Table 5: 'Appropriate' national and religious identities in N. Ireland (2001)

	Protestant %	Catholic %
Choose 'appropriate' national **and** religious identity	4	11
Choose 'appropriate' national identity only	21	15
Choose 'appropriate' religious identity only	17	25
Choose **neither** of these	58	49
Sample size	*875*	*678*

Relatively few Protestants choose *both* British and Protestant, suggesting that these identities may be regarded as in some way coterminous. A rather larger proportion of Catholics choose both Catholic and Irish. What the table reveals is that the salience of religious-national identities *taken together* in Northern Ireland approaches the salience of national identities in Scotland and Wales. Nevertheless, it still seems surprising that religious/national identities in Northern Ireland do not prove *more* salient.

Conclusion

The salience of national identities differs between the four territories, as does the most popular form of national identity. In Scotland and Wales, the relevant sub-state national identity is chosen with more frequency than the state identity of Britishness. In England, state and sub-state identity are much more evenly balanced, and neither proves consistently more popular across all measures of national identity. This supports the notion that state and sub-state identities are less easily distinguished from each other in England than in Scotland and Wales. Northern Ireland is different again, with a polarisation between British and Irish identities and the presence of a substantial minority who opt out of both these.

Almost all respondents in different parts of the UK are willing to claim some form, or combination, of national identity. Further, when asked to choose key identities, many choose a national identity. This varies by territory, but it is clear that for most people, national identity matters in some form or another. In Scotland and Wales, almost three-fifths of respondents choose a national identity, in most cases being Scottish or Welsh, as important. Even in England, where the proportions of respondents choosing a national identity are *relatively* low, almost half

of respondents choose being British and/or English as a key aspect of identity. In Northern Ireland, religious-national identities are as salient as national identities in Scotland and Wales. In other words, national identities *matter* in the United Kingdom in terms of how respondents describe themselves, and the importance they attach to them.

Policy Implications

These findings suggest a difficulty in the UK government's requirement for newly naturalised British citizens to pledge their 'loyalty to the United Kingdom'. Whilst this may seem reasonable in the legal sense of British citizenship, the ceremonies designed to make 'new Britons' sit uneasily with the fact that a considerable proportion of all Britons do *not* regard themselves as British, or do not rate being British highly. Most people in Scotland and Wales give priority to 'national' over 'state' identity, while in Northern Ireland there is a conflict between alternative identities. A substantial minority in England do not describe themselves as British either.

Related Publications

Bond, R. and Rosie, M. (2002), 'National Identities in Post-Devolution Scotland', *Scottish Affairs*, 40, pp. 34-53. See: www.institute-of-governance.org/onlinepub/bondrosie.html

Rosie, M. and Bond, R. (2003), 'Identity Matters: the Personal and Political Significance of Feeling Scottish', in C. Bromley *et al.* (eds.), *Devolution – Scottish Answers to Scottish Questions?* Edinburgh University Press.

This Identity Briefing was written by Ross Bond (rj.bond@ed.ac.uk) and Michael Rosie (m.j.rosie@ed.ac.uk) of the Department of Sociology at the University of Edinburgh.
Further details of the research can be found at
http://www.institute-of-governance.org/forum/Leverhulme/summaries/public_opinion_summary.html

Institute of **G**overnance

Constitutional Change and Identity

Identity Briefings

National identities in the UK: do they matter?

Briefing No. 16, January 2006

Key Points

- National identities in every part of the United Kingdom are multiple and/or plural.

- In England, Scotland, and Wales most people assign themselves to a 'state' (British) identity and/or a 'sub-state' (English; Scottish; Welsh) identity. Dual identities are common.

- In Northern Ireland there is no obvious and uncontroversial 'state' identity, and people describe themselves variously in terms of being Irish, British or Northern Irish. Very few people are both British and Irish.

- People say that national identity matters to them personally, and this is particularly true of Scottishness in Scotland and Welshness in Wales.

- There is some evidence of a close coincidence between – and complex intertwining of – national and religious identities in Northern Ireland.

The Leverhulme Trust

Introduction

Accounts of national identity must be accounts of identities because identities are multiple, heterogeneous and flexible; multiple, because people identify with many of social categories; heterogeneous, since identities may mean different things to different people; flexible, because they change according to the contexts in which people find themselves.

