

National Identities and Politics after Devolution

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Introduction

It seems entirely appropriate that *Radical Statistics* should come to Edinburgh in 2008 to mark a decade of devolution. Recent elections in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have led the United Kingdom into uncharted political territory. Whilst the Labour party continued to govern at Westminster, it was ousted from power in Scotland by the Scottish National Party (a party committed to an independent Scotland) and obliged to negotiate a Welsh assembly coalition with the strongly autonomist Plaid Cymru. In Northern Ireland a historic compromise saw a Stormont administration bring the Democratic Unionists and Sinn Fein together. Thus each of these territories was governed (solely or in coalition) by parties challenging the political integrity of the UK. Devolution has clearly not provided final answers to the United Kingdom's various 'national' questions. Here we wish to examine to what degree national identities are, or might be, significant with respect to these and future political (and in particular 'constitutional') developments. More specifically, are national identities likely to be the basis for demand for further constitutional change? Is British sentiment declining within the United Kingdom and, if so, what are the past and future links between such a decline and devolution?

To explore this issue we analyse large-scale social and political surveys. Constitutional change inspired a number of innovative research programmes, some of which included substantial surveys carrying novel questions on both national identities and post-devolution political perspectives. The establishment of the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey (conducted annually since 1999) and the Wales Life and Times Survey (since 2001) has supplemented the long-standing British Social Attitudes Survey (since 1983) and more irregular election-based surveys. The Northern Ireland Life & Times Survey (annual since 1998, and succeeding the earlier Northern Irish Social Attitudes Survey) gives us excellent coverage. It is interesting to note, however, that it is only relatively recently that statistics have been gathered on national identities, especially in England, where there has not been parallel 'national questions' to those in other parts of UK. The BSA did not ask relevant questions on nationality until the

very eve of devolution. Rather surprisingly, few analyses have been conducted embracing all four of these territories. Analyses of single territories are relatively common, as are comparative studies of the territories within Britain (see, e.g., Curtice, 2006; Heath & Kellas, 1998; Heath & Smith, 2005). Analyses across the entire United Kingdom, however, are rare. Here we present such an analysis, assessing to what extent patterns of national identities in the four UK territories represent potential for constitutional (in)stability, and exploring how far these identities are associated with key political attitudes relevant to the UK's future constitutional structure.

Measuring national identity

Here we wish to explore four means by which national identities have been measured in recent UK social surveys. We will also demonstrate that, notwithstanding their weaknesses (which will be discussed below), social surveys reveal consistent and robust patterns of similarities and differences across territory and across time. Here we draw on the most recent publicly available surveys containing relevant questions. Sources are noted in each table and graph; the appendix lists all surveys used.

Our first measure is what might be called the 'permissive' or 'multiple choice' measure. Here respondents are given a list of possible national and territorial identities and asked to choose from them as many or as few as they like:

Please say which, if any, of the words on this card describes the way you think of yourself. Please choose as many or as few as apply.

African	European	Ulster
Asian	Irish	Welsh
British	Northern Irish	Other
English	Scottish	None of these

The second measure forces respondents into choosing a *single* identity. The actual form of question depends on year and location of study. Broadly speaking earlier surveys gave respondents a singular choice of national identity (that is they could choose either to be X or Y but not both) whilst later surveys asked respondents to choose the 'best' identity from amongst those they had chosen through the multiple choice measure.

The question might thus run:

Do you consider yourself to be British, Scottish, English, Irish, Welsh or something else?

or,

And if you had to choose, which one best describes the way you think of yourself?

The most recent available results on the first measure are shown in Table 1¹⁰. Note that in England and Northern Ireland Britishness proves the most popular identity, whereas the most popular identities in Wales and Scotland are Welshness and Scottishness. Note too that all columns sum to more than 100%, indicating the extent to which respondents hold dual or multiple identities, particularly in the British territories (i.e. excluding Northern Ireland):

Table 1: Multiple choice national identities

%	England	Scotland	Wales	N. Ireland
British	70	52	56	49
English	60	4	13	1
Scottish	2	85	1	1
Welsh	1	1	70	*
Irish	2	3	2	30
N. Irish	1	1	*	33
<i>N</i>	<i>3643</i>	<i>1549</i>	<i>988</i>	<i>1800</i>
Source:	BSA05	SSA05	WLT03	NILT03

The second measure allows us to judge which of these multiple and (in some cases) overlapping identities are invested with the greatest importance. Most recent available results are shown in Table 2.

