland (18%), though slightly smaller in Scotland (13%). All of this should be born in mind when interpreting the findings as it may well indicate that this is not an issue about which much of the electorate has particularly strong or developed views.

**Figure 2.12** Shared vs UK parliamentary sovereignty



Question: When people talk about changing the way the UK is governed, this sometimes includes the notion that the UK Parliament should share sovereignty (its supreme power to make laws) with the devolved legislatures. Other people argue that the sovereignty of the UK Parliament should remain undiluted. On the following scale, which comes closest to your view?

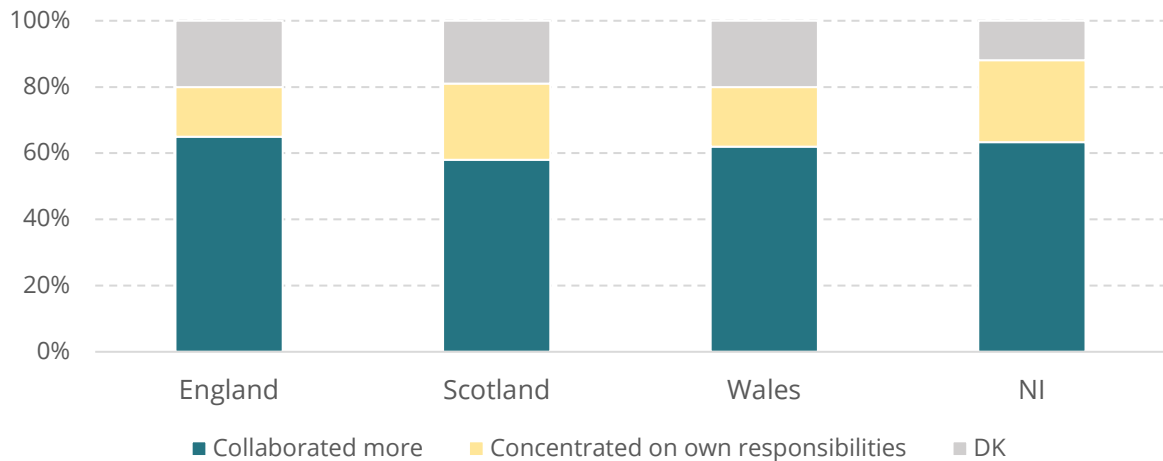
That said, it seems clear that there is more support for shared sovereignty in the devolved territories than in England. In Scotland, indeed, there is a clear preference for shared sovereignty. Views in Wales and Northern Ireland are evenly split between the shared and parliamentary sovereignty camp (with the caveat that the proportion of don't knows is smaller in the latter territory). On this evidence, identifying a mutually acceptable way forward is clearly a challenge.

### 2.2.3 Collaboration between different levels of government

Given the focus on 'shared rule' and 'self-rule' that characterises much of the academic discussion of federalism, we were eager to discover where the various electorates across the UK stood on this matter. We did so by asking our respondents whether they thought that the governance of the UK would be improved if the UK and devolved governments collaborated more or concentrated on their own responsibilities. This framing is deliberately designed to portray each side of the argument in a positive light. Asking about either in isolation would have led to strong agreement with both, but this double-ended scale allows us to understand how respondents react to the trade-off.

The responses were emphatic (Fig. 2.13). Significant majorities in all four territories, ranging from a low of 58% in Scotland to a high of 65% in England, favoured more collaboration – this again in a context in which the don't knows are included in the overall totals. Yet interpreting the implications of these findings is far from straightforward. Other findings already reported in the previous section suggest that the public do not support greater UK involvement in areas of devolved responsibility, suggesting that support for 'more collaboration' should not be interpreted as support for an enhanced UK government role in areas of policy that have been devolved. Relatedly, we might also recall that, as reported our report on *The Ambivalent Union*, there was strong public support for some of the more controversial differences in the various governments' approaches to the Covid pandemic, including travel bans. Yet it seems equally unlikely that these findings should be read as implying that the public across the four territories of the UK would be supportive of greater devolved level involvement in the decision-making of the central state. As we say: interpreting the significance of these findings is not straightforward!

**Figure 2.13** UK governance: Collaborate vs Focus on own responsibilities?



Question: Which comes closest to your view? UK governance would be improved if the UK and devolved administrations collaborated more on issues of common interest; UK governance would be improved if the UK and devolved administrations concentrated on their own responsibilities; Don't know.

## 2.3 Independence/Reunification

Given the political salience of Scottish independence before and after the 2014 independence referendum, as well as the surge of interest in and discussion of both Irish unification and Welsh independence since the 2016 Brexit referendum, a great deal of polling has been undertaken in order to explore public attitudes towards these matters in the territories concerned. In this section we utilise our '360 degree' survey to supplement this work, doing so in two, inter-related ways. First, we compare patterns of support for independence/reunification across the four constituent parts of the state. Secondly, we consider attitudes towards the territorial integrity of the UK as currently constituted, demonstrating the existence of a distinctly ambivalent view of the union, especially in its largest part. It should be noted that in both cases, we are updating with more recent data the analysis published in our report on *The Ambivalent Union* (pp. 23-29).

### 2.3.1 Patterns of support for independence/reunification

It has become customary to survey respondents about their attitudes to independence/reunification in a Yes/No binary format, almost always – as already noted – in the context of their ‘own’ part of the state only. We adopt a different approach asking respondents to locate their views on independence/reunification on a -10 to +10 scale (where positive numbers imply support for change) and for each of the four territories of the state. The responses are visualised in Fig. 2.14 with each dot representing what the electorate of that place thinks should be the future for the stated territory (in a horizontal row.) Thus, the top row provides a comparative view of what voters in each of the four territories think, on average, of English independence.

As is clear, attitudes hover around the midpoint – average responses range from -4 to +2 so it is not the case that there is, on average, either overwhelming support or overwhelming rejection for maintaining the current border of the UK. Support for an independent England and an independent Wales is below the midpoint of 0. Outside Scotland support for Scottish independence it also below 0 although Scottish opinion is almost exactly on the midpoint (at -0.1). Attitudes towards reunification in Northern Ireland are strikingly different. Whereas attitudes in Northern Ireland itself falls very near the midpoint (+0.3), the electorates in England, Scotland and Wales are each more supportive in the aggregate of reunification.

Figure 2.14 Support for independence/reunification by territory (No to Yes)

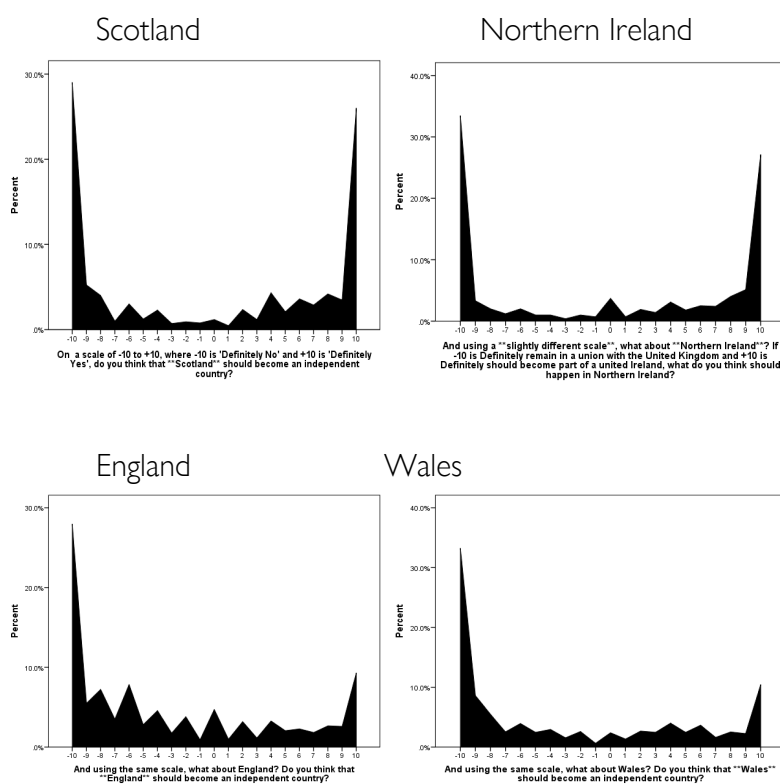


Question: On a scale of -10 to +10, where -10 is Definitely No and +10 is Definitely Yes, do you think that [x] should become an independent country? Etc.

