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UK Devolution and Europe
Overview

- Introduction
- Scottish and Welsh attitudes to the EU in the 1970s
- EU and devolution in the 1970s
- The 1980s turnaround
- Scottish and Welsh attitudes to the EU in the 1990s
- EU and devolution in the 1990s
- Assessing the impact of the EU on devolution
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1 Introduction

- Explore the connection between European integration and the politics of devolution in the UK

- Context: broader debate about European integration and demands for regional self-government

- Attitudes to the EU and impact of EU on politics of devolution

- Comparison between 1970s and 1990s – focus on referendums - and a look to the future

- Main focus on Scotland and reference to Wales when latter’s experience different
2 Attitudes to the EU in the 1970s

- UK joined EU in 1973 but hostility still widespread; eg 1975 referendum

- Elite positions: Liberals, Conservatives, business in favour; Labour, Nationalists, trade unions hostile

- Hostility deeper in Scotland and Wales than in England; eg patterns of voting in the referendum

- Why?
  - Labour dominance and strong trade unions
  - Nationalists’ view of integration
  - Specific policies; eg agriculture, fishing

- EU seen as ‘negative extension’ of the UK by Nationalists

- Elite opinion largely matched by mass opinion
3 EU and devolution in the 1970s

- Support for devolution associated with hostility to the EU; former perceived as running counter to the latter

- The pro-devolution camp did not exploit the European dimension in their strategies

- Interaction effect:
  - SNP committed to withdrawal from the EU
  - Devolution seen as paving the way to secession
  - Elite and mass opinion very hostile to independence

- Taking into account non-voters, result truly a rejection in 1979, despite 60% support as 40% of supps voted No

- No Europeanisation led to defeat of devolution

- No interaction effect in Wales but some patterns replicated
4 The 1980s turnaround

- Centre-left opinion, dominant in Scotland, turned positive on economic integration based on market liberalisation
- EU developed policies - such as social policy, the structural funds and subsidiarity - closer to the preferences of the median Scottish voter while the UK abandoned them
- The SNP adopted the policy of ‘independence in Europe’
- ‘Europe of the Regions’ discourse
- Support for minority languages by Council of Europe
- 1988 the key year
  - Single market programme got going
  - Social dimension added; structural funds doubled
  - Thatcher’s Bruges speech
5 Attitudes to the EU in the 1990s

- Dramatic reversal compared to 1970s but divisions lingering on

- Elite positions: Liberals, Labour, Nationalists, trade unions in favour

- Conservatives, business divided: pro single market but against social dimension and heavy regulation

- Scotland and Wales now more pro-EU than England
  - Labour and trade unions change
  - Nationalist change

- EU seen as ‘positive alternative’ to the UK by Nationalists

- Elite opinion largely matched by mass opinion
6 EU and devolution in the 1990s

- Support for devolution associated with pro-EU position; former perceived as going hand in hand with the latter

- The pro-devolution camp exploited the European dimension in their strategies; SNP made it central

- No interaction effect:
  - SNP committed to ‘Independence in Europe’
  - Devolution still seen as linked to secession
  - Elite, mass opinion much less hostile to independence
  - Independence within the EU preferred to status quo

- Only 7% of supporters of self-government voted No

- Europeanisation neutralised ‘interaction effect’ and led to endorsement of devolution

- ‘Europe of the Regions’ discourse also influential in Wales
7 Assessing the impact of the EU

- No impact in the 1970s but a powerful one in the 1990s

- Many variables remained almost constant between 1979 and 1997; devolution down but independence up

- Direct impact on support for devolution
  - More EU powers reduced costs of access to UK centre
  - Subsidiarity gave normative justification
  - Need for representation in Brussels
  - ‘Europe of the Regions’ discourse

- Indirect impact on support for independence
  - Guarantee of markets and regulation
  - Political continuity lowered costs of separation
  - EU framework made ‘state’ better than ‘region’
8 Looking into the future

- EU framework continues to be important to the ‘devolved’ UK

- But devolution has not brought about that sea change in European affairs that some hoped for

- ‘Europe of the Regions’ discourse has lost a lot of its shine and regions have not increased their power since Maastricht

- But EU dimension still central to SNP discourse > recent polls point to rise in support for independence

- Legal question of EU membership for an independent Scotland still unclear; some believe it will need to apply
9 Conclusions

- European integration did not create the demand for devolution but it was a facilitator.

- What changed between the 1970s and 1990s was not so much the deepening of integration as the change of attitudes and perceptions.

- Indirect impact stronger in Scotland, direct impact stronger in Wales.

- Impact is greatest if there is a perceived ‘misfit’ between EU and a state; EU seen as a positive alternative.

- Generalisations: some patterns of UK devolution replicated elsewhere but many unique features.