Over both these measures we can see that sub-state level national identities are more salient than Britishness in Wales and, in particular, Scotland. Indeed Scottishness in Scotland is notable for its particular popularity, both in terms of being chosen, and in terms of being chosen as the ‘best’ identity. In England, by contrast, Britishness is chosen more frequently on both measures than Englishness, although the latter is chosen by a large proportion.

¹⁰ Abbreviations are as follows: British Social Attitudes (BSA); Scottish Social Attitudes (SSA); Wales Life and Times (WLT); Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT). The year of the surveys is noted in each table/figure. Standard errors vary according to sample size but are rarely more than 2 to 3%. [See Appendix](#) on how to access [more information](#) on these surveys.

Table 2 Best choice national identities

<i>% by column</i>	England	Scotland	Wales	N. Ireland
	%	%	%	%
British	48	14	27	39
English	40	2	7	-
Scottish	1	77	*	-
Welsh	1	1	60	-
Irish	1	1	1	28
N. Irish	*	*	*	27
<i>N</i>	<i>3643</i>	<i>1549</i>	<i>988</i>	<i>1200</i>
Source:	BSA05	SSA05	WLT03	NILT05

The situation in Northern Ireland is different, in that there are *two* state-level identities that might be claimed (Britishness and Irishness) and because there is a very close association between the identity chosen and the respondent's religion. Here, in 2005, 65% of Protestants chose British, 24% Northern Irish, and just 5% Irish. By contrast, 60% of Catholics chose Irish, 29% Northern Irish, and 8% British).

The utility of the first measure is that it is permissive enough to allow respondents to express a wide and varied range of identities. However, an obvious practical and analytical drawback of this approach is that it produces a multitude of variables. The second measure produces a simple and singular variable but with the serious limitation that it does not take account of **multiple** identities. Hence work has been conducted on finding appropriate scales for national identity.

One longstanding scalar measure used for national identities in the UK is the so called Moreno question. Developed in Spain (see Gunther *et al*, 1986) and introduced to Scotland by Luis Moreno (Moreno, 1988) this measure asks respondents to balance the relative weight of two identities, usually a sub-state level and state level one. The measure has utility in situations where these identities can, and often do, overlap. It thus has little value in Northern Ireland where the most important identities – Britishness and Irishness – are more or less mutually exclusive.

Thus, for example, respondents in Wales are asked:

Which, if any, of the following best describes how you see yourself?

- Welsh not British*
- More Welsh than British*
- Equally Welsh and British*
- More British than Welsh*
- British not Welsh*
- Other description*
- None of these*

Recent results are shown in table 3 where ‘X’ denotes ‘English’, ‘Scottish’ or ‘Welsh’ as is appropriate:

Table 3: ‘Moreno’ national identities

<i>% by column</i>	England	Scotland	Wales
	%	%	%
X not British	17	32	21
More X than British	19	32	27
Equally X and British	31	22	29
More British than X	13	4	8
British not X	10	5	9
Other/none/dk	10	5	6
<i>N</i>	<i>1917</i>	<i>1549</i>	<i>988</i>
Source:	BSA03	SSA05	WLT03

If we imagine the scale as being pivoted around the ‘Equally’ point then in all three countries – notably including England – we find that the scale tips towards the sub-state ‘local’ national identity rather than towards Britishness. This is a relatively modest gradient in England, not least since the modal response is an evenly balanced identity. In Wales almost half (48%) of respondents are found towards the ‘Welsh’ end of the scale, and this is particularly marked in Scotland where a clear majority (64%) either emphasise their Scottishness over their Britishness, or feel Scottish not British. Indeed one third of respondents in Scotland express an exclusively Scottish identity on this question.

The Moreno measure is broadly consistent with what we found on the simpler measures – in Scotland and Wales the ‘local’ national identity is consistently more salient than Britishness, although a majority of people in Scotland (58%) and Wales (64%) express some form of dual identity on this measure. Welshness and Scottishness are by no

means incompatible with Britishness and, to a very considerable extent, people hold both identities. It is the 'local' identity, however, that is regarded as more important. In England, on the other hand, the levels of Englishness and Britishness tend to be closer together – which may represent a tendency amongst some people in England to conflate these identities to a degree (Kumar, 2003; Langlands, 1999; Rose, 1982).