The focus on aggregate scores tells only part of the story, however. In Figure 2.15 we show the distribution of support for independence/reunification among respondents for their own territory.

This demonstrates that the even if the aggregate results tend to cluster around the midpoint (Fig 2.14), underlying this is set of highly polarised preferences. In other words, attitudes at the individual level towards the position of one’s own territory within the state are far from ambivalent but rather tend to be very definite. We also observe a clear difference between Scotland and Northern Ireland, on the one hand, and England and Wales, on the other hand. In the former we find U-shaped curves with almost equally strong support and opposition to independence/reunification at the poles of our -10/+10 scale. This is in contrast with the latter where the balance of opinion is opposed to change.

Figure 2.15 Distribution of support for independence/reunification in own territory



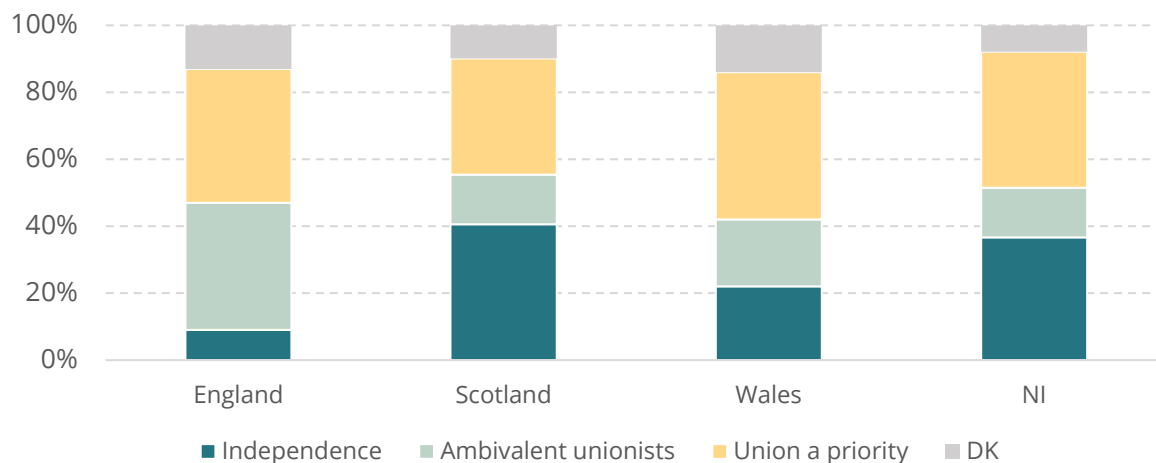
### 2.3.2 Territorial integrity and ambivalent unionism

Maintaining the territorial integrity of the state is regarded as one of the most important – if not the most important – political priority in most political systems. Our findings with regards attitudes towards the prospect of a united Ireland in England, Scotland and Wales have already demonstrated that this is not the case in the UK. This is further underlined by responses to another question which probes constitutional attitudes towards the territorial integrity of the state as a whole offering three substantive response options: I support independence/reunification for my part of the state; I don’t support independence/reunification and it’s a priority for me that the union remains as it is; and, I don’t support independence/reunification for my own part of the state, but if one or more other parts of the UK decide to go their own way then so be it. In our

previous work we have identified the latter position as **ambivalent unionism** (Henderson and Wyn Jones 2021b, 2023).

Fig. 2.16 sets out the responses to this question in the 2023 survey. Again, we find further evidence of the polarisation of the electorates in Scotland and Northern Ireland: roughly equal proportions of the electorates support radical change or prioritise maintaining the union in its current form, with in both cases some 15% adopting the ambivalent unionist position. England is home to the largest group of ambivalent unionists: the proportion of the electorate adopting the ambivalent unionist position is roughly equal to the proportion who say that they prioritise maintaining the union in its current form, with only 9% choosing the independence option. (We note that this represents a drop in support for English independence in our 2021 survey when the equivalent figure was 16%) In Wales, the proportion of who say they prioritise maintaining the union in its current form (44%) is twice as large as that choosing the independence option (22%), with another 20% opting for the ambivalent union position.

**Figure 2.16** Unionists, Ambivalent Unionists and Secessionists



Question: Which comes closest to your view? I don't want independence for Wales but if one or more other parts of the UK decide they want to go their own way then so be it; I want Wales to become independent from the rest of the UK; I don't want independence for Wales and it's a priority for me that the UK stays as it is, a union of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; Don't know. [And so on]

Thus, overall, if we combine those who actively support independence/reunification with the ambivalent unionists and regard this group as representing those who are not fully committed to the territorial integrity of the state as current constructed, we find that it is larger than the group who view maintaining the union in its current form as a priority in every part of the state except Wales. Indeed, if we exclude the don't know respondents, then – outwith Wales – we reach more than 50% of electorate in every part of the UK. And of course, as we saw in Fig. 2.14, when asked specifically about Northern Ireland, the Welsh electorate's support for the union as currently shaped also falls away.



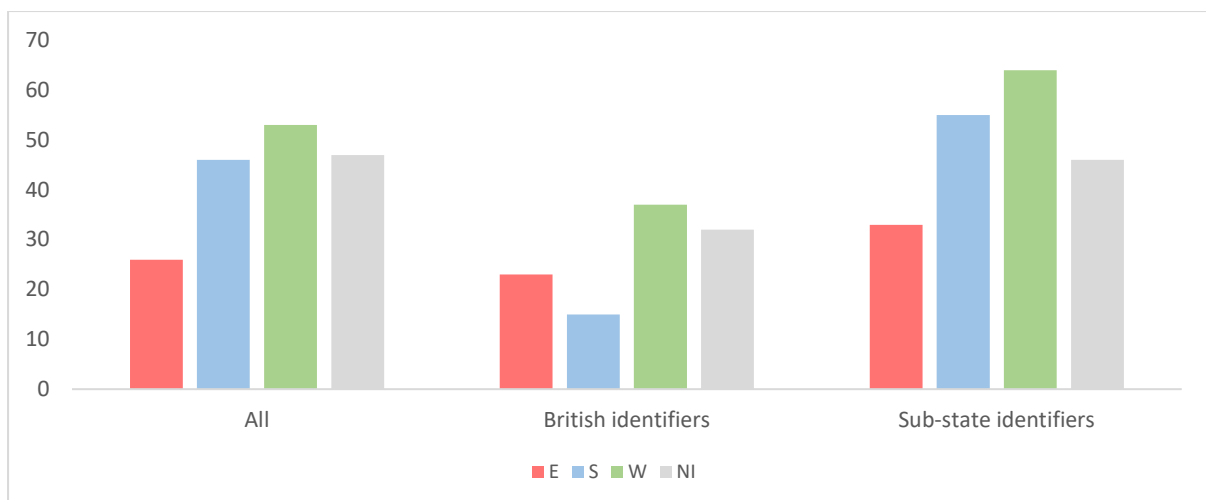
### 3. Challenges

In the previous chapter we presented and analysed evidence from the 2023 State of the Union Survey as it pertains to the three scenarios for the possible constitutional future of Wales currently under consideration by the Independent Commission. Here we consider evidence from the same source which serves to underline the challenges facing anyone seriously considering the future of the UK. Central to these challenges are the ways in which different cleavages – partisan, constitutional, national identity – interact with views and preferences. Again, we take the opportunity to update parts of the analysis presented in our report on *The Ambivalent Union* using more recent data.

