Scotland's many subcultures

The argument for independence often invokes the idea of a uniform Scottish identity. Using new analysis, Richard Webber and Trevor Phillips expose this myth, revealing the eight Scottish subcultures and their attitudes to independence.

Figure 1: Cultural regions of Scotland based on proportions of adults bearing different types of name

In just a few weeks' time, the people of Scotland will vote on whether or not to leave the United Kingdom. No doubt economic and financial considerations will determine how many Scots will cast their vote. Others, following the leadership of the 'Yes' campaign, will see independence as a matter of Scottish identity and an opportunity to differentiate Scotland's identity from that of people in other parts of the UK.

Whether or not the Scottish electorate votes for independence will therefore depend to a significant degree on the persuasiveness of the SNP narrative on Scottish identity and whether it resonates with voters' own sense of who they are ancestrally and historically as well as politically.

Clearly it in the interest of the SNP leadership to conduct the argument for independence on the premise that there is a single Scottish identity. No separatist movement has achieved its aims by highlighting the internal diversity of a would-be independent territory. The SNP is unlikely to be an exception. Unionist campaigners, whether for reasons of political expediency or through ignorance, have been slow to challenge this assumption. So too have most commentators.

This essay sets out a contrary narrative: that Scotland is uniform neither in terms of its ancestry, history and culture; that its electorate, just like that of the rest of the UK, is an amalgam of people of diverse origins who, despite the similarity of their physical appearance, derive from distinctly different cultural backgrounds; and that these differences may have a significant influence on people's support for the concept of an independent Scotland.

THE MANY FORMS OF SCOTTISH IDENTITY
If we were to rely on the measure of identity included in the 2011 census it would indeed seem to be the case that Scots are a very homogenous people. Only 1 per cent of Scottish residents described their identity as Irish and only 2.3 per cent English or Welsh. However how people described themselves on census night is a relatively limited measure of their identity, one which takes greater account of where they were born and where they now live than the web of attitudes and values that constitutes a distinctive culture.

To realise this we have only to consider the ways in which the rival supporters of (Irish Catholic) Celtic and (Scottish Protestant) Glasgow Rangers are likely to have characterised themselves when required to complete a census questionnaire. Both probably described themselves as Scots and both as Christians. Yet Celtic supporters are markedly less likely to attend Scottish national matches than supporters of other Scottish football teams.

Census representations of identity are clearly even less appropriate when we try to record the historically more distant influences than the migration of Irish Catholic labourers to Glasgow, of London bankers to Edinburgh or

internationally footloose oil workers to Aberdeen. How, for example, can we measure the legacies on behaviour of:

- The historic trading relationships linking Galloway to other coastal communities bordering the Irish Sea

- The influence of early Christian missionaries on the Hebrides

- The Scandinavian settlement of Orkney and Shetland

- The exchanges between Scotland's east coast communities and the Baltic

- The hostilities experienced by those who lived in the Scottish Borders

- The common heritage that bonds Ulster Protestants to their kin in Galloway and Ayrshire

In previous research projects we have become aware that people's names can prove useful both as indicators of ancestral origins and as predictors of current behaviour. As a result we decided first to explore whether people's names could be used to identify the different cultural identities that make up contemporary Scotland, then test whether names were predictive of their bearers' support for independence.

To test these propositions we analysed 7,884 respondents to two YouGov surveys , one of 3,489 Scottish residents, the other of 4,395 residents in England and Wales. Both surveys included a question on Scottish independence. Whether respondents had a Scottish, Irish Catholic or English / Welsh cultural background was inferred by examining the origins of their personal and family names.

Clearly some family names (such as Brown's and Cameron's) are necessarily not a 100 per cent efficient proxy for background. If, notwithstanding this source of error, type of name is still predictive of voting intention, then the relationship between a person's origins and their voting intention would be even stronger than the following results imply.

MEASURING THE EXTENT OF SCOTTISHNESS
Much is written about the Scottish diaspora, much less about people who have migrated to Scotland from other countries.

Table one shows that within Scotland fewer than half of adults have names which are indicative of a Scottish cultural background, that is to say names which are more common in Scotland per head of population than they are in other parts of the British Isles. The proportion of adults of Irish Catholic ancestry, at 10 per cent, is ten times the proportion who ticked 'Irish' as their identity on their census questionnaires.

