# *Understanding the 'Northern Irish' Identity*

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# Questions about 'Northern Irish'

How many?

Vary across community?

Who? – age and social class

Trends over time?

What does 'Northern Irish' mean? New 'shared identity' or just another way of saying British or Irish?

Relate Northern Irish to social & political attitudes and vote choice?

What causes people to become 'Northern Irish'? Contact?

Policy implications?

But first… Brief overview of existing academic literature

# Social Identity Theory

An individual's behaviour can be predicted from the social category they consider themselves a part of

Dividing people into groups: ingroup favouratism

Optimal conditions for groups to live together harmoniously: contact, status and common goals

May lead to conflict reduction because contact leads to creation of a new 'shared' identity.

# Northern Irish as a 'Shared' Identity

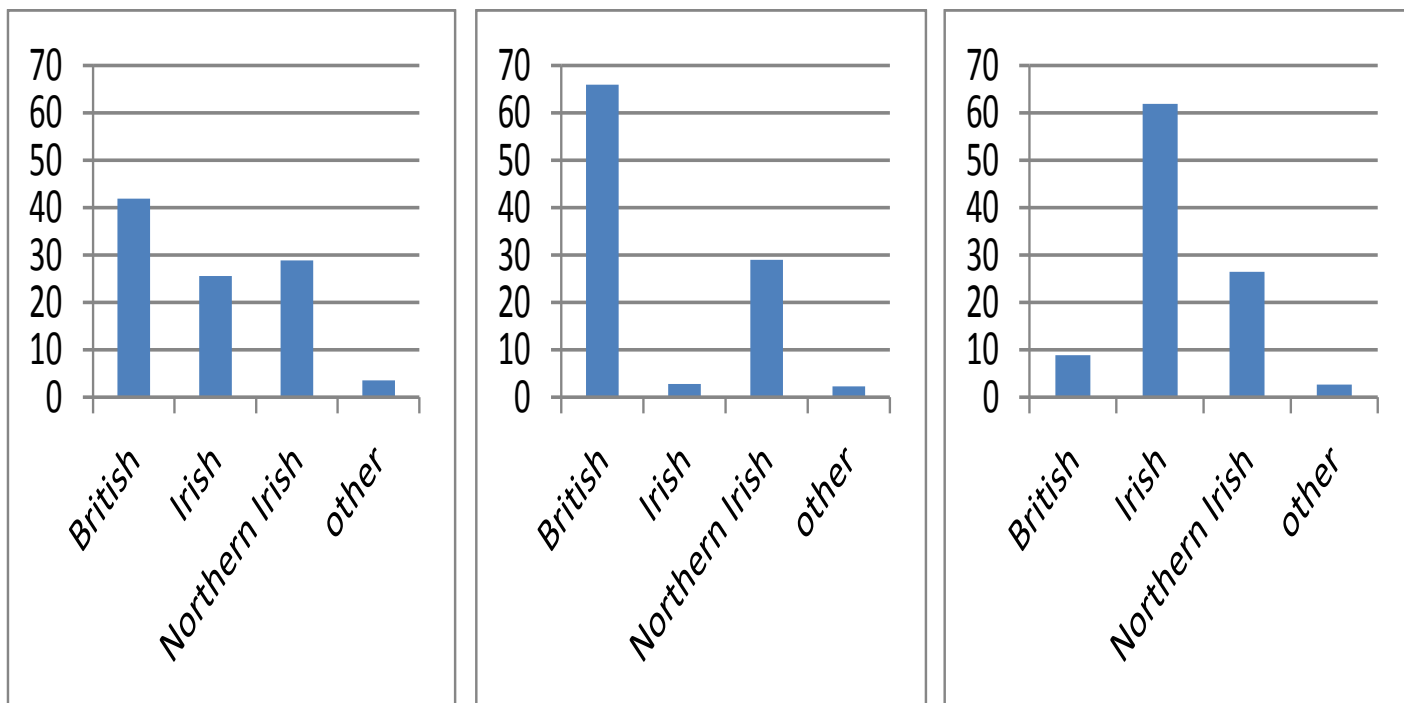Research shows Northern Irish identifiers are:

      more tolerant

      associated with attending integrated education

      & having contact with members of other religion

However, Northern Irish is more associated with Britishness than Irishness: likely due to different status

Terminological ambiguity: the term can mean different things to different people

a. All respondents          b. Protestants only          c. Catholics only

**Figure 1   Prevalence of 'Northern Irish' Identity**  *(see endnote for data description)*

# Trends over time, age and social class

Growth in Northern Irish over time for Protestants

Catholics have a fairly stable level over time

Political event seem to effect the level of Northern Irish self-description:

     Flag dispute 2012

For Protestants age is strongly related to being Northern Irish:

     36% of youngest group versus only 15% of oldest group

Northern Irish may be a somewhat middle class phenomenon:

     more likely to be employed and own one's own home

# Possible meanings of 'Northern Irish' identity

1. Genuinely 'shared' cross-community identity?

2. Just another way of expressing that you are British or you are Irish?

3. Meaningful distinction, but only for Catholics?

We investigate this looking at the relationship between Northern Irish identity and attitudes and political behaviour…

# Table 1: Relationship between identity and other ethno-national positions

|  | Protestants | | Catholics | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | British | Northern Irish | Irish | Northern Irish |
| unionist | 67.7 | 51.4 | 1.1 | 2.1 |
| neither | 31.1 | 47.0 | 29.9 | 63.7 |
| nationalist | 1.2 | 1.6 | 69.0 | 34.2 |
|  | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| UK direct rule | 38.9 | 23.0 | 4.6 | 9.0 |
| UK assembly | 60.4 | 74.8 | 36.1 | 70.2 |
| united Ireland | 0.6 | 2.2 | 59.2 | 20.8 |
|  | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| very pro power sharing | 30.7 | 36.1 | 52.8 | 53.2 |
| pro power sharing | 45.3 | 49.8 | 41.2 | 41.9 |
| anti power sharing | 24.0 | 14.0 | 6.0 | 4.9 |
|  | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

**Table 2: Protestant vote choice between the DUP and UUP by ethno-national positions**

|                | DUP  | UUP  | total |
|----------------|------|------|-------|
| British        | 62.1 | 37.9 | 100.0 |
| Northern Irish | 65.9 | 34.1 | 100.0 |

**Table 3: Catholic vote choice between Sinn Fein and the SDLP by ethno-national positions**

|                | SDLP | SF   | total |
|----------------|------|------|-------|
| Irish          | 25.2 | 74.8 | 100.0 |
| Northern Irish | 52.3 | 47.1 | 100.0 |

# Relationship to Inter-Group attitudes

Northern Irish identifiers have more tolerant views

Mind if a close relative married someone of other religion?

Does the culture and traditions of the [other] community add to the richness and diversity of Northern Ireland society?

# Does Inter-Group Contact cause the Northern Irish identity?

Northern Irish identity similar to American identity?

Number of friends you have from the other community is a good predictor of whether you describe yourself as Northern Irish or not

4% versus 16% or 13%,

Bigger effects for Catholics

# Conclusion

The 'Northern Irish' identity does seem to a real 'shared' or common ingroup identity:

associated with tolerant views and seems to be caused by cross-community contact

Different in perception of what Northern Irish means to Catholics and Protestants:

Catholics more likely to see it as neutral and overarching

# Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS)

*…is a forum that encourages debate on a wide range of research findings, with the overall aim of promoting evidence-based policy and law-making within Northern Ireland*