#### 3.1 Territorial grievance

We have long noted the existence of a sense of territorial grievance across different parts of the UK – a sense that some parts (usually one’s own) get less than their due, while others get more (Henderson and Wyn Jones 2021a, 2021b, 2023; Wyn Jones et al. 2012, 2013). Here we focus on a question in the 2023 survey that asks respondents whether they believe that different parts of the state get more than their fair share, less than their fair share or about their fair share of resources (for a full overview of the 2021 results see Henderson and Wyn Jones 2023: 14). For the sake of clarity, we display (in Fig. 3.1) only those proportions who that say that their own part gets *less* than its fair share i.e. those in England who say that England gets less than its fair share (and so on). We further disaggregate responses by national identity.

Figure 3.1 My part gets less than its fair share, all and by national identity (%)





Question: Would you say that compared with other parts of the UK, each of these gets pretty much their fair share of government spending, more than their fair share, or less than their fair share? England; Scotland; Wales; Northern Ireland. Gets their fair share; Gets more than their fair share; Gets less than their fair share; Don't know

There are several things to note here. The first is that respondents in the devolved territories are much more likely than English respondents to say that their own part gets less than its fair share. Confirming our previous findings, we find that this view is strongest in Wales.

But as is also clear, there are significant differences in views across different national identity groups. In each case, British identifiers are less likely to believe that their own part of the state gets less than its fair share – particularly so in Scotland – while, conversely, sub-state identifiers are much more likely to believe that this is the case. In other words, the sense of grievance about resources is tied to national identity. It is also the case, however, that the degree of polarisation between identity groups on this matter varies significantly across the state. It is more muted in England and Northern Ireland (where the gap between the views of the identity groups stands at 10 point and 14 points, respectively) than in Wales and Scotland (where the gap stretches to 27 points and an extraordinary 40 points.)

## 3.2 The perils of Muscular Unionism

The approach adopted to by the UK state to its relationships with the devolved governments in recent years has been characterised as ‘muscular unionism’, a term first applied to Scottish Labour (Henderson 2020). We have developed a scale in order explore the extent to which public attitudes are consistent with this view of the union, which is explained in depth in *The Ambivalent Union* report.

### Box 3.1

<b>British values are the glue that holds this state together</b>	Vs	There is no such thing as British values, just different values in different parts of the state
People support constitutional change because there are fundamental problems with the current arrangements	Vs	<b>People support constitutional change because they don't know enough about the benefits of the union</b>
<b>The UK Government should spend more time explaining the benefits of the union</b>	Vs	The UK government should spend more time listening when people say there are problems with the union
The UK Government should allow referendums on constitutional change whenever particular regions or nations want them	Vs	<b>The UK Government should not allow referendums that threaten to break up the state</b>

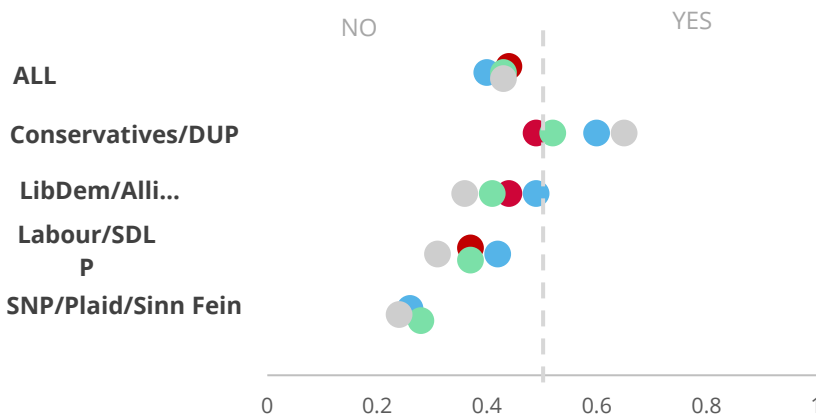
**The UK Government should spend more money in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to highlight the benefits of the union**

Vs

The UK Government should target spending based on economic need not political priorities

The questions that form the basis of the scale are listed in Box 3.1, with the bolded option corresponding to the muscular unionist position. We recode responses to run as a plot, flipping the direction of some questions so that higher numbers in each case imply greater support for muscular unionism. The result from our 2023 survey are set out in Fig. 3.2. For ease of interpretation across the state, we have grouped together broadly similar parties although we note that this clearly involved combining apples with pears. Compared to our 2021 data, we find attitudes across the four electorates have become more closely aligned as part of what is, overall, a slight shift away from muscular unionism. But as is readily apparent, there remain significant differences both *across different* political parties and *within* the same party in different parts of the state. Most obviously, Welsh and Scottish Conservatives are more likely to hold muscular unionist views than their English counterparts – indeed the views of Scottish Conservatives on the union are closer to those of DUP supporters than they are to those of English Conservatives. Scottish Labour and Scottish Liberal Democrat are also more muscular in their approach to the union than their party colleagues across the rest of Britain.

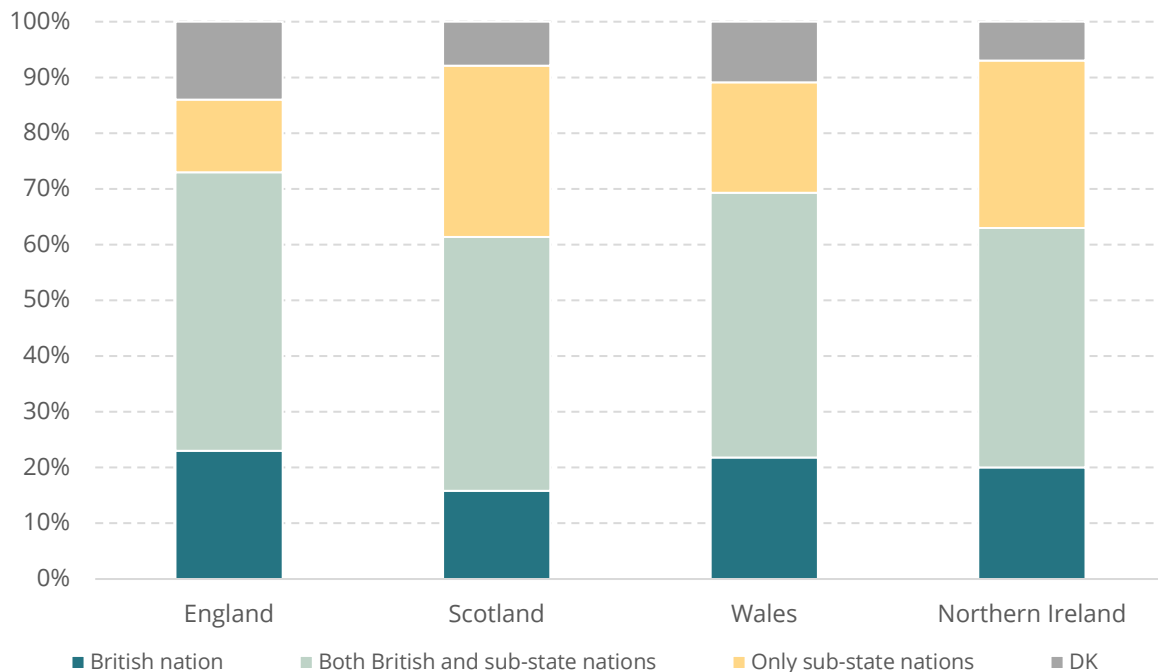
Figure 3.2 Muscular unionism, by 2019 vote



Inter and intra-party differences also come to the fore when we analyse responses to a survey question that asks respondents how many nations there are in the UK using the following response options: only one British nation; only sub-state nations; or both British and sub-state nations? (A don't know option was also included.) The plurality response in each of the four territories is that there are both British and sub-state nations (although with sizeable minorities in both Scotland and Northern Ireland choosing the only sub-state nation option.)

