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Economics of National Identity

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ABSTRACT

Following the decision by the UK government in 1997 to create an elected assembly in Wales, the Economic and Social Research Council introduced questions about the perception of national identity in the British Household Panel Survey. Analysis of the first set of this data suggest that the language might have contradictory effects on the perception of Welsh identity. Those whose mother tongue is English reject the view that they are not Welsh, but the self-perception of Welshness amongst the English speakers is stronger in areas, which are also industrial regions, where the Welsh language is virtually extinct. We speculate on the implications of these findings for the electoral fortunes of the National Party of Wales.

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I. Introduction

This paper is about the economics and politics of national identity in the context of an analysis of Welshness contained in the works of Gwyn A. Williams (1985), one of the most distinguished if controversial historians of Wales.[1] Williams argues that economic development that took place in the 19th century entailed social changes that were not reflected in the myths which came to define the imagined community of a people in the discourse on Welsh nationalism that was initiated in the twentieth century. As the country became industrialized, the language became less prevalent in the south, where much of the population gravitated, but it survived in the less populated north.[2] These changes were not reconciled, according to Williams, in the definition of Welshness as articulated in the political movement of Welsh nationalism in the 20th century. This discourse was started in the chapel-based academic community in the northwest region of the country, with strong identification with the Welsh language.[3] Those who did not speak Welsh, the huge majority of the people living in Wales, were viewed in negative terms. They were viewed as "di-Gymraeg (Welsh-less)" in the eyes of the Welsh nationalist.

We examine BHPS data on the self-perception of identity to see how the two linguistic groups perceive themselves. It appears that the argument for exclusion of the English speaking community from the claim to Welshness is rejected by this community. Around 81 per cent of the respondents in the BHPS data, whose mother tongue is Welsh, consider themselves either Welsh or Welsh and British. The percentage of those respondents whose mother tongue is English who consider themselves as either Welsh or Welsh and British is not much different at 77 per cent, if we confine this latter groups to only those who were born in Wales or born of parents at least one of whom was born in Wales.[4]

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[1] From now on Williams refers to Gwyn A. Williams. The first name is included when any other Williams, for example Glyn Williams, is cited here.

[2] The story is more complicated, but the historical details are outside the scope of this paper. See for example Glyn Williams (1992).

[3] In the writing of Glyn Williams (1985), a different explanation for the rise of nationalism in the north might be found. In explaining the idea of nationalism, but we hasten to point out that he is discussing contemporary nationalism, Glyn Williams suggests the following. When an area is economically marginalised, and "economic survival is threatened by the encroachment of 'new' developments" (p. 333), then nationalism is embraced as a survival option. The attitude to second home ownership in the 1970s in the sparsely populated areas may provide an example (Bollom 1978).

[4] This restriction is to filter out the effect of migration into Wales. In their analysis of the perception of

However, in those areas where the Welsh language still survives, in that a significant percentage of the population still claim Welsh to be their mother tongue, the English speakers are less likely to claim to be Welsh than in regions where the language has become virtually extinct. We do not have an explanation for this, but we speculate on the relevance of this finding for the fortunes of Plaid Cymru,[5] as it tries to re-brand itself as the National party for Wales, distancing itself from the idea that the language is central to the idea of Welshness.

The paper is organized as follows. Section II explains the background to the modern debate on the claim to nationhood for Wales. With the introduction of questions about identity in the British Household Panel Survey, the regional differences in the connection made by respondents between the Welsh language and the self-perception of being Welsh can be described. That is done in Section III. Section IV contains a discussion of the results in III. Section V examines election data for the period adjacent to that covered by the Survey, and analyses the data in the context of sections III and IV. Section VI concludes.