Whatever the strengths and weaknesses of the first three measures, all beg a fundamental question: so what? It is one thing to show that people are willing to choose one national identity or another, or even that they regard some as more or less important than others, but do they invest these identities, in the relative scheme of things, with any real status? Are identities which might appear to have a greater significance to people's everyday lives – such as class, gender, age, ethnicity – of considerably more importance to them?

Our final measure, first carried in NILT98 and subsequently developed in the SSA/BSA, aims to answer precisely this. It offers respondents a wide range of potential identities spanning nationality, ethnicity, life stage, personal/family circumstances, gender, class etc and asks them to pick the one which is most important to them¹¹. They are then given the opportunity to select a second and third important identity. In the early development of this question it carried a preamble that flagged up national identities¹². This preamble was removed in later surveys (with little discernable effect) so that the question runs:

People differ in how they think of or describe themselves. If you had to pick just one thing from this list to describe yourself – something that is very important to you when you think of yourself, what would it be?

(And what would the second most important thing be? And what would the third most important thing be)

Table 4 shows those identities which, across all of their three choices, respondents were most likely to choose (with national identities in bold for emphasis). Here we do not differentiate between first, second

¹¹ These may vary slightly from survey to survey but tend to be as follows: Working class; British; Elderly; Woman/Man; Not religious; Wife/Husband; Catholic; Country person; City person; Protestant; Mother/Father; Middle class; Black; Retired; Religious; Scottish (*or English etc.*); Working person; Young; White; Asian; Unemployed; Other; None of these/no further answer.

¹² Thus the question in NILT98 carried the preamble: "Some people say that whether they feel British or Irish is not as important as other things about them, other people say that their national identity is the key to who they are."

and third choices, but only show which kinds of identities were chosen within the three choices. The pattern of findings was fairly similar across the four territories except that in Northern Ireland choosing being Irish or choosing a religious identity also proved popular. Religious identities are not shown in the table: in Northern Ireland being Catholic was chosen by 15%; being Protestant by 11%.

Table 4: Most important Identities

%	England	Scotland	Wales	N. Ireland
Parent	48	45	50	49
Spouse	30	25	30	35
Gender	26	24	20	43
Working Class	24	27	22	34
Working Person	30	24	29	11
British	27	15	22	14
English, Scottish etc.	21	52	39	14
Irish (asked N. Ireland only)	-	-	-	13
<i>N</i>	1917	1508	988	1800
Source:	BSA03	SSA05	WLT03	NILT01

In all four territories national identities are amongst the most frequently cited as ‘key’, but there are some interesting variations. Consistent with what we might have expected given the results of earlier measures, being Scottish in Scotland and Welsh in Wales are particularly salient. This is particularly true in Scotland where being Scottish proves to be the single most popular identity in 2005 (and was joint most popular, along with being a parent, in 2003). Even in England – where, according to a number of accounts (e.g. Fenton 2007), national identity is of a relatively low salience – being British is chosen more often than a gender identity or being working class, with being English not so far behind.

Northern Ireland perhaps confounds expectations. It is perhaps here, where a bitter conflict has been waged over a religio-ethnic cleavage, that we would expect national identities (since they map onto that cleavage) to be most salient. It may seem surprising, therefore, that relatively low proportions lay claim to either Irishness (13%) or Britishness (14%) as a ‘key’ identity. We offer two potential explanations for this. First, it may be that the profound cultural and political connotations attaching themselves to national identity claims in Northern Ireland make some reluctant to make them in interaction with strangers (such as survey researchers). Second, respondents might well see *religious* identities as proxy markers for political and

national positions (see Moxon-Browne, 1983). Fairly substantial proportions of Northern Ireland's Protestants choose *either* 'being British' or 'being Protestant' (55%), with a similar proportion of Catholics choosing *either* 'being Irish' or 'being Catholic' (59%). Nevertheless, we might still have expected a rather higher salience of religio-national identification.

National identities: some caveats

What the above measures seem to suggest is that, firstly, people across the UK are happy to assign themselves at least one of several potential national identities and, secondly and crucially, these identities are regarded by respondents as more than simply convenient labels. For many respondents national identity is crucial to their sense of self.