But when we focus in on the ‘only one British nation’ response by party support (again using 2019 vote as our guide) we find some striking differences (Table 3.1). Conservative supporters are much more likely to believe this than supporters of the Labour party, but in the case of Scottish Conservatives their views are closer to those of DUP supporters than their English Tory counterparts (for comparable 2021 data see Henderson and Wyn Jones 2023: 34; also Henderson and Wyn Jones 2023). In the case of Labour party supporters, its supporters in Wales are least likely to believe that there is only one British nation. In short, we are confronted not only with different ideas about what (if anything) needs to be done to reform the state, but – not unrelatedly – with fundamental differences of opinion about nature of the of state we’re living in, with these differences not only manifested across parties but also present within the governing and potentially future governing parties themselves.

**Figure 3.3** How many nations and where are they?



Question: Which of the following comes closest to your views: There is only one nation in the UK, the British nation; There is no British nation, only separate nations (e.g. Wales) in different parts of the state; There is both a British nation as well as other nations in different parts of the UK; Don't know.

**Table 3.1** Only one British nation by party support

	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
Con/DUP	30	41	38	48

Lab/SDLP	18	17	12	5
----------	----	----	----	---

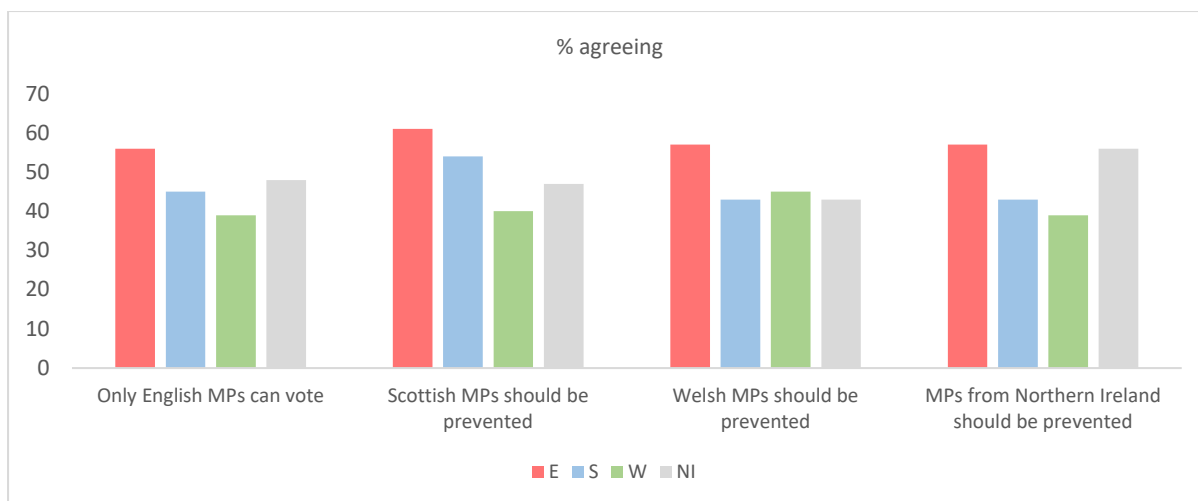
Results should be read across rows and columns. Thus, 30% of English Conservatives believe there is only one nation, the British nation.

### 3.3 The English Question redux?

In section 3.1 we highlighted the existence of a sense of territorial grievance focused on the perceived unfairness of the ways in which resources are distributed across the state. It transpired that, in that case, the sense of grievance was in fact lower in England than in the other constituent parts of the state. It was also lower among English identifiers in England than it was among sub-identifiers in other parts of the state. Yet, there is a long-standing sense that people in England have reason to be – or might become – particularly aggrieved about the impact of the current asymmetric arrangements for devolution. In the 1970s this was crystallised by way of the ‘West Lothian Question’: how could it be right that non-English MPs would still be able to vote on legislation that applied in England only when, after devolution, members who represent English constituencies would not be able to vote on matters that had been devolved to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland?

In 2011, the McKay Commission, recommended the introduction of a form of English Votes for English Laws (EVEL), this not only as a way of answering the ‘West Lothian Question’, but also in order to address what it regarded as a wider ‘English Question’. Namely, how could England (qua England) be given a voice in a context in which devolution had given both form and voice to political communities in the other constituent parts of the state (McKay Commission 2011)? In the event, as noted in Section 2.1.1 above, a minimalist form of EVEL was introduced in 2015 before being quietly abolished in 2021. In the intervening period not only did the EVEL procedure fail to have *any* substantive legislative impact; evidence from previous survey work suggests that only a tiny minority of the electorate even noticed its existence. Yet, this does not necessarily mean that the English question can or should be ignored – as responses to our 2023 survey make clear.

Figure 3.4 EVEL and the impact of framing



Question: In the past five years the following ideas for changes to how England is governed have been proposed. Please indicate to what extent, if at all, you agree or disagree with each idea: [...] Changing the rules in the UK parliament so that only English MPs can vote on laws that would apply only in England (sometimes called English votes for English laws). Strongly agree; Tend to agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Tend to disagree; Strongly disagree; Don't know. Thinking about [x], to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? [X] MPs should be prevented from voting on laws that apply only to England. Strongly agree; Tend to agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Tend to disagree; Strongly disagree; Don't know.

Let us first return to EVEL (Fig. 3.4). There are several ways of exploring attitudes on this matter. We have asked about it in the context of English governance: should only English MPs be allowed to vote on legislation that applies only in England? But we have also asked about it in terms of *excluding* MPs from other parts of the UK. We compare the responses in Fig 3.4. The first thing to note is that, however the question is framed, overall support for EVEL is very high – especially given that the don't know respondents are included in the overall totals. Support is highest of all in England and, strikingly, increases still further when EVEL is framed in terms of excluding others – and especially when mention is made of Scotland.

But, counterintuitively for some, no doubt, we also find that – outside England – every electorate seems most supportive of the exclusion of their *own* territory's MPs from legislating on English matters. Thus, support for EVEL in Wales is highest when it is framed as excluding Welsh MPs, highest in Scotland when it is framed as excluding Scottish MPs, and so on. It is important to note, however, that some of this enthusiasm is driven by large gaps in the responses of different national identity groups.