Table 1: Scottish adults by cultural background using names as a proxy (2011)

Origin of name	%
Scotland	45.2
Rest of the UK	37.3
Irish Catholic	10.0
Other	7.5

Source : Experian, OriginsInfo.Ltd

Conversely, though people in the rest of the United Kingdom are obviously far less likely to bear a Scottish name than people resident in Scotland, such is the disparity in population size between Scotland and the rest of the UK that only two in every five UK residents with a recognisably Scottish name now lives in Scotland. In other words that only 40 per cent of the proportion of the UK's Scottish genetic ancestry continue to be resident in Scotland.

Table 2: Distribution of Scottish cultural background in the UK (2011)

	Total adults (million)	Of which have a Scottish name (million)	% of adults with a Scottish name	% of Scottish names in the UK
Scotland	4.0	1.8	45.2	40.2
Rest of the UK	42.0	2.7	6.3	59.8
United Kingdom	46.0	4.5	9.8	100.0

Source : Experian, OriginsInfo.Ltd

Turning to our analysis of the YouGov results, it was much to our surprise that the strongest majority support for independence was not among 'pure' historic Scots, but among people of Irish Catholic descent: with the latter being only 6 per cent net against independence, and historic Scots 16 per cent against. On the surface one might suppose this group would take its political lead from the Labour Party, for which it votes more consistently than any other group in Scotland.

When one considers that electors from the same cultural heritage form the backbone of the Sinn Fein vote in West Belfast, this rejection of Labour's position can be interpreted as a visceral opposition to the Union, to the Tory establishment and to Westminster. Thus 'Yes' voters among this group are likely to have very different motivations and to be expressing very different identities than the typical voter with an English or Welsh name; in fact they are supporting independence for the same reasons that they support Labour, a historic sense of oppression. What is significant is that the appeal of independence is driven more strongly by cultural and political considerations than socio-economic ones.

In the rest of the United Kingdom we find that people of Scots cultural background, who showed slightly above average support for independence if they lived in Scotland, are if they live elsewhere in the UK the most strongly opposed to independence. In other words people of Scots and of Irish Catholic descent are the most polarised on the issue.

Whether they support or oppose independence depends on whether they live in Scotland or in the rest of the UK. Table three shows that support for independence among the English and Welsh is much less affected by where they live.

Table 3: Support for independence by cultural background

Name origins	Scotland 'Yes' campaign lead (%)	Rest of UK Majority in favour of independence (%)	Difference
Scotland	-16.0	-41.1	25.1
Irish Catholic	-5.8	-35.4	29.6
England and Wales	-29.3	-35.2	5.9

	Scotland	Rest of UK	
Other	-4.0	-24.2	20.2
All respondents	-19.3	-34.3	15.0

Source: YouGov

Why do Scots who live outside Scotland appear to care as much about the independence debate, yet take such a different view to their cousins? They undoubtedly have a higher educational and occupational profile than people with Scots names living in Scotland. They may be more enterprising, more confident, or less parochial. They may, of course, have a vested interest in the perpetuation of the Union. Like Scots-descended Canadians or New Zealanders they may have no intention of returning to Scotland – but they proudly wear their kilts at sons' and daughters' weddings.

Unlike the Irish diaspora, this is not a group that identifies with the sense of historic oppression. Scots names are disproportionately found on Westminster's Tory benches at Westminster in opposition to the majority of members whose names originate from Ireland, Wales, South Asia, Africa or the West Indies. One possible explanation for this paradox might lie in the fact that when it comes to politico-cultural preferences, not all types of Scots are alike.

THE EIGHT SCOTTISH SUBCULTURES
Beyond simply revealing differences in the level of support for independence among Scots in England and Wales and Scots in Scotland and differences within Scotland by national ancestry, we also suspected that names, particularly surnames, could be used to explore some of the more subtle cultural differences found in particular regions of Scotland. The most celebrated of these differences is between Highland and Lowland Scots. But the referendum campaign has also served to highlight the divisions between mainland Scots and those of Orkney and Shetland, many of whom live in lands that were annexed by the Scottish crown only a couple of hundred years before the Union with England.

Just as family names are indicative of the country from which a person's male ancestors originated, they sometimes identify the region of a country from which a person's ancestors came from. That is because the practices whereby people were first given family names often varied at quite a local level. In Italy for example a Sardinian can often be identified by having a

surname ending in '-u' whilst surnames ending in '-n' are indicative of origins in the Veneto region. Likewise in Holland a person bearing a family name ending in '-stra' is likely to have Frisian ancestry.