II. The Background

Whilst the Irish emigrated in large numbers in the 19th century, as economic opportunities at home declined, the Welsh did not. Wales as a nation may not have survived if the Welsh had joined the Irish in the rush to emigrate. "In those years which sent so many across the Atlantic, for every 77 per 10000 Irish who migrated annually, there were …only 3 Welsh" (Williams 1985:180). Contrary to the experience of the smaller nations in the British Isles, the Welsh experienced a period of revival. A thriving mining and manufacturing sector, dominated by heavy industry, began to emerge in the south. Economic development brought in its wake changes in the demographic characteristics within Wales. Economic development had different impacts on families living in different parts of Wales. Industrialization changed especially the south, where the new industries largely located and where the

national identity on the referendum on the creation of a Welsh Assembly, Richard Wyn Jones and David Trystam (1999) point out the difficulties of filtering out migration effect from survey data in Wales. In "some parts of Wales, babies are routinely born in English hospitals"(p.75). We respond to this difficulty by introducing the parents' place of birth.

[5] We refer to Plaid Cymru both as Plaid and Plaid Cymru, in the Welsh langauge. The Labour party also has a welsh name in Wales, Llafur Cymru (Welsh Labour). However, we use the term Labour

population gravitated. Almost two thirds of the population in what was the geographical entity of Wales became concentrated in the south-east of the country. Those who came and those who were already there were both immersed into a society which was undergoing rapid changes: "planting communities and uprooting them, building itself into an export metropolis of a world economy and merging inexorably into the overwhelming culture of the world language of English" (Williams 1985:180-181). Industrialization led to a revival of Wales, in that it staved off the prospect of depopulation, but the economic process of revival also made the myth of a uniform culture of Welshness transmitted through the Welsh language less relevant to the idea of Welsh nationality.

But the rhetoric of nationalism in the twentieth century, especially in the writings originating in north Wales, remained oblivious to the changes brought about by economic developments in the previous century. The rural Wales of the north experienced emigration of the enterprising amongst the young, and it became economically marginalized, but it retained its traditional non-conformist radicalism. Also, the language survived in the rural north.[6] The Welsh language assumed a central role in the imagined community of the Welsh nation in the articles on national identity that began to appear in the "chapel-derived intellectual journals" (Williams 1985:238). The educational institutions that were set up during this period generated intellectual movements which denied the need to revise the idea of national identity in light of the process of industrialization. "What has come to be thought of as 'traditional', Non-conformist, radical Welsh-speaking Wales in particular, that Wales which created so many of the characteristic Welsh institutions, notably the educational, was in some basic senses a by-product of this industrialization…" (Williams 1985:180). These academic journals articulated one of the "dominant themes of Plaid Cymru's early philosophy, namely the intimate relationship between a people and its land" (Gruffud 1995:223). The identity of the Welsh as a people, in this view, was based on the mythology of a 'peasant culture' notwithstanding the historical reality. Kenneth O. Morgan (1971:156) puts the case bluntly that Welsh revival was "not in the hinterland, so beloved of many apostles of 'peasant culture', but amidst the blast

party here in this paper.

[6] Gruffud (1995) suggests that topography may have played a role in the survival of the language in the north.

furnaces and winding-shafts of the working-class metropolis of Merthyr Tydfill".

A nation is an imagined community of a people (Anderson 1983), and the imagination reflects both the realities and myths of the historical process by which the community came to be formed.[7] Also, for nationalism to mean anything, it must exclude people and define the terms for inclusion (Berlin 1998:590):

> By nationalism, I mean something more definite, ideologically important and dangerous: namely the conviction, in the first place, that men belong to a particular human group, and that the way of the group differs from that of the others; that the characters of the individuals who compose the group are shaped by, and cannot be understood apart from, those of the group, defined in terms of common territory, customs, laws, memories, beliefs, language, artistic and religious expression, social institutions, ways of life, to which some add heredity, kinship, racial characteristic; and that it is in these factors which shape human beings, their purposes, and their values.

The language became the criterion for inclusion in this imagined community, and it also became the criterion for exclusion of the vast majority of people living in Wales.