However, we would like to add several caveats here since social surveys can only take us so far in understanding the importance of identities. Notably, we know nothing here about the *contextual* nature of such identities. Are these kinds of identities more or less salient according to the situation respondents find themselves in? For example it is likely that an English person's identification 'as English' or 'as British' will be more salient when they are abroad on holiday, or socialising with new friends from outwith the UK, than in everyday interaction with friends and family. Context is all the more important when we consider the considerable evidence that for many people across the UK national identity is at least *plural*, and sometimes *multiple*. What precisely is the relationship between such multiple territorial identities? Are they concentric and nested (so that, for example, Englishness is regarded as *a part* of being British)? Or might they be hierarchical (so that someone may feel both English and British but that these are *apart* and may be of differing importance)?

Survey measures are also poor at telling us what respondents understand of the national identity labels they do or don't choose. This might be found at the individual level – a Welsh-speaking retired Gwynedd farmer, for example, might have a very different conception of what being Welsh means than a young Anglophone Cardiff professional. This is certainly the case across different territories – when Gordon Brown and Ian Paisley extol the virtues of Britishness we can be sure that they have rather different conceptions of the term.

Finally the use of the term identity may be seen as somewhat hackneyed and problematic. Identity, it often seems, is everywhere and nowhere, an increasingly empty term (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000).

Does it imply similar conceptions: a national identity? Might alternative terms like 'attachment' or 'belonging' be more appropriate?

Despite these caveats we argue that the evidence of social surveys, such as that described above, is extremely useful in establishing the broad contours of national identities across the UK. Although relatively new, the tradition of researching national identities in a 'categorical' fashion is well-established and has proved innovative and insightful (for some prominent examples of such research see e.g. Curtice & Heath, 2000 and McCrone, 2001). And despite the issues of context and meaning outlined above it remains true that such identities may well encompass considerable internal diversity whilst still remaining meaningful in themselves (our Gwynedd pensioner and young Cardiff professional both genuinely *feel* Welsh).

Finally, whatever problems and limitations there are in using survey measures in the investigation of national identities it must be stressed that they do provide robust and consistent evidence which can be tested and retested in a rigorous and evolving fashion. The evidence they provide proves consistent in two ways. Firstly (and as we have glimpsed above), they demonstrate clear and consistent patterns of difference between the territories of the United Kingdom. On *all* these measures we find that Scottishness is more salient than Britishness in Scotland; and that there is a similar but less marked pattern in Wales. In England we consistently find a broadly comparable extent of both Englishness and Britishness, although on the first two measures Britishness seems a little more salient whilst on the 'Moreno' scale Englishness seems a little more prioritized. Evidence from Northern Ireland suggests (unsurprisingly) the continued centrality of a religio-ethnic cleavage. Dual identities are prominent in all 'British' nations, but not in Northern Ireland.

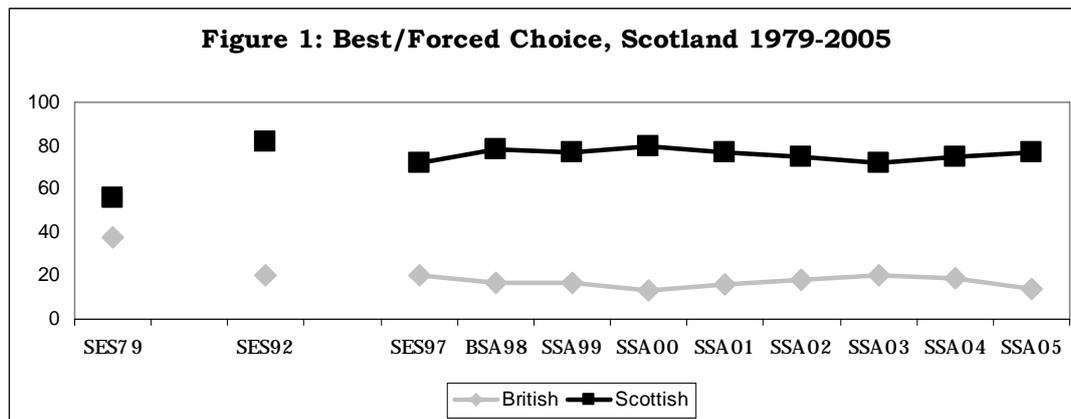
We have seen that there are distinctive patterns of national identities across the UK, and that there are differences between territories in the relative importance attached to such identities. In Scotland 'being Scottish' is chosen by half of respondents, and although such attachments seem less central in other parts of the UK they are, nevertheless, amongst the most important aspects of individual's sense of themselves. Two core questions remain to be addressed. To what extent has identity been influenced by the profound constitutional changes of the late twentieth century; and to what extent, if any, are national identities associated with political attitudes and with the potential for further radical change?