In England, there are large gaps between identity groups, with English identifiers consistently more supportive of excluding Scottish (72%), Welsh (68%) or Northern Irish MPs (67%), with scores for British identifiers typically fifteen points lower. In Scotland, by contrast, British identifiers are most supportive of excluding Scottish MPs. Thus, 52% of Scottish identifiers but 60% of British identifiers in Scotland support the exclusion of Scottish MPs. However, when our Scottish

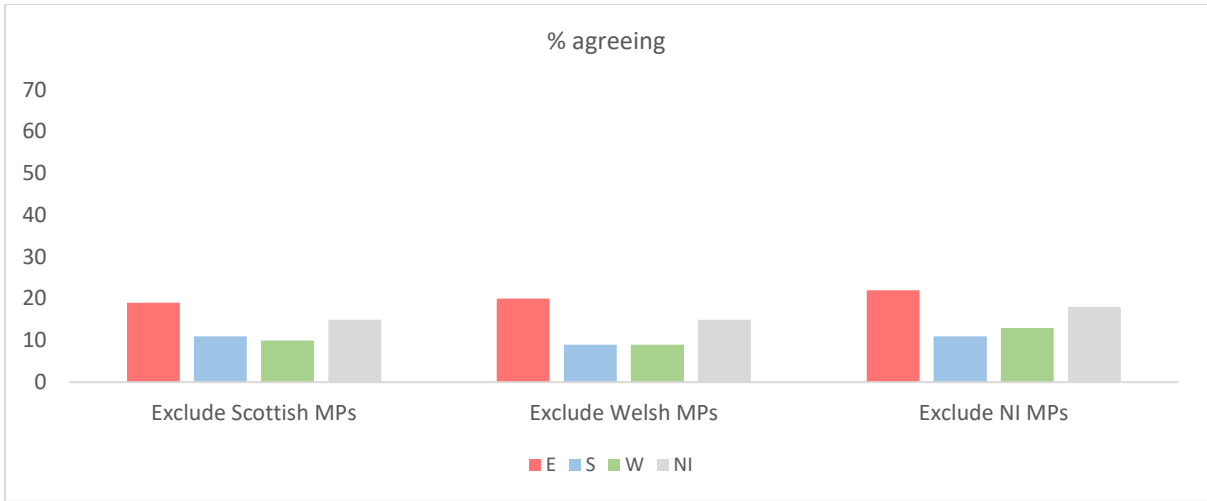
respondents were asked about excluding Welsh MPs, support among Scottish identifier support drops to 43% while among British identifier support drops to 46%. In Wales there are small gaps across the identity groups, and essential none when we talk about excluding Welsh MPs (British identifiers 47%, Welsh identifiers 46%). In Northern Ireland, we find virtually no gap in responses by national identity when asking about excluding Scottish and Welsh MPs, but a gap of more than 15 points opens-up when we ask about excluding Northern Ireland MPs, with Northern Irish identifiers most supportive of this (59%). In short, we are faced not only with framing effects (including only English vs excluding others), but also territorial and national identity effects as well.

The EVEL experiment between 2015 and 2021 can only be regarded as a failure: once it had been introduced, few seemed to have noticed its existence, while its death went almost completely unremarked and un-mourned. Yet it is also worth recalling that the model of EVEL implemented during this period (there are several potential models) was deliberately designed to be as unobtrusive as possible. As such, there was never any real prospect that it would create a forum through which an English political voice might emerge, even though this had been one of the McKay Commission's main hopes when it recommended its introduction.

Yet as is clear, the appetite for reform – particularly among English electors – remains overwhelming. For those who want to build a long-term settlement for the UK's territorial constitution via entrenchment, simply refusing to engage with this sentiment seems foolhardy. Especially given the evidence presented here that an exclusionary framing of EVEL – that is, a framing that is potentially more divisive – engenders even higher levels of public support. Meanwhile, however outraged elected politicians from the devolved territories themselves may be at the prospect of EVEL, their attitudes are emphatically not shared by most of living in those places, and especially not by those among them (the British identifiers) who tend to be most devoted to the union.

Beyond EVEL – and in particular in the wake of the way that potential SNP influence on a UK government played a central role in the Conservative party's campaign at the 2015 UK general election (Henderson and Wyn Jones 2021: 1-34) – we have sought views on the question of whether non-English MPs should be excluded from roles in the UK government. Fig. 3.5 focuses only on those who agree with the proposition. As is clear, overall support is relatively low – even if it is twice as high in England as it is in Scotland and Wales (with Northern Ireland occupying an intermediary position)

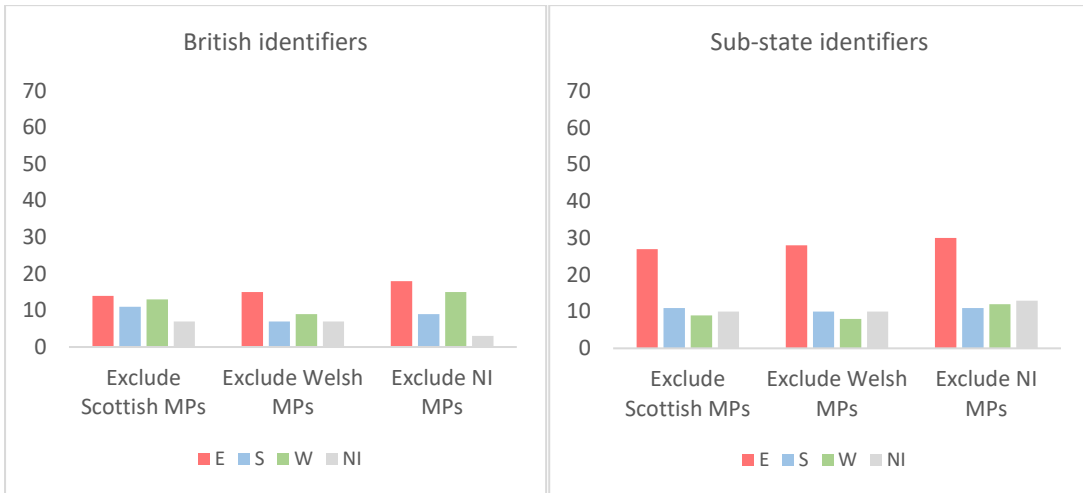
**Figure 3.5** MPs from the devolved territories should not be members of the UK Government? (Strongly agree and tend to agree combined)



Question: Thinking about [x], to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? No [X] MP should ever be a member of the UK government. Strongly agree; Tend to agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Tend to disagree; Strongly disagree; Don't know.

When we disaggregate responses by national identity, however, we find that while British identifiers as well as sub-state identifiers in Scotland, Wales and (to a lesser degree) Northern Ireland remain unenthusiastic about the prospect of excluding non-English MPs from positions in the UK government, there is very significant support for this among English identifiers (Fig. 3.6).

**Figure 3.6** MPs from the devolved territories should not be members of the UK Government, by national identity



This finding underlines two analytical points – and two challenges in the context of the current report. The first is a key theme in much of our previous work, namely that English national identity is unlike the other sub-state national identities found across the rest of the state (be that Scottish, Welsh, Irish or Northern Irish), aligning with very different ideas about the UK. Secondly – and

making the point as starkly as possible – for a considerable proportion of English identifiers, the UK state is and is for England.



## 4. Conclusion

In our Introduction we stressed some of the inherent limitations of surveying public attitudes towards different potential constitutional futures some of which, at least, have not been the subject of extensive public debates and whose very form remains somewhat opaque. It is also the case that debates about such proposals can be unevenly distributed throughout the UK, with respondents in the devolved territories typically more likely to be confronted by media reports of such issues than in England. One result is that we've had to approach some issues *indirectly* (because, when the exact details of any potential scheme are unclear, it makes sense to focus on first principles and issues that are bound to arise in the process of constitutional design) and/or *cumulatively* (focusing on attitudes towards elements of what might become part of a larger constitutional whole). Relatedly, a significant number of the survey measures on which we have reported here are also brand new – bespoke questions designed with the Commission's deliberations in mind. This is very much in keeping with the ethos of the Future of England and State of the Union surveys, namely that survey questions should reflect the constitutional debates of the day and develop iteratively over time. In the cases of our newest questions, there is obviously no timeseries of data to consider. While we have sought to guard against this, not least by integrating the analysis of questions with a longer history, it remains the case that be the case that alternative wordings or framings could have elicited different responses. That said, there are several Conclusions that may be drawn with relative confidence from our analysis.