In this paper we use surveys to explore similarities and differences in the patterns of national identity across the four constituent territories of the United Kingdom. For conceptual clarity, we refer to British identity as 'state identity' and English, Northern Irish, Scottish, Welsh identity as 'sub-state identity'. We use the terms state or sub-state identity, taking the word national as read.

Methodology

This paper draws upon the following surveys: British Social Attitudes Survey, 2003; Northern Ireland Life & Times Survey 2001 and 2003; Scottish Social Attitudes Survey, 2003; Welsh Life & Times Survey, 2003. The surveys are funded by a wide variety of governmental, quasi-governmental and other grant-giving organisations (including the Leverhulme Trust). More information on the surveys, and the organisations funding them, can be found at the UK Data Archive (www.data-archive.ac.uk)

Findings

National identities

First of all, respondents were asked to choose from a list of national identities, as many as they felt applied to them. Overall, 'British' together with 'English', 'Scottish', or 'Welsh' are the options chosen by most respondents in these three territories. One minor exception to this pattern is the relatively large proportion of respondents in Wales (13 per cent) who say they are English. The *major* exception is Northern Ireland where no single identity commands a majority and where 'British', 'Irish' and 'Northern Irish' are prominent:

Table 1: Multiple choice national identities

% by row	British	English	Scottish	Welsh	Irish	Northern Irish	Sample size
England	70	59	3	2	3	*	3709
Scotland	58	4	84	1	3	1	1508
Wales	56	13	1	70	2	*	988
N.Ireland	49	1	1	*	30	33	1800
*less than 1%							

'British' is more commonly chosen in England (70%) than in either Wales (56%) or Scotland (58%). In terms of sub-state identities, the differences are clear. In Scotland more than 8 out of 10 people say they are Scottish, and in Wales 7 out of 10 say they are Welsh. More than half say they are British. In England, however, this pattern is reversed, more people choosing British than English although a majority do choose an English identity.

In Northern Ireland, about a half claim to be British, and one third, Irish. One third of respondents regard themselves as Northern Irish, with a small but notable proportion (11% – not shown in the table) claiming an Ulster identity. National identities in Northern Ireland reflect the cleavage between religious and political identities. Three-quarters of Northern Ireland's Protestants regard themselves as British, but only 12 per cent of Northern Ireland's Catholics do so. Conversely, a majority of Catholics (65%) regard themselves as Irish, whilst very few Protestants (5%) do likewise. Very few Catholics (1%) compared to Protestants (19%) claim an Ulster identity but a Northern Irish identity is shared in broadly equal measure across religious traditions.

Many people choose more than one national identity, supporting the claim that multiple allegiances are the norm rather than the exception. To confirm the extent to which dual identities are common in the four territories, table 2 examines the proportions choosing both, one, or neither of the applicable 'state' and 'sub-state' identities. In Northern Ireland, at this point, we only present data on the potential state identities (i.e. British and/or Irish).

Table 2: Dual and exclusive identities

(X = *English, Scottish, Welsh, Irish as applicable*)

	England %	Scotland %	Wales %	Northern Ireland %
British **and** X	38	47	34	3
British **but not** X	32	11	22	46
X **but not** British	21	38	36	26
Neither of these	9	4	8	2
Sample size	*3709*	*1508*	*988*	*1800*

In this table, where the figures in columns add up to less than 100 per cent, 'other', 'don't know' and 'not answered' have been omitted.

People in Scotland and in Wales are more likely to prioritise their sub-state identities ('Scottish' and 'Welsh') than are people in England. Dual identities, however, are very common, particularly in Scotland where almost half of respondents are both British and Scottish. Substantial minorities in England and in Wales also adopt a dual identity. In Northern Ireland, very few respondents identify themselves as both British and Irish, unsurprising given the *competing* nature of these identities. Further, a substantial minority in Northern Ireland choose *neither* of these identities. Of this minority, nearly three-quarters regard themselves as Northern Irish, suggesting that it is a potential 'escape' identity for those uncomfortable with the historic British-Irish cleavage.

We see, then, the salience of *complementary* identities in the constituent parts of Britain, and of *competing* identities in Northern Ireland. What, however, is the relative *weight* which respondents place on their national identities, particularly where dual identities are in evidence? This is explored in table 3 by asking respondents about the relative weight given to state/sub-state identities. The options (where X = English, Scottish or Welsh) are as follows: X not British; More X than British; Equally X and British; More British than X; British not X; Other/none of these.