Welsh nationalism and the political party, Plaid Cymru, that espoused nationalism, became the bearer of this historical legacy. For example, Jones and Trystan (1999:83) find evidence for this in the 1979 Welsh Election Survey:[8]

A consequence of this linguistic identification of Plaid Cymru was that its electoral base was limited (see Section IV). This changed after 1997 when the party aggressively re-branded itself as the National Party of Wales. The party now is faced with a dilemma. If it distances itself from the view that the Welsh language is central to the Welsh identity, it risks alienating its traditional supporters. The party also risks losing the influence on policies, as a pressure group for the Welsh language, to enhance the use of the Welsh language in the political and cultural spheres of life in

[7] In the recent debate over the definition of a 'nation', Anderson falls in the modernist camp of those who see nations as inventions or constructions, entities based on perception rather than blood and history (see Bolaffi *et al* 2003:196-197). According to the modernists, to put it in the words of Seton-Watson (1977:5) 'a nation exists when a significant number of people in a community consider themselves to form a nation, or behave as if they formed one.'

[8] Survey recorded political attitudes in Wales and it was conducted by Dennis Balsom and colleagues (Balsom *et al.* 1983, Balsom *et al*. 1984, Balsom 1985).

Wales. On the other hand, if it does not take a more inclusive view of the Welsh identity, it risks remaining an onlooker sitting on the fringe in the Welsh Assembly and the evolving institutions of governance in Wales.

III. The Data

The Panel Survey was initiated by the Economic and Social Research council almost a decade ago, but questions about national identity were not included. Also, only a few hundred people were sampled from Wales. The design of the Survey came under review when devolution of power was mooted by the incoming Labour government in London in 1997. It was expected that increasingly greater responsibility for local decisions would be passed on to a devolved structure of government in Wales, and there would be need for better data.

The Secretary of State for Wales is a member of the UK cabinet in London, who used, until recently, to oversee the governance of Wales on behalf of the Westminster parliament in London.[9] Constitutional changes initiated by the incoming Labour government after the General election of 1997 changed the role of the Secretary of State. The post still remains, but the function has changed. The secretary of State is selected from amongst members at Westminster[10], which has overall power for the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, but these powers are changing. An assembly in Wales was established in 1999, and it was vested with powers to make certain decisions that were originally made in London and executed by the Secretary of State on behalf of the UK government[11].

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[9] It has often happened that the Secretary of State represented a constituency located outside of Wales. For example, a Secretary of State for Wales might be a member of Parliament from an English constituency. This state of affairs is especially common under a Conservative government in London because there are very few Conservative who can aspire to get elected to Westminster from Wales. In the 1992 General Election, when the Conservatives won parliamentary majority at Westminster, they managed to secure only 6 out of the 38 parliamentary seats from Wales. In the 1997 Labour landslide, no Conservative candidate was sent to Westminster from Wales.

[10] Westminster parliament refers to the UK parliament in London and the term Westminster is also used to denote both the UK parliament and the UK government.

[11] The powers of these elected bodies at local level are still being debated. As custom and practice develop, the demarcation between London and the regional capitals in Cardiff and Edinburgh would become clearer. Only 'secondary' legislation, an evolving concept, can be enacted by devolved governments. The Welsh Assembly has no fund raising power, but the Edinburgh Parliament is allowed to vary taxes within a narrow band. As the historian Kenneth Morgan explained in his British Academy lecture in September 1998, it "is not difficult to see prospects of years of wholesale constitutional and legal confusion to bemuse or distract the British people" (Morgan 1999:212).

These developments brought into sharp focus the inadequacies of the BHPS data at regional level because of sparse coverage at the regional level. Booster samples were added in the devolved regions of Britain.[12]

The Welsh booster sample contains interviews with some 3000 individuals in Wales. Also, new questions were added. For example, questions relevant to formulation of policy for the rural areas in Wales were added to the Welsh sample for the BHPS. Questions concerning perceptions about national identity in Wales appeared in Wave 10 of the Survey, conducted in the year 2000, following the first ever election of a Welsh Assembly in 1999.

The identity questions are administered by showing cards to respondents and asking them to choose one or **more** of the categories that best describe them in their own eyes. They are asked the following question: "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". The categories on the card as listed below.[13]

> British, English, European, Irish, Northern Irish, Scottish, Welsh, Other (write in), None of these

A preliminary analysis of this data, which has only very recently been placed in the public domain, is reported here, and it reveals certain interesting features about the role of the Welsh language in the perception of identity.[14] These are discussed below. First, some observations about the data are needed.