First, and coming as no surprise to anyone who has taken even a cursory interest in attitudes towards the union, we have confirmed yet again that public attitudes are deeply polarised, varying by – inter alia – territory as well as patterns of national identity and partisan support. Not only that, but because of our '360 degree' approach, we clearly see the ways in which some of these variables align with union preferences in different and even contradictory ways in different parts of the state. This is true of British identity, for example – with British identifiers in different parts of the state holding at times opposing views – but there are also significant differences between supporters of the same political parties in different parts of the state, the latter raising potentially complex issues for key political actors.

Beyond that, we can also say the following about the three options discussed in Chapter 2. We found considerable common ground in many of the responses to our questions exploring public attitudes towards **entrenchment**, with that common ground distinctly helpful from the perspective of those who favour this approach. For example, on dispute resolution, territorial representation in the Lords, going beyond Sewel, protecting the powers and prerogatives of the devolved legislatures, and the prospect of a written constitution, attitudes across the state align in ways that are consistent with this entrenchment agenda. The widespread support for EVEL may also be

regarded as helpful if there is a willingness to heed the warning bells sounded in Chapter 3. This is not to say that such options will not confront other obstacles, but our evidence suggests they are not likely to face widespread public opposition.

Less straightforward in this context, however, is the continued support for parliamentary sovereignty, especially in England (assuming here that meaningful entrenchment must necessarily entail challenging that doctrine.) The low priority afforded to territorial-constitutional questions beyond those of one's own territory is another potential issue in that it makes it hard to envisage how the necessary political impetus and energy can be developed in to undertake serious reforms of the central state. Certainly, to the extent that the public's priorities matter, the shadow of the UK's relationship with the EU continues to loom large. The different attitudes towards muscular unionism may also matter. Given that muscular unionism is in many ways the antithesis of the entrenchment approach, it seems like that Scottish and Welsh Conservatives will begin from a position of opposition even if their English counterparts may potentially be more tractable.

Public attitudes towards **federalism** are more challenging for those who would advocate such a development. The widespread support for a written constitution is undoubtedly a positive, as is – more tentatively – the endorsement of greater cooperation between different levels of government (and **not** Westminster and Whitehall running roughshod.) But attitudes towards the governance of England – this most obviously in England itself, but also across the state – present significant challenges. There is clearly only very limited appetite for dividing England into Scotland-sized regions, a development regarded by most supporters of federalism as a prerequisite for success. It is also clear that a section of England's population views the British state as effectively their – that is England's – own, making it hard to envisage how any attempt to disentangle British from English functions could avoid generating very significant opposition. Moreover, while there is evidence of support for shared sovereignty in Scotland, it is largely limited to that part of the state. Finally, given just how much political time and effort would be required to federalise the UK, the fact that electors view dealing with the constitutional challenges facing other parts of the state as such a low priority remains another major barrier to this type of reform.

Turning to **independence** (or in the case of Northern Ireland, reunification) we have again noted the extent to which attitudes towards the union are ambivalent. Given that the aggregate position of English, Scottish and Welsh voters is that Northern Ireland should become part of a united Ireland, support for the territorial integrity of the state as currently constituted is clearly limited. Whatever their views at the prospect of the break-up of Britain, the break-up of the **UK** clearly holds few terrors here. In the aggregate, Scottish voters are evenly divided for and against their own independence while Northern Irish voters are evenly divided on the question of reunification. This is undeniably a state that is subject to major centrifugal pressures. It might also be argued that

the fact that voters in the different parts of the state are much more likely to prioritise the future of their own territory than the challenges faced by other parts means that changes around the periphery – up to and including independence and reunification – remain a significantly more realistic prospect than wholesale changes at the heart of the state.

That said, it is also the case that in no part of the state have pro-independence/pro-unification arguments persuaded a majority of that territory's inhabitants. But as we have seen, Wales remains the part of the state that is most supportive of the maintenance of a union with some if not necessarily all of its current constituent units. While developments elsewhere may yet see the union brought to an end, our survey of public attitudes suggests that the Welsh are unlikely to be the instigators of such a development.

## Bibliography

BBC (2014) 'Labour warns of 'two classes of MP' if England-only votes go ahead', BBC politics, 20 September 2014 (available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-29292719>)

Booth, P (2015) *Federal Britain: The case for decentralisation*, Institute of Economic Affairs (available at <https://iea.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Booth-Federal-Britain-Interactive.pdf>)

Daily Record (2014), 'The Vow', *Daily Record*, 16 September 2014.

Gething V (2022) 'Written statement: The UK Shared Prosperity Fund', 13 April 2022 (available at <https://www.gov.wales/written-statement-uk-shared-prosperity-fund>)

Griffin, SP (2021) *Remaking the British state: For the many, not the few* (available at <https://redpapercollective.net/?p=22>)

Henderson A (2020) 'Labour must be careful in chasing the unionist vote', *The Times*, 26 June 2020 (available at <https://thetimes.co.uk/article/labour-must-be-careful-in-chasing-the-unionist-vote-523t6gjjgv>)

Henderson A (2021) Oral evidence House of Commons Procedure Committee, Question 5, 3 March 2021 (available at <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/1775/html/>)

Henderson A and Wyn Jones R (2021a) *Englishness: The political force transforming Britain*, Oxford University Press

Henderson A and Wyn Jones R (2021b) 'Unions of the mind: The United Kingdom as a subjective state', *Comparative European Politics*, 19: 164–187

Henderson A and Wyn Jones R (2022) 'The Conservative party's national question', UK in a Changing Europe website, 15 September 2023. <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/the-conservative-party-national-question>

House of Commons Library (2021), *Transport funding for Wales and HS2*, House of Commons Research Briefing 22 October 2021 (available at <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cdp-2021-0168/>)

Jeffery C, Wyn Jones R, Henderson A, Scully R and Lodge G (2014) *Taking England Seriously: The new English politics*, ESRC Scottish Centre on Constitutional Change

Keble, J (1997) *Federal Britain: A History*, Routledge

Lamont J (2020) 'Brexit: Internal market bill will strengthen the Union, not weaken it' *The Times*, 16 September 2020

Morgan K and Wyn Jones R (2023) 'Brexit and the death of devolution', *Political Quarterly* (<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.13293>)

Roberts O (2012) *Wales and the reform of the House of the Lords* (National Assembly for Wales Research Paper) (available at <https://senedd.wales/media/lhehsdop/12-017-english.pdf>)

The Commission on the UK's Future (2022) *A New Britain: Renewing our democracy and building our economy. The report of the Commission on the UK's Future*, The Labour Party (<https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Commission-on-the-UKs-Future.pdf>)

The Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales (2022), *Interim report by The Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales* (available at <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2022-12/independent-commission-the-constitutional-future-of-wales-interim-report-december-2022.pdf>)

Welsh Government (2021) *Reforming our Union. Second Edition: June 2021* (available at <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-06/reforming-our-union-shared-governance-in-the-uk-june-2021-0.pdf>)

Wyn Jones R, Jeffery C, Lodge G, Scully R, Gottfried G, Henderson A and Wincott D (2013) *England and its two unions: The anatomy of a nation and its discontents*, IPPR. <https://www.ippr.org/publications/england-and-its-two-unions-the-anatomy-of-a-nation-and-its-discontents>

Wyn Jones R, Lodge G, Henderson A and Wincott D (2012) *The dog that finally barked: England as an emerging political community*, IPPR. <https://www.ippr.org/publications/the-dog-that-finally-barked-england-as-an-emerging-political-community>

# Appendix 1: Statistical Modelling

Although we have focussed in our report on the ways in which attitudes, expectations and preferences vary across the four territories of the UK, across national identities and partisan support, there are other factors that might influence political attitudes and behaviour. To see whether these factors are still relevant even when we control for other variables, but also to see if other demographic or socio-economic factors are significantly related to the themes in our report, we have constructed a series of models. For these we have recoded variables in the dataset, created a number of indices and run either linear or logistic regression models depending on whether the variables of interest are interval or binary in nature. This statistical appendix includes information on this recoding, and summarizes the results of these models.