Trends in identity

We have seen differences in national identity across the constituent parts of the UK – but has there been consistency over **time**, and has **devolution** made a difference? Rather than look across the trends on all the measures outlined above we will look only at trends in best/forced identity. This is the easiest measure to grasp quickly and allows for the longest comparisons over time. Broadly speaking our conclusions on this measure hold true on the others (for the trends on the multiple choice and Moreno measures see our Conference slides¹³).

In **Scotland** we have data on this question for 1979 and 1992 as well as continuous data since the Scottish Election Study of 1997 (which predated the devolution referendum).

On this measure (figure 1) there has been remarkable consistency since 1997 – if there have been any notable identity shifts then these *pre-dated* devolution.

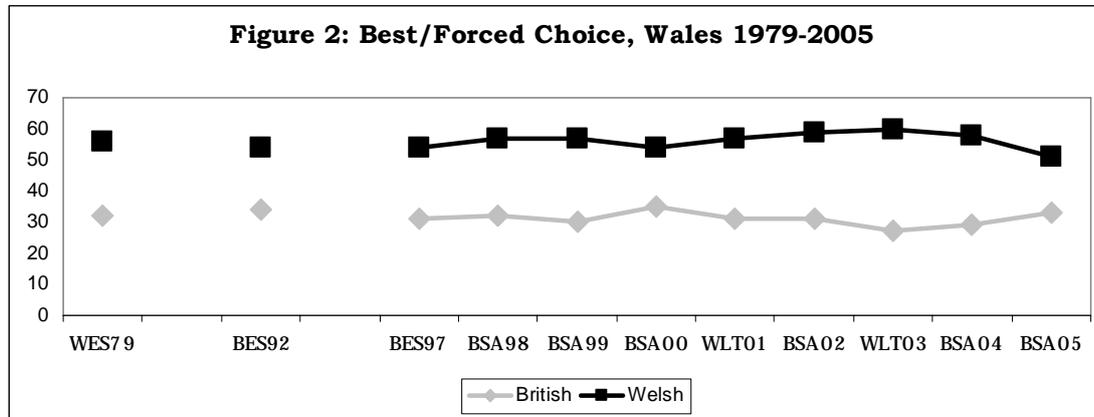


The 1979 data suggest a substantial subsequent drop (of about 20%) in the proportions choosing British as their best identity and a symmetrical rise in the proportion choosing Scottish. Although rather speculative – since we have a single survey without any previous data to contextualise its result – it does hint towards a shift of identities in Scotland well *before* devolution, and which may have contributed to the strong support in Scotland, by the early 1990s, for constitutional change.

We have a similar time series available for **Wales**, but here we are largely dependent on the Welsh sample within British-wide surveys. These are fairly small and not as robust as the dedicated Welsh

¹³ Available at: <http://www.radstats.org.uk/conf2008/programme.htm>

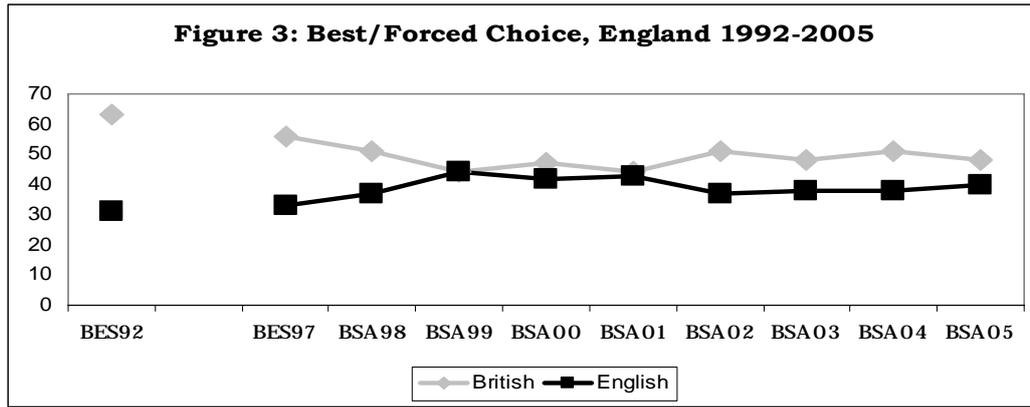
surveys of 1979, 2001 and 2003. Nevertheless the trend over this period is clear: relative stability. The striking degree of consistency across the whole period suggests neither a marked rise in Welshness nor a decline in Britishness around key devolutionary points.