Different types of surname are equally characteristic of different regions of Scotland. A surname ending in '-ie' is typical of the Lowlands, clan names such as 'Bruce' and 'Gordon' are common in the North East and around the Moray Firth. Surnames with the prefix 'Mac-' are more likely to originate in the Gaelic speaking Islands and Highlands whilst the Northern Isles is characterised by names of Scandinavian origin.

There are many other types of family name which are associated with particular regions of England and Wales as well as Scotland. Figure one marks the natural regions of Scotland based on their cultural and ancestral differences.

Figure 1: Cultural regions of Scotland based on proportions of adults bearing different types of name
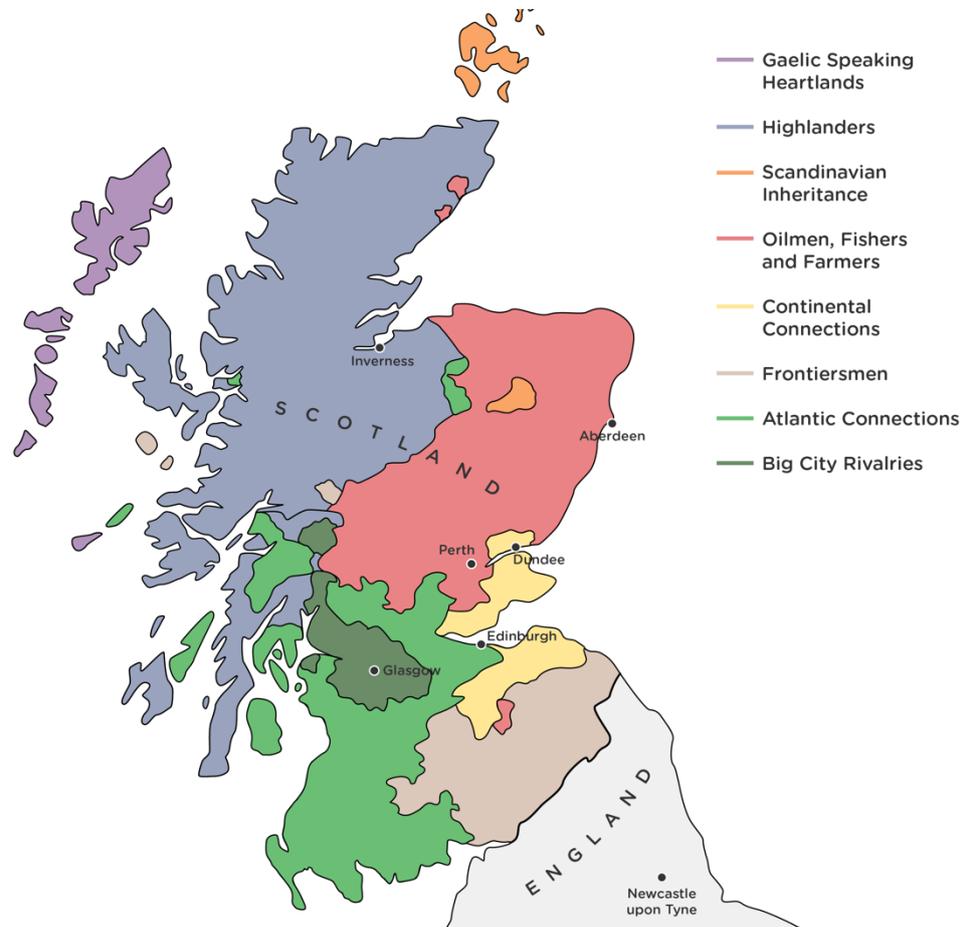
A striking feature of the result is the extent to which towns with a similar mix of names fall within clearly bounded regional blocks. So clear is the pattern that it is difficult not to credit that the boundaries between the colours reflect deep-seated differences in the practices whereby people originally acquired their family names five hundred or more years and twenty or more generations ago.

The clarity of the boundaries formed by these clusters lends weight to the belief that, despite the multiple migrations over the last five hundred years, far more people live in the communities from which their ancestors originated than could be expected on a random basis. Accepting this, we can now examine how sharply the eight Scottish regions differ in terms of Westminster representation and attitudes to independence, albeit speculatively in the absence of qualitative follow-up.