The samples were not stratified according to language and thus the ration of Welsh speakers to non-Welsh speakers in this sample is smaller than the national average for

[12] At the time that an assembly was established in Wales, certain powers were also devolved from the central government to an elected parliament in Scotland. The Scottish parliament enjoys greater powers than the Welsh assembly, but further discussion is outside the scope of this paper.

[13] The question number is D89 in the BHPS interview. After the respondent has chosen, the interviewer asks: "Any other?". The object of this prompt is to underline the fact that one can have more than one identity.

[14] If they choose Welsh but no other category, we consider that they regard themselves as exclusively Welsh. In an earlier survey, it was found that the proportion of people in Wales who regard themselves as Welsh regard themselves as none other, but exclusively Welsh is almost half the proportion of those in Scotland who regard themselves as exclusively as Scottish. Likewise, when the constitutional proposal for devolution was put to referenda in Wales and Scotland, a greater degree of enthusiasm for devolution was observed in Scotland. Curtice (1999:142) argues that the "Scots are indeed more likely than the Welsh to think of themselves as a nation that is distinct from the rest of the United Kingdom".

Wales. However, we assume that the relative density of Welsh speakers between the regions of Wales reflect their relative density in the population as a whole.

In view of the need to choose the sample on a wide range of criteria, the BHPS does not sample Welsh speakers[15] in the same proportion as they are represented in Wales. Only 10 per cent of the BHPS sample can claim Welsh as their mother tongue, whilst census data suggest that almost 20 per cent of the population in Wales might have Welsh as their first language. The size of the sample of Welsh speakers is small and we mainly discuss the sample of English speakers in our analysis of the perception of identity. However, if we accept that the distribution of the sample by mother tongue below provides a picture of the relative ranking of the regions in terms of the density of Welsh speakers, it is possible to draw inferences about the impact of the language and the perception of Welshness amongst English speakers.

Table III.1: The distribution of the sample population by mother tongue

Welsh Regions	No of those whose mother tongue is	
	English	Welsh
North West Wales	190	144
North East Wales	366	47
Mid and West Wales	324	75
South West Wales	509	18
South East Wales	222	1
South Central Wales	596	17
Cardiff and Glamorgan	328	10
Total	2535	312

Source: BHPS 2000 Wave10

The areas where the Welsh language is more prevalent are areas where agriculture played a greater part in the economy until the collapse of employment in that sector during the 1990s (see Appendix).

[15] English speakers and Welsh speakers are terms we use to denote those whose mother tongue is English and Welsh, respectively.

Table III.2: The distribution of the sample population by mother tongue

Welsh Regions	Percentage of the sample whose mother tongue is	
	English	Welsh
North West Wales	55.72	42.23
North East Wales	84.53	10.86
Mid and West Wales	78.01	18.07
South West Wales	92.21	3.26
South East Wales	94.87	0.43
South Central Wales	92.26	2.63
Cardiff and Glamorgan	88.17	2.69
Total	84.69	10.42

Source: Table III.1 above

On further interrogation of the questions about self-perceived national identity in the BHPS Wave 10 data, the first picture to emerge is that around 70 per cent of those in our sample whose mother tongue is Welsh regard themselves exclusively as Welsh. If the respondents who regard themselves as both Welsh and British are considered, then the percentage rises to over 80.

Table III.3: Self perception of identity amongst those in the sample whose mother tongue is Welsh [16]

	Percentage who consider themselves as	
Wales regions	Exclusively Welsh	Both British & Welsh
North West Wales	69.4	6.9
North East Wales	63.8	21.3
Mid and West Wales	78.7	5.3
South West Wales	66.7	22.2
South East Wales	0.0	100.0
South Central Wales	70.6	29.4
Cardiff and Glamorgan	60.0	10.0
Total	70.2	11.2

Source: BHPS Wave 10

[16] We also placed the following seemingly redundant condition, restricting the sample to those who claim to have some knowledge of the Welsh language, in sorting through the data to filter out responses that make no sense.

The self-perceived Welsh identity is weaker amongst the English speakers, especially those who also do not claim any knowledge of the Welsh language, than it is amongst those whose mother tongue is Welsh (compare tables III.3 and III.4). These results are not surprising, but what is interesting is that the perception of Welsh identity is weaker amongst English speakers who live in areas where the density of Welsh speakers is greater than the average for Wales in the BHPS sample than those who live in areas where the Welsh language is virtually extinct. We shall investigate this particular aspect of the regional variations in the perception of identity presently by taking out the effect of migration and see if the variations persist.

Table III.4: Self perception of identity amongst those whose mother tongue is English and who do not claim any knowledge of the Welsh language

	Percentage who consider themselves as	
Wales regions	Exclusively Welsh	Both British & Welsh
North West Wales	11.1	4.9
North East Wales	26.8	12.0
Mid and West Wales	34.8	9.3
South West Wales	41.0	22.3
South East Wales	36.8	30.7
South Central Wales	59.9	16.5
Cardiff and Glamorgan	24.3	24.8
Total	39.2	18.1

Source: BHPS Wave 10

If we restrict the sample of English speaking respondents to the subset of those who claim to have some knowledge of the Welsh language, the percentage of those who regard themselves as exclusively Welsh is not much improved.[17] Knowledge of the Welsh language for English speakers may indicate either non-transient connection with Wales or a special sympathy with the language. The BHPS data do not contain sufficient details to investigate the relative effect of these factors. Instead, we can examine the effect of long-term association with Wales on the perception of national

[17] This finding appears at first sight to be the opposite of what would be expected from the findings from the referendum survey as reported by Jones and Trystan (1999). They report that cultural affinity with Wales, for example, in terms of the language - increases a sense of identification with Wales. This may indeed be the case, if we consider respondents who consider themselves as both British and Welsh. We do not report any of the percentage figures derived from the BHPS data because a large number, almost a third, of the respondents in this category did not answer the identity question. We

identity by restricting the sample to those English speakers who were either themselves born in Wales or born of parents at least one of which was born in Wales.[18]

Table III.5: Self-perception of identity amongst those whose mother tongue is English and who do not claim any knowledge of Welsh and who were either themselves born in Wales or born of parents at least one of who was born in Wales

Welsh Regions	Percentage of those who consider themselves	
	Exclusively Welsh	Both British and Welsh
North West Wales	32.1	14.3
North East Wales	44.9	18.6
Mid and West Wales	58.3	16.5
South West Wales	52.4	27.9
South East Wales	41.5	33.1
South Central Wales	65.5	17.9
Cardiff and Glamorgan	33.1	33.1
Total	52.2	23.6

Table III.6: Self-perception of identity amongst those whose mother tongue is English but who claims to know some Welsh, and who were either themselves born in Wales or born of parents at least one of who was born in Wales.

Welsh Regions	Percentage of those who consider themselves	
	Exclusively Welsh	Both British and Welsh
North West Wales	48.2	14.3
North East Wales	45.7	32.6
Mid and West Wales	56.9	21.5
South West Wales	61.9	20.9
South East Wales	68.2	27.3
South Central Wales	71.8	21.2
Cardiff and Glamorgan	50.0	25.0
Total	57.6	23.1

need to examine this issue further.

[18] The object of this restriction is to separate respondents by their long-term association with Wales. It is not our purpose to give credence to the idea of genetic transmission of national identity. This is an idea that is mooted in Kedourie (1960) and disputed by most authors (see e.g. Barry 1983 or Day 2002).

Knowledge of the Welsh language only marginally improves the perception of Welshness amongst the above group of respondents.