## Coding variables

### Predictor variables

	Original variable	Recoded variable
Age	Respondents were asked to indicate their age	Runs from 0, youngest respondent (18), to 1, oldest respondent
Gender		Female (1, 0 otherwise)
Class	Original question has six categories A, B, C1, C2, D, E calculated from YouGov codes	ABC1 (1, 0 otherwise)
Education	Original measure contains 18 education codes	University degree (1, 0 otherwise)
Place of birth	Question asks where in the UK one was born, or if born outside the UK	Three new variables Born in the territory (1, 0 otherwise) Born in the rest of the UK (1, 0 otherwise) Born outside the UK (1, 0 otherwise)
National identity	We relied on the 'if you had to choose' question	Two new variables British (1, 0 otherwise) Relevant sub-state identity (1, 0 otherwise) In Northern Ireland, this is the 'Northern Irish' identity but we have added an Irish variable to the regressions (1, 0 otherwise)
Language	In Wales, respondents were asked if they were Welsh speakers. In England, respondents were asked if they could speak a language other than English	Welsh speaker (1, 0 otherwise) Other language (1, 0 otherwise)
Past UKGE vote	We used past vote in the 2019 election as it had more responses than vote intention or partisan identification questions	For GB samples Conservative19 (1, 0 otherwise) Labour19 (1, 0 otherwise) LD19 (1, 0 otherwise) Plus in Scotland: SNP19 (1, 0 otherwise) In Northern Ireland DUP19 (1, 0 otherwise) SF19 (1, 0 otherwise) Alliance19 (1, 0 otherwise)
Brexit vote		Leave voter (1, 0 otherwise)



## Indices

	Variables in Index	Coded
Independence index	Scottish independence Welsh independence English independence NI reunification	higher numbers = greater support for independence runs 0 to 1
English governance reform index	UK minister for England UK minister for English regions English Parliament City regions EVEL	Higher numbers = greater support for reform Runs 0 to 1
Interference index	Never legislate devolved area Never spend devolved area Never block devolved legislation	Higher numbers = never intervene Runs 0 to 1
Fair share	Uses the three territories other than the respondent's own	Higher numbers = other territories have more than their fair share Runs 0 to 1
Muscular unionism index	From 5 MU items	Higher numbers= more muscular Runs 0 to 1
Exclude devolved MPs from government index	Exclude Sc MPs from government Exclude W MPs from government Exclude NI MPs from government	Higher numbers = exclude Runs 0 to 1
Exclude devolved MPs from voting index	Exlude Sc MPs voting on England Exclude W MPs voting on England Exclude NI MPs voting on England	Higher numbers = exclude Runs 0 to 1

## Other recoded variables

	Variables	Coded
Keep England whole*	From 2 option question about dividing England into units or keeping it whole	Keep it whole (1, 0 otherwise)
Ambivalent unionism*	From 3 option question about support for union or independence	So be it (1, 0 otherwise)
Collaboration*	From 2 option question concentrating on own responsibilities vs collaboration	Collaboration (1, 0 otherwise)
Arbitration4 parts*	From 3 option question with different arbitration options (UK government, 4 territories, international)	Arbitration mechanism involving all 4 territories (1, 0 otherwise)
Shared sovereignty	Scale that runs from shared to parliamentary sovereignty	Higher numbers = shared Runs 0 to 1
Written constitution	Agreement with written constitution	
Lords reform	Agreement with Lords reform	
Referendum to change devolution	Agreement that require referendum to remove devolution	
One British nation*	From 3 option question about number of British nations	Only one British nation (1, 0 otherwise)

Variables marked with an asterisk (\*) are binary measures, and so the resulting models are logistic rather than linear regressions.

In the following statistical tables, we have identified a series of predictor variables. We have sought to keep these constant across the four territories to facilitate comparisons, with three exceptions. Where a language variable is available we have included that. In addition, we have adapted the party vote variables to reflect local context. Thus, while we have code variables for voting Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat



in 2019 across all territories in Britain, we have added SNP vote in Scotland and we have coded DUP, Sinn Fein and Alliance support in Northern Ireland. We cannot include all parties in the models due to risks of collinearity so we have focused on the largest parties that facilitate a sense of the full political spectrum. Last, while we have included a measure of state national identity (British) and sub-state national identity, in Ireland we have also included the label Irish. In the report we use Northern Irish consistently so that the relationship between sub-state identity across the UK is visible. It is instructive to see that, while patterns of British identity are often common across Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, patterns of sub-state identity are not and part of this stems from the particular position of the sub-state identity label in Northern Ireland. In many ways, the label 'Irish' operates in a way more similar to Scottish and Welsh national identity and thus we have included it in the models as an additional control.

There are also subtle changes to the coding to reflect where the respondent lives. If the variable captures all other territories in the UK (e.g. born outside the territory where the respondent lives, or assessing whether all other parts of the UK get more than their fair share of resources) the individual territories involved will rotate depending on where a respondent lives. So, for example, if respondents live in England then all other = Scotland and Wales and Northern Ireland; but if in Wales, all other = England and Scotland and Northern Ireland, etc.

To facilitate a comparison, we examine the results in themed clusters (entrenchment, federalism, independence and challenges). These allow us to identify if predictors behave in similar ways within a particular theme. We start with a summary of the model results for each territory separately, then end with a comparison across the four territories.

## Modelling support for constitutional attitudes

### England

	Gender	Age	Class	Education	Place of birth		Natid		Brexit	Other lang	2019 UKGE vote	
	Female	older	Abc1	Uni	Eng	rUK	Brit	Eng	Leaver	yes	Con	Lab
Entrenchment												
Never interfere index	+		-		+	+	-	-			-	
Need ref	-											
Arbitration 4 parts*	+										-	
Lords reform			-					-			-	
Written constitution												
Federalism												
English gov reform index		-		-		-		+				
Keep England whole*							+	+			+	
Shared	+	-	-		+		-	-	-		-	
Collaboration*									-			
Independence												
Indy index		-					-					+
Ambivalent unionism*			+				-					
Challenges												
Others more		+							+			
Muscular union index	-	+					+			-		-
One British nation*		+		-	-		+				+	
Exclude devo vote								+	+		+	-

Exclude devo gov		+		-				+	+		+	
------------------	--	---	--	---	--	--	--	---	---	--	---	--

Signs indicate direction of statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) coefficients. All models employ linear regression except those marked with an asterisk

### Scotland

	Gender	Age	Class	Education	Place of birth		Nativity		Brexit	2019 UKGE vote		
	Female	Older	Abc1	Uni	Scotland	rUK	Brit	Scot	Leaver	Con	Lab	SNP
Entrenchment												
Never interfere index								+	-	-		+
Need ref to remove	-									-		
Arbitration 4 parts*	+					+		+		+		
Lords reform							-	-	-			
Written constitution							-			-		
Federalism												
English gov reform index										-		
Keep England whole*												
Shared						+		+	-	-		
Collaboration*		+				-						-
Independence												
Indy index		-					-			-		+
Ambivalent unionism*										-		-
Challenges												
Others more index	-	+									+	+
Muscular union index					+		+	-	+	+		

One British nation*		+	-	-			+		+			-
Exclude devo vote									+			-
Exclude devo gov		+	-				-	-	+	-	-	

Signs indicate direction of statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) coefficients. All models employ linear regression except those marked with an asterisk