Subculture one, 'Gaelic speaking heartlands', the Western Isles (Na h-Eileanan Iar), has been represented at Westminster by Labour and SNP since

1935. For much of this time it has been the least densely populated seat held by Labour. Since 2005 it has returned an SNP MP. The Western Isles attracts tourists and retirees in smaller numbers that the West and Central Highlands and to apply for a public position you need fluent Gaelic. Unemployment is high and population decline persistent. Survey respondents are too few in number to challenge the popular belief that this heartland of the Gaelic way of life is strongly pro-independence.

Subculture two, 'Highlanders' has returned Liberal / Liberal MPs to Westminster since 1964. This region generates sufficient survey response for it to be clear that this is the region of Scotland where there is little support for independence. Though this is the region of Scotland where you are most likely to find visual images of Scots subculture, tartans in shops, highland games, bagpipes and kilts, and people who bear names such as McDonald or McLeod, it would be a mistake to suppose that such symbols get in the way of a predominantly hybrid Scots / British identity.

Could this be because this is a region which is particularly likely to have family members in England and Wales? Or because experiences of interaction with the English predominantly with tourists who arrive with a positive picture of Scots identity? Or does it make a difference that this is increasingly a destination for English and Welsh refugees said to be fleeing the excesses of neo-Liberal capitalist values, most of whom actively involve themselves in the local community and are recognised as an asset on account of the social and cultural capital that they bring with them?

Subculture three, 'Scandinavian inheritance', represents the part of Scotland with the longest tradition of Liberal representation, residents of Orkney and Shetland being the only Britons to have unbroken Liberal / Liberal Democrat representation in Westminster since that seat was won by Jo Grimond in 1950.

Residents enjoy a reputation for being more entrepreneurial than their Highland neighbours. Sample sizes prevent us measuring the strength of feeling against Scottish independence but much has been made of the fact that were Scotland to become independent, many islanders would welcome the opportunity to re-join the remainder of the United Kingdom. Some indeed might even prefer to return to Norway.

Subculture four, 'Oilmen, fishers and farmers', has proved much more fertile territory for the SNP than the 'Highlanders'. Four of the SNP's six

Westminster MPs elected in 2010 represent seats in this region. A distinctive feature of this region is the incidence of clan names such as Gordon, Fraser and Duncan which double as personal names. There is a seeming paradox that whilst this is the region has the strongest economy, highest incomes and lowest unemployment in Scotland, it should have Westminster representation from a party whose ideological roots are on the far left.

The YouGov results suggest that this is the region with the strongest difference between the voting intentions of people with Scots names, the most for independence, and English names, the most against. Can one suppose that the recent oil wealth that characterises this region has been to the disproportionate benefit of English newcomers who have settled here for material advantage, a very different demographic from the English retirees in the Highlands, and who are much less interested in integrating with the indigenous Scots population and in assimilating Scottish culture?

One senses that the core SNP support in this region comes from traditional and mostly lower earning Scots households, often living in small towns, many of whom are resentful of the material success of English newcomers. Is there a hidden narrative to the proposition that Scottish oil belongs to Scotland, one that the benefits should accrue to local people rather than newcomers, as much as to an Edinburgh rather than a London exchequer?

Subculture five, 'Continental connections', is a region represented almost exclusively at Westminster by Labour MPs. Here both the English and the Scots are more strongly opposed to independence even if many of them live within commuting distance of what in the event of independence would become the capital of a European nation. The culture of this region has developed as a result of its close trading links with continental Europe.

Subculture six, 'Frontiersmen', which covers the rural Borders region, has a level of support for independence much stronger than might be supposed from a region where Liberals and Lib Dems have been returned to Westminster ever since David Steel won Roxburgh, Selkirk and Peebles in a bye-election in 1965.

Is it that proximity to a border and the annual celebration of border skirmishes, such as the Common Ridings, contributes to the persistence of a Scottish identity of differentiation from and opposition to southern neighbours. Paradoxically it is in the Liberal Democrats heartlands that are

furthest from the English border that support for an independent Scotland is at its weakest.

Subculture seven, 'Atlantic connections', is a complex region which is characterised by a history of migration across the Solway Firth and the Irish Sea. Many of the names which are common in this region are of Anglo-Norman origin. Others have English etymology but are also common among the Protestant community in Ireland.

Until 1964 the region sent many Tory MPs to Westminster, no doubt supported to a degree by a working class with strong links with Ulster Unionists and hostility to Roman Catholic immigrants. It may be a legacy of these links that contributes to a higher level of support for the Union in this region than might be supposed given the high levels of unemployment that characterise many of its small industrial communities.