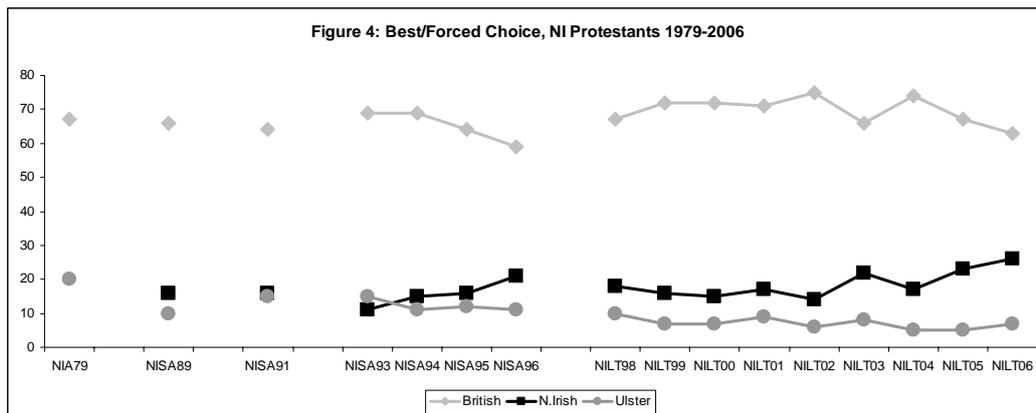
Our time series for **England** dates from 1992. Most interest in identities in their English context have focussed on whether or not there would be a 'backlash' or 'reaction' in England after devolution of power to Scotland and Wales. It is certainly plausible that the higher visibility of sub-state identities elsewhere in the UK might encourage more people in England to consider their own identities. An important academic contribution asked, in 2000, 'Is the English lion about to roar?' (Curtice & Heath, 2000). The answer to that question appears to be 'no'.

Certainly the trend in best identities since 1992 (figure 3 overleaf) suggests a gradual strengthening of Englishness (by around 10%) and a similar decrease in Britishness – but as the earlier data showed Britishness remains the most popular identity on most measures.

Further, it is not at all clear that people in England regard these two identities as differentiated. Trends in Moreno (not shown here) do *not* support the idea that Englishness is waxing and Britishness on the wane. Nevertheless the trend shown here is suggestive of a 'coming together' of the two identities around precisely the point (1999-2001) that devolution was established.

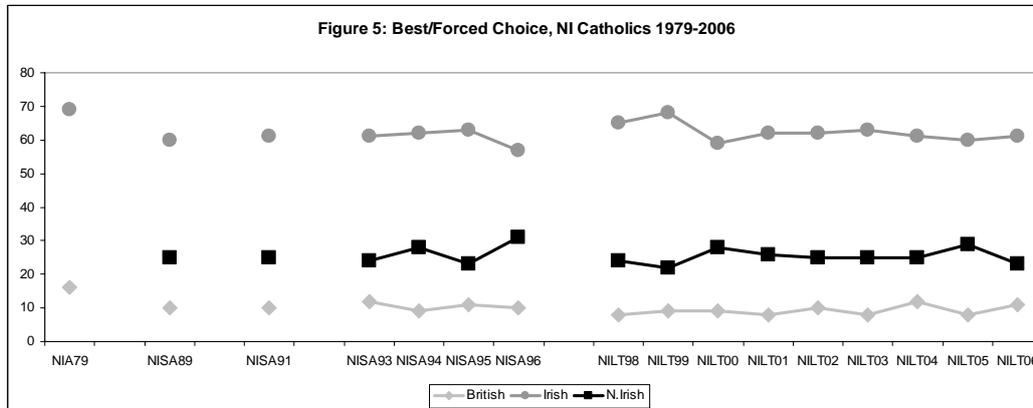


The best/forced identity question has been asked in **Northern Ireland** almost continually since 1989 – the only previous Northern Ireland Attitudes Survey which addressed the issue in 1979 did not allow ‘Northern Irish’ as an option. Figures 4 and 5 show the trends in best choice for, firstly, Northern Irish Protestants and then, secondly, for Catholics. We have done so since both communities show relatively little change over time, and because the differences between these communities have thus stayed fairly constant. Most Protestants feel British, most Catholics feel Irish. Very few Protestants choose Irish as their best identity (it is consistently less than 5%) and we do not show this identity in Figure 4.