## Wales

	Gender	Age	Class	Education	Place of birth		Nativity		Welsh speaker	Brexit	2019 UKGE vote	
	Female	Older	Abc1	Uni	Wales	rUK	Brit	Welsh	Yes	Leaver	Con	Lab
Entrenchment												
Never interfere index							-		+		-	
Need ref	-			+								
Arbitration 4 parts*	+			-					+	-	-	
Lords reform				+							-	
Written constitution		+					-				-	
Federalism												
English gov reform index		-			+	+	-					
Keep England whole*									-			
Shared	+	-					-		+	-	-	+
Collaboration*		+			-		+		-		+	
Independence												
Indy index						+	-		+	-		
Ambivalent unionism*												+
Challenges												
Others more		+										
Muscular union index							+			+	+	
One British nation*		+						-	-	+	+	
Exclude devo vote									+	+		-
Exclude devo gov		+		-						+		

Signs indicate direction of statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) coefficients. All models employ linear regression except those marked with an asterisk

## Northern Ireland

	Gender	Age	Class	Education	Place of birth		Nativity			Brexit	2019 UKGE vote		
	Female	Older	Abc1	Uni	NI	rUK	Brit	NI	Irish	Leaver	DUP	Alliance	Sinn Fein
Entrenchment													
Never interfere index									+	-			
Need ref	-												
Arbitration 4 parts*								+		-			
Lords reform													
Written constitution				-			-						
Federalism													
English gov reform index													
Keep England whole*										+		-	-
Shared		-			-		-		+	-			
Collaboration*					+				-				-
Independence													
Indy index							-		+	-	-	+	+
Ambivalent unionism*								+				+	
Challenges													
Others more	-									+			+
Muscular union index							+		-	+	+	-	-
One British nation*		+						-	-	+	+	-	
Exclude devo vote								+	+				
Exclude devo gov				-					+		-	-	

Signs indicate direction of statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) coefficients. All models employ linear regression except those marked with an asterisk



The symbols in each cell indicate the direction of the statistically significant coefficient. For column headings that are binary (the trait is either present or absent) it means that having the trait results in a positive or negative impact on the variable in the relevant row. Thus, for England, Conservative voters in 2019 were less likely to say the UK government should never interfere on spending, legislation or blocking things (i.e. a negative relationship). For other variables, such as age, it shows the effect of going from the lowest category (in this case the youngest) to the highest category (in this case oldest). In Wales, for example, older respondents are more in favour of a written constitution.

If we look across these four tables summarising the model results, three things are worth noting. First the **demographic and socio-economic variables tend to matter little**. Age, gender, class and education are typically not relevant predictors of constitutional attitudes, mattering in a handful of instances. That said, some interesting patterns emerge. Older respondents in particular were more likely to say that there is one British nation and this was true across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In all but Northern Ireland older respondents were also more likely to say that other parts of the UK got more than their fair share of resources and that devolved MPs should be excluded from sitting in government. In all but Scotland they were more in favour of parliamentary (as opposed to shared) sovereignty. If we look across the themes, therefore, older respondents were more likely to score highly on attitudes that might be considered challenging to constitutional reform. On language, Welsh speakers were more supportive of certain aspects of entrenchment, including non-interference and an arbitration mechanism that includes representatives of all four parts of the UK. They are also more supportive of shared sovereignty.

In general, though, **other identities or behaviours matter more to constitutional preferences** and this is our second point. This is true of vote choice. Conservative voters in Britain are less supportive of most measures of entrenchment, federalism and independence. Leave voters in all four parts of the UK score higher on the 'challenge' measures but are also less likely to opt for shared sovereignty over parliamentary sovereignty (which makes intuitive sense given the logic of Brexit).

Third, **there are interesting differences across the four territories** (or three when we look at voting across Britain). Scottish Conservatives are more in favour of a four-territory arbitration mechanism. Welsh Conservatives are more supportive of collaboration and English Conservatives are more supportive of keeping England whole in any future governance arrangements. Scottish and Welsh Conservatives are more supportive of muscular unionism, but there is no such pattern for English Conservatives. While this confirms our earlier analysis, it is useful to note that this relationship holds when we control for other variables (ie all the other column headings). Leave voters in Scotland and Wales have an almost clean sweep of statistically high responses to the challenge measures, but this is not the case in England. As for Labour voters, in Wales they are more likely to be ambivalent

unionists, while in England they are more likely to score highly on the independence index.

While national identity matters, under control, it is only in rare instances we find statistically significant relationships in opposite directions for British and sub-state identifiers. The exception to this is the muscular unionism index, where British identifiers in Scotland and Northern Ireland are more supportive, but Scottish and Irish identifiers are not. Sub-state identity works in different ways in different parts of the state. Scottish identifiers are typically more supportive of entrenchment measures, while the opposite is true of English identifiers. In Wales, national identity tends to matter less but our assessment is that the Welsh language variable appears to be picking up these same relationships and behaves similarly to the Scottish national identity variable.

Not surprisingly, in all four parts of the UK British identifiers have lower scores on the independence index, which includes aggregated support for independence or reunification across all four parts of the UK. But it is also the case that British identifiers outside England tend to be less in favour of certain measures of entrenchment. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland this includes opposition to a written constitution.

In summary, therefore, attitudes towards the union of Great Britain and Northern Ireland are clearly not only complicated – defying easy summary – but, relatedly, vary significantly across the state. A necessary first step for all those thinking seriously about its possible futures must surely be to understand and even embrace this complexity and variety, something that is made significantly easier when we make the effort to collect, analyse and compare evidence from across the four constituent territories.

## Appendix 2: Methodology

Data for the Future of England Survey/State of the Union Survey has been gathered by different survey providers. From 2011 to 2019, fieldwork in England was conducted by YouGov. The same was true in Scotland and Wales in 2014 and then again in both 2018 and 2019. Panelbase was responsible for the fieldwork in all three territories from 2020 to 2021. In each case the surveys were administered online to their British panels. Fieldwork in Northern Ireland was conducted by YouGov (2019) or Panelbase (2020), with access to Lucid Talk respondents. In 2021, Panelbase relied on its own panel for the Northern Ireland sample. In 2023, YouGov were responsible for data collection in all four territories with fieldwork taking place between the 28<sup>th</sup> of July and the 8<sup>th</sup> of August.

In each instance, separate samples were drawn for the four parts of the UK (rather than for GB/UK as a whole). Respondents were then reweighted to correct for any over- or under-representations in the data. Sample sizes are shown in Table A1.

**Table A1: Sample sizes for the Future of England Survey/State of the Union Surveys**

	2011	2012	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2023
<b>England</b>	2,836	3,600	3,705	3,451	5,103	3,168	2,741	1,594	1,507	1,603	1,621
<b>Scotland</b>	--	--	1,104	--	--	--	1,502	1,006	1,515	1,610	1,650
<b>Wales</b>	--	--	1,027	--	--	--	2,016	1,503	1,512	1,610	1,605
<b>Northern Ireland</b>	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	1,029	818	1,067

**NB: No surveys were conducted in 2013 or 2022.**

Funding for fieldwork for these surveys has been provided by several different organisations/funding bodies whose support we gratefully acknowledge. In 2011 and 2012 they included Cardiff University, the University of Edinburgh and the Marie Curie International Incoming Fellowship. An extension to the Future of the UK and Scotland ESRC grant held by Michael Keating provided funding for the 2014 surveys in England, Scotland and Wales. From 2015 to 2020, fieldwork was predominantly funded by Cardiff University. In 2021, the Royal Society of Edinburgh funded fieldwork in Scotland and England, while the Welsh Government funded fieldwork in Wales and Northern Ireland. Fieldwork for the 2023 survey was supported by The Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales.