



# One nation under a groove? Understanding national identity<sup>☆</sup>

Andreas Georgiadis, Alan Manning\*

Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE, United Kingdom

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 26 September 2011  
Received in revised form 23 July 2012  
Accepted 29 October 2012  
Available online 6 November 2012

### JEL classification:

D71  
Z13

### Keywords:

Identity  
Multiculturalism

## ABSTRACT

There is a lot of evidence that identity matters for behaviour. There is a widespread belief that societies will function better if they manage to establish a common sense of identity among the population and contemporary fears in many countries that this common identity is threatened. This paper presents a simple framework for the determinants of identity and uses it to inform an empirical investigation of the correlates of national identity in Britain. Our main conclusions are that people who feel they are treated with respect and who feel tolerated are the most likely to identify with feeling part of Britain.

© 2012 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

There is considerable evidence that ‘identity matters’, that many individuals think of themselves as part of a social group and that this membership has consequences for individual behaviour, for behaviour towards others with the same identity and towards those who do not or are perceived not to share that identity. How societies function is then likely to be affected by the number and type of social groups within it so the nature of identity becomes a matter of public concern. Because there is very considerable evidence that people behave more pro-socially towards those they perceive as being of the same identity (starting perhaps with [Tajfel, 1970](#)) it is a common belief that countries should seek to create a sense of common identity among its citizens, what we might call ‘nation-building’.<sup>1</sup> This need is most acute in societies whose populations come from a diverse collection of cultures.<sup>2</sup> In many countries, there are those who argue that there has been a serious failure in ‘nation-building’. In the United States, [Huntington \(2004\)](#) expressed concern that Mexican immigrants are failing to adopt an American identity and the values that traditionally go with that. In Britain – the focus of this study – a certain smug satisfaction that it had been relatively successful in building a multicultural society has turned to dismay as some young Britons turn suicide bombers. The result has been an active debate about ‘Britishness’.<sup>3</sup>

But, although there is a widespread belief that it is desirable to have a common sense of identity, there is much less agreement about how this is best achieved. The ‘multicultural’ approach suggests that minorities are more likely to feel part

<sup>☆</sup> Data made available thanks to the ESRC Data Archive. We would like to thank the editor and referees for helpful comments.

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [a.manning@lse.ac.uk](mailto:a.manning@lse.ac.uk) (A. Manning).

<sup>1</sup> For example, [Kymlicka \(2002, p. 267\)](#) suggests “the common national identity provides a source of trust and solidarity that can accommodate deep disagreements over conceptions of the good life”.

<sup>2</sup> According to [Putnam \(2007, p. 137\)](#) “one of the most important challenges facing modern societies . . . is the increase in ethnic and social heterogeneity in virtually all advanced societies”. He also argues that a retreat to cultural homogeneity is not an option.

<sup>3</sup> To give but one example, see ex-Prime Minister Gordon Brown’s speech to the Fabian Society on the future of Britishness <http://www.fabians.org.uk/events/speeches/the-future-of-britishness>.

of a society if allowed or even encouraged to retain their traditional cultures. However, others (e.g. [Sen, 2006](#)) have argued that such a policy only preserves differences and leads to fragmentation and a failure to build a sense of common identity. But, in spite of the fact that many commentators have very strong views on the subject, we have remarkably little large-scale quantitative evidence on the factors associated with feeling a part of society. To present some evidence that sheds light on these questions is the purpose of this paper.

Our particular application in this paper is to Britain, though we believe the insights are of wider applicability. Britain is a good country in which to investigate questions of identity because it contains a wide mix of ethnicities and cultures and because it has very good data on these topics, a product of the fact that the government has become very concerned about alleged failures in nation-building. We use data from Britain's 2007 Citizenship Survey to investigate the relationship between various measures of identity and other variables that have been thought related to these outcomes like ethnicity, religion, measures of integration, perceptions of fairness etc.

It should be admitted from the outset that we do not have a clean research design with exogenous variation in the variables we include on the right-hand side of our regressions so that what we are estimating are correlations and not necessarily causal effects. We will try to avoid interpreting our findings using language that smacks of causal effects though we may not always succeed in this to every readers' satisfaction. Nevertheless we think our exercise is worthwhile. Knowing what correlations are in the data does restrict the set of possible models to those that can explain that correlation. And it is important to remember that this is an area where many have very strongly held views but there is little in the way of quantitative evidence of the sort we present. In such a vacuum we believe that correlations can be of interest.

The plan of the paper is as follows. In the next section we try to explain why a common sense of national identity has been regarded as important for the well-being of a society. We then use the theoretical work on identity to develop hypotheses about the factors that might be associated with identity. Section 3 describes our data and Section 4 considers the associations between identity and the factors identified as likely to be important. Our main conclusions are that people who feel well treated are more likely to feel they belong to or identify with the wider society. We also find little evidence that religious or ethnic minorities are either less likely to feel they belong or that they see an irresolvable conflict between their religion and identifying with Britain though many do experience some conflict at times. However the white British are more concerned about such conflict. Section 5 concludes.

## 2. Identity

### 2.1. *Who cares?*

There is now a considerable body of evidence from many parts of the social sciences that identity matters for behaviour. This is partly because the 'rules' for membership of a group generally require certain behaviour from individuals, often to mark the individual as a member of the group. Some of these prescribed behaviours may be regarded by others as undesirable even if the consequences fall wholly or largely on the individual (see, for example, [Austen-Smith and Fryer, 2005](#), on 'acting white' or [Constant and Zimmermann, 2008, 2009](#); [Casey and Dustmann, 2010](#); [Nekby and Rodin, 2010](#); [Battu and Zenou, 2010](#), for links between identity and economic outcomes).

But, identity also matters because it affects behaviour towards others. A general feature of groups (and one that is arguably essential for them to be stable) is that one behaves in a more pro-social way towards other members of the same group and less pro-socially to outsiders (in some cases, it may be that a group actively causes harm to outsiders) – see [Hogg and Vaughan \(2005\)](#) for an accessible introduction to this literature or [Bernhard et al. \(2006\)](#), [Goette et al. \(2006\)](#), and [Charness et al. \(2007\)](#) for recent examples from the economics literature. Essentially one puts a greater weight on the welfare of someone who is part of one's group than one does on the welfare of an outsider.

From this perspective, it is easy to understand why it is widely believed that it is desirable for those in a country to have a common sense of national identity. To give an example, suppose a society consists of two groups who do not care about each other – a majority and a minority who differ in their preferences in some way. If decisions are made by majority vote, there is a danger that the majority will enact policies that are very disadvantageous to the minority – John Stuart Mills' 'tyranny of the majority'. In turn, the minority may then, realizing the impossibility of achieving more desirable outcomes peacefully through the ballot box, resort to violence or the threat of it in an attempt to get the majority to take its grievances seriously.

If, by creating a common sense of national identity, both groups think of the other as part of a wider in-group, then the effective distance in preferences will be reduced and less extreme outcomes will be produced. Although the minority does not have political power, the majority will, in part, internalize the welfare of the minority, so that the policies enacted will be less harmful to the minority. And, because the minority now internalize, in part, the welfare of the majority they will be less likely to threaten harm to obtain a more desirable outcome.

We do have evidence of costs from diversity that is usefully surveyed by [Alesina and La Ferrara \(2005\)](#). They review evidence like that presented by [Easterly and Levine \(1997\)](#) that ethnic fragmentation leads to lower growth in Africa and [Alesina et al. \(1999\)](#) that public good provision is lower in US cities with higher levels of ethnic diversity. [Miguel \(2004\)](#) argues, in a comparison between Kenya and Tanzania, that nation-building does help foster cohesive societies. [Alesina and La Ferrara \(2005, p. 794\)](#) conclude that there is "overwhelming evidence" that public good provision is lower in fragmented societies". We do have some studies providing evidence against this i.e. that diversity raises productivity

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7243745>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7243745>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)