One interesting change that the data show is a slow (and relatively modest) increase in the number of Protestants choosing ‘Northern Irish’ as their best identity. In the 1980s and early 1990s Catholics were considerably more likely than Protestants to choose this as their best identity. The trend has now equalised, with around a quarter in each community describing their best identity as Northern Irish.

A small (and seemingly declining) minority of Protestants describe their best national identity as 'Ulster'. We do not show this identity in figure 5 since the proportions of Catholics choosing 'Ulster' is never more than 2% and often zero:



The political significance of national identity

To conclude we wish to address directly the issue of the political significance of national identities. We have shown that there are distinctive patterns of such identities in different parts of the UK; that these patterns have been relatively stable over the last decade and more; and that many people regard national identity as a very important facet of their sense of themselves. But what associations do national identities have with politics?

In this final section we use a variant of the first ('multiple choice') measure outlined above. We have used this to identify, in each territory, those who select the 'British' identity only; those who select the 'local' national identity only (or, in the case of Northern Ireland those who select 'Irish'); those who select *both* of these; and those who select *neither*. The results on this measure are summarized in table 5 with the 'local' national identity (or Irish in N. Ireland) denoted as 'X':

This measure can be easily applied across all four territories (unlike Moreno) and gives us a rather more nuanced measure than best/forced choice. It confirms some of our earlier findings in showing that dual state/sub-state identities are widespread in England, Scotland and Wales, and also that in the latter two territories it is the sub-state identity that is more prominent in terms of exclusive national identities. In Northern Ireland we use the two competing state identities – British and Irish – rather than introduce the added

complexity of two possible state/sub-state dual identities (British/Northern Irish and Irish/Northern Irish)¹⁴.

Table 5: variant on ‘multiple’ national identities

<i>% by column</i>	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
	%	%	%	%
Chose British only	31	10	22	46
Chose X only	21	42	26	26
Chose both	38	43	34	3
Chose neither	9	5	8	24
<i>N</i>	<i>3643</i>	<i>1549</i>	<i>988</i>	<i>1800</i>
Source:	BSA05	SSA05	WLT03	NILT03

Not surprisingly, very few people have a dual British/Irish identity. We will now use this measure to look at two key political questions with constitutional significance: party identification (especially significant in territories with ‘separatist’ parties) and respondents’ views on the best way to govern their particular territory. In three cases we will not report the ‘neither’ category (since it is relatively small), and in the Northern Irish case we will omit the ‘both’ category since this represents just 3% of respondents.

In **England** (Table 6) those differences we find are small. The British-only group are relatively more likely to favour Labour rather than the Conservatives, but the difference is modest. There is no strong association between national identity and the constitutional preference for the governance of England, with broad consensus support for the status quo:

¹⁴ Even if we take such cases into account, overall levels of dual identities are still substantially lower in Northern Ireland than in the three other territories. 13% of respondents had a dual British/Northern Irish identity and 4% an Irish/Northern Irish identity.

Table 6 National identities and political attitudes in England
(BSA05)

	English only	English & British	British only
	%	%	%
Party identification ¹⁵			
Labour	36	38	43
Conservative	30	29	23
Lib. Dem.	10	15	14
Constitution			
Westminster	53	54	57
English Parl.	20	18	18
Reg. Assemblies	21	24	16
<i>N</i>	<i>774</i>	<i>1411</i>	<i>1145</i>

Table 7 National identities and political attitudes in Scotland
(SSA05)

	Scottish only	Scottish & British	British only
	%	%	%
Party identification			
Labour	33	41	26
Conservative	10	16	30
Lib. Dem.	11	14	16
SNP	19	9	4
Constitution			
Devolution	35	50	51
Independence	44	30	18
No Scottish Parliament	10	16	22
<i>N</i>	<i>660</i>	<i>658</i>	<i>156</i>

In **Scotland** (Table 7) we find a stronger association on both questions. SNP support is strongest amongst the Scottish-only and weakest amongst the British-only, with Conservative support markedly stronger in the British-only group. However, we can also see

¹⁵ Note that the column percentages for party identification in tables 6-9 sum to much less than 100 because those who say they do not support or feel closer to any particular party, or who identify with one of the smaller parties, are not shown in the tables.