Table 3: National identities

	England %	Scotland %	Wales %
X not British	17	31	21
More X than British	19	34	27
Equally X and British	31	22	29
More British than X	13	4	8
British not X	10	4	9
Other/none/don't know	10	5	6
Sample size	*1917*	*1508*	*988*

Dual identity is more evident than in table 2, possibly because the offered responses remind respondents of dual identities. Most people in Scotland (65%) see a British identity as either of little relevance or as less important to them than Scottishness: few (8%) prioritise Britishness. In Wales, half prioritise Welshness, with less than one-fifth (17%) prioritising Britishness. In England, responses are rather more symmetrical, suggesting possibly that the question allows Englishness a higher salience than the measures explored earlier, or that, for some, Englishness and Britishness coincide.

Do national identities matter?

So far, we have examined how respondents describe themselves, but we have not yet investigated how *important* national identities are compared with other social identities. Respondents were asked to choose their most important identity, followed by their second and third choices, from a list[1]. The wording of the question was:

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?

Table 4: The three identities most important to respondents 2003

(Northern Ireland, 2001)

%	England	Scotland	Wales	N.Ireland
Parent	48	49	50	49
Spouse	30	29	30	35
Gender	26	27	20	43
Working class	24	21	22	34
Working person	29	30	29	11
British	27	13	22	14
"Sub-state" (English; Scottish; Welsh; N.Irish/Ulster)	21	49	39	15
(Irish)	–	–	–	13
Sample size	*1917*	*1508*	*988*	*1800*

The identities shown in table 4 represent the most popular choices, and in many respects the four territories are quite similar. In Northern Ireland, however, rather more people choose a spousal, gender, and working class identity (although fewer choose being a 'working person'). To some extent this is explained by the much lower proportions in Northern Ireland who choose a national identity, which means that more people will necessarily choose other kinds of identity. It is, however, with respect to national identities that we see considerable differences across territory. In Scotland, 'being Scottish' was chosen by half of the respondents, on a par with being a parent. In Wales, 'being Welsh' was the second most popular choice after parenthood. In England, by contrast, 'being English' emerges as the *least* popular of the seven identities shown, though one in five choose it.

Importantly, the extent to which respondents choose *any* national identity is revealing. Given that respondents in table 4 may have opted for more than one national identity, we cannot simply sum the percentages shown in the table. Closer analysis shows that in both Scotland and Wales a clear majority (58% in both countries) choose at *least one* of the national identities on offer (i.e. in Scotland 58% chose *either* British *or* Scottish *or* both of these). In England and Northern Ireland, however, only a minority choose at least one national identity. The smaller proportion of respondents in England choosing a national identity (45%) may reveal a culture where national identities are less salient (and state and sub-state identities arguably more interchangeable) than in Scotland and Wales. Given the highly charged political resonance of national identities in Northern Ireland, it is surprising that here we find the lowest proportion (37%) choosing at least one national identity.

Northern Ireland: A place apart?

Northern Ireland thus poses a puzzle. We know that national identity is one focus for friction between communities, and that a British-Irish divide mirrors Unionist-Nationalist and Protestant-Catholic cleavages. It may seem surprising, therefore, that relatively low proportions in Northern Ireland choose either Irishness or Britishness as a key identity. We might have expected to find these identities more salient, but two issues may explain the data. Firstly, there are strong denominational differences here. We find that a quarter (25%) of Protestants choose 'being British', whilst a similar proportion of Catholics (26%) choose 'being Irish'. Even so, national identification may still seem unexpectedly low. Might this be related to the fact that relatively large numbers in Northern Ireland choose *religious* identities as key to their sense of themselves? Although not shown in table 4, being 'a Catholic' (15%), or 'a Protestant' (11%) proved more popular in Northern Ireland than being 'a working person'.

Table 5 shows how often Protestants and Catholics choose the relevant religious and national identities; simply put, the proportions of Protestants who choose 'being Protestant' and/or 'being *British*' and, conversely, the proportions of Catholics who chose 'being Catholic' and/or 'being *Irish*'.

[1] The full list of options was: working class; British; elderly; a woman/man; not religious; a wife/husband; a Catholic; a country person; a city person; a Protestant; a mother/father; middle class; black; retired; religious; a working person; young; white; Asian; unemployed; other; none of these. In England, respondents were also offered 'English'; in Scotland, 'Scottish'; in Wales, 'Welsh' and 'English'; in Northern Ireland, 'Irish', 'Ulsterman/Ulsterwoman' and 'Northern Irish'.