Finally subculture eight, 'Big city rivalries', which covers the industrial Clyde Valley, is the region with the highest concentration of Irish Catholic names. The Catholic community historically had similar origins and culture and suffered similar levels of discrimination to the Catholic communities of West Belfast. Clydeside Catholics has formed an important bedrock of Labour support in Scotland.

Yet a referendum is different from a Westminster election. Where Labour was seen (and not just in Scotland) as the source of protection against discrimination, the referendum provides the opportunity to achieve freedom from a disliked British state. For this community a 'yes' vote is not support for the vision of national identity portrayed by the SNP but an opportunity to express cultural dissociation from a prevailing British identity.

A key finding of the research is that Irish Catholics who live in this region are significantly more likely to vote 'yes' that Irish Catholics elsewhere in Scotland. The influence of fellow members of the Irish diaspora appears to reinforce individual disposition.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR THE REFERENDUM?
These findings do provide support for the contention that names, though a necessarily imprecise proxy for origins, must nevertheless act as a sufficiently strong one to contribute to understanding the backgrounds that people come from. Otherwise the differences that we have found would not be as strong as they appear to be.

Some of the differences that we have found could have been explained in terms of class differences, the Irish Catholics being occupied often in low paid jobs and English and Welsh immigrants in the professions. However the YouGov surveys suggest that, despite the high overlap between voting SNP and supporting independence, the social profile of the 'yes' vote is very much lower than the social profile of SNP voters and very different from the 'Tartan Tory' soubriquet given to previously Tory seats now represented by the SNP in Westminster.

Likewise, notwithstanding the importance of class and personal political values, ancestral backgrounds do seem to have a significant effect on attitudes. Those responsible for campaign strategy would be prudent to give consideration to the different cultural groups that exist within Scotland and the political messages most likely to resonate with them.

More generally we feel that the results demonstrate the resilience of sub-identities even where these are not supported by devolved political powers, legal entitlements or cultural self-expression. Whilst this resilience in certain contexts may be supported by a shared sense of grievance, this is not necessarily the case, as for instance the sense of entrepreneurial superiority felt by many residents in the Northern Isles.

Contrary to the situation in Wales, where national identity is weakest in the Marches, a zone of mixed Welsh and English culture, in Scotland distance from a national border seems to weaken a sense of national differentness, perhaps in a not dissimilar pattern to support for UKIP which achieves its best election results in places closest to the European continent from which it seeks Britain's independence.

In Scotland we are able to perceive differences due to historical connections with cultural kin in neighbouring countries or regions, not just among the Irish Catholics but also among those who bond with Ulster Unionists, a pattern which causes disturbance wherever political boundaries fail to align with zones of cultural cleavage.

Likewise the contexts in which cultural groups interact with outsiders would appear to have a significant impact, as for example the benign effect of tourists and refugee retirees in Highlands as compared with income seeking English newcomers in North East Scotland and with the lower levels of contact with people of English descent experienced by residents of the Clyde Valley and the Western Isles.

The combination of economic decline and cultural isolation contributes to distinct political attitudes among communities which are at risk of having become 'stuck', a concept developed by David Goodhart which may be just as relevant to understanding Irish Catholics in Coatbridge, Gaelic speakers in Stornoway and conceivably Glaswegians in Corby as it is to understanding Somalis in Camden Town and Pakistanis in Dewsbury.

Finally one of the strongest findings from this study is the polarisation of opinion between Scots in Scotland and Scots in England. This may be partly justified in terms of class but not wholly. Scots, when they arrive in England, are disproportionately more likely to be elected to Tory benches in Westminster, unlike the Irish and the Welsh who sit predominantly on the Labour benches. Why they should be more likely than other migrants to take with them a much broader and less exclusive sense of their identity than those they leave behind is not immediately obvious.

However were Scotland to vote for independence and to remain within the EU, and were a significant proportion of the Scots in England to elect for and be granted Scottish citizenship – Alex Salmond has stated he wants descendants of the Scottish diaspora to have 'the maximum entitlement to citizenship' – then whatever small majority there was for independence would almost certainly be overturned and there is every likelihood that the new, enlarged electorate (that would be enfranchised in an independent Scotland) would promote a very different form of engagement with the rest of the UK than that currently being promoted by the SNP.

Richard Webber and Trevor Phillips

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