that the most strongly represented party among the Scottish-only is Labour. Indeed, if we were to swap the rows and columns of Table 7 and examine how each party’s supporters are divided across national identities, we would see that a large proportion of Labour identifiers (39%) have an ‘exclusively’ Scottish identity. Likewise, a substantial proportion of SNP supporters (35%) feel British. On the constitution we find relatively high support for independence amongst the Scottish-only group, but again we must be cautious not to overstate the connections between identity and constitutional preference – we find support for independence even in the British-only group and all groups strongly support Scottish autonomy in some form – either devolution or independence:

Wales (Table 8) shows a broadly similar pattern to Scotland but with less marked associations. Note that we find a very strong representation of *Labour* identification among Welsh-only respondents. Support for independence is fairly weak, even amongst the Welsh-only group, although note that the most popular constitutional option among those with an exclusive or dual Welsh identity is an enhanced form of devolution similar to the Scottish Parliament. The British-only sample are divided constitutionally, but most still favour some form of devolution.

Table 8 National identities and political attitudes in Wales
(WLT03)

	Welsh only	Welsh & British	British only
	%	%	%
Party identification			
Labour	50	49	35
Conservative	9	18	31
Lib. Dem.	5	11	11
Plaid Cymru	18	8	2
Constitution			
Welsh Parliament	42	36	29
Welsh Assembly	19	29	31
Independence	19	10	5
No Welsh Assembly	15	20	32
<i>N</i>	354	335	226

Northern Ireland (Table 9) represents the exception which proves the rule, since there are very strong (and opposing) alignments amongst

the British-only and Irish-only groups. The first of these groups is very strongly identified with the Unionist parties and with those constitutional preferences which maintain Northern Ireland within the UK. The second group, by stark contrast, is strongly identified with the nationalist/Republican parties and with a united Ireland (although in fact little more than half of the Irish-only support this option). The 'neither' group has a much more varied profile:

Table 9 National identities and political attitudes in N. Ireland, (NILT03)

	British only	Irish only	Neither
	%	%	%
Party identification			
Ulster Unionist	32	1	12
DUP	28	*	9
SDLP	4	38	17
Sinn Fein	*	32	6
Constitution			
NI Parliament	40	13	28
NI Assembly	32	6	17
Independence	5	11	14
Westminster	16	6	12
Irish Unification	2	51	11
<i>N</i>	845	455	439

Conclusions

Survey data over the last ten to fifteen years now shows very evident consistencies across different measures of national identities and, to a degree, over time. There are quite distinctive patterns of national identities in different parts of the United Kingdom and these contrasts suggest at least the potential basis for constitutional instability. However, it should be stressed that there is little evidence of marked shifts in these patterns in any part of the United Kingdom immediately prior to devolution nor in its aftermath. Hence in this sense national identities are neither an obvious 'cause' nor 'effect' of constitutional change.

Evidence of *direct* political significance is also largely inconclusive: there is weak association between identities and attitudes in **England** and substantial 'non-alignment' between identities and political preferences in **Scotland** and **Wales**. In these latter countries 'Welshness', 'Scottishness' and 'Britishness' can be found across the

political spectrum. Here national identity does not demarcate the battle lines between parties and constitutional positions and seems unlikely to provoke any major impetus for a radical change to the current constitutional status quo. In **Northern Ireland**, national identity provides precisely that line of demarcation – but the battle lines here are so thoroughgoing and so longstanding that short-term alternatives to devolution seem unlikely.

In closing we would stress that even though the data and arguments in this article appear to indicate that national identities are not of great ‘political’ significance in the UK (at least with the obvious exception of Northern Ireland), contrasting patterns and salience of national identities across different UK territories undoubtedly reflect different national perspectives through which many ‘political’ issues will be viewed and interpreted. In David McCrone’s terms ‘... there is a Scottish ‘frame of reference’, a prism, through which social, economic and political processes are refracted’ (2005: 78). Although this is not necessarily reflected in the kind of survey evidence we have examined here, it is likely that in this respect national identities do have political, and perhaps even constitutional import.

References

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Appendix: Sources of survey data¹⁶

British Election Studies 1992, 1997

British Social Attitudes Surveys 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005

Northern Ireland Attitudes Survey 1979

Northern Ireland Life and Times Surveys 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006

Northern Ireland Social Attitudes Surveys 1989, 1991, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996

Scottish Election Studies 1979, 1992, 1997

Scottish Social Attitudes Surveys 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005

Wales Life and Times Surveys 2001, 2003

Welsh Election Study 1979

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¹⁶ Further details on all these surveys - including technical information, documentation and datasets - are available from the **UK Data Archive** (www.data-archive.ac.uk).