It appears that there is a regional difference within Wales of the response by English speakers to the question of feeling exclusively Welsh. The rank order is preserved whether they have any knowledge of the Welsh language or not. We first run the Spearman's rank order correlation to check the null hypothesis whether or not data in the first columns of both tables are the same. We get the following results:

Spearman's rho = 0.57 (*p-value* = 0.139)

Then we test for the similarity of the rank order in the second column between the above two tables. The following statistics are obtained:

Spearman's rho = 0.54 (*p-value* = 0.168)

We cannot reject the null hypothesis that the rank order of the self declared feeling of identity - exclusively Welsh (Column 1) and both Welsh and British (Column 2) - is unaltered whether or not the sample of English speakers is restricted to those who claim to have some knowledge of the Welsh language.

We further check whether or not the difference is significant from zero between each column in the above two tables, III.5 and III.6. We run the *Pair t test* and the *Wilkoxon signed-rank test*.

Results for Column 1 (exclusively Welsh) are listed below:

Paired t test = -3.0328 (*p-value* = 0.019)

Wilcoxon signed-rank test = -2.240 (*p*- value = 0.0251)

Results for Column 2 (both Welsh and British) are listed below:

Paired t test = -0.0432 (*p- value* = 0.9668)

Wilcoxon signed-rank test = 0.351 (*p- value* = 0.7256)

Again, we cannot reject the null hypothesis that the rank order of the self declared feeling of identity - exclusively Welsh (Column 1) - is unaltered whether or not the sample of English speakers is restricted to those who claim to have some knowledge

of the Welsh language. However, the results for Column 2 (both Welsh and British) reject the null hypothesis of similarity.

The samples are small and further investigation is needed, but it is possible to draw at least some tentative conclusions.

IV. What Do The Results Show?

It appears that the language is not an unambiguous contributor to the feeling of exclusive Welshness, as registered by the response of YES to "Feel Welsh" and NO to any other description of the feeling of national identity. It is indeed the case that 70 per cent of the respondents in Wales, whose mother tongue is Welsh, answer in the affirmative to the question of feeling exclusively Welsh. However, similar percentages of English speakers appear to identify with an exclusive view of Welshness in areas where the language is hardly spoken by anyone. If one drops the requirement of exclusivity, and includes those who regard themselves as both Welsh and British, the total share of the population identifying with Wales is similar between the English and Welsh speakers. For example, around 80.7 per cent of the English speaking respondents recorded in Table III.6 consider themselves Welsh, either exclusively Welsh or Welsh and British. The corresponding figure for Welsh speakers in Table III.3 is 81.4 per cent. There is a marginal effect of the language if we compare responses between tables III.5 and III.6.

An interesting observation that emerges from tables III.5 and III.6 is that there is a clearly discernible difference in the response from English speakers about identity between areas where the density of the Welsh speakers is high (e.g. North West Wales) and areas where the language is hardly spoken (e.g. South Central Wales). The English speakers are keener on an exclusive Welsh identity if they live in areas where there are few Welsh language speakers.

The geographical difference in the answers to the question of identity that we observe may have to do with the historical legacy of the development of nationalist thought as described in Williams. There is a related issue. When one claims to belong to a group, there is an implicit assumption of there being a clear distinction between those who belong and those who do not. The distinction may be exacerbated in the Welsh

speaking regions where the knowledge of the language in certain types of public sector employment leads to an element of segregation between communities.

The political significance of the language for the hitherto nationalist party, Plaid Cymru, has assumed new importance after the creation of the Welsh assembly. It is clear that the Welsh language is not the primary determinant of the idea of belonging to Wales, but the language has traditionally been an important determinant of support for Plaid Cymru. Jones and Trystan (1991) highlight the following from the 1978 Election Survey (p.83):

> Among Welsh identifiers, the minority exhibiting strong Welsh 'cultural attachment', defined as knowledge of - or positive attitude towards - the Welsh language, regular exposure to Welsh-based media, and non-conformist religious affiliation, were more likely to be Plaid Cymru supporters than the majority among whom identification with the Labour Party predominated.

Labour dominated Welsh politics until the end of the last century, but the landscape suddenly changed after 1999 for a combination of reasons, not the least of which is the self-inflicted problems of the Labour party. The leadership in London ignored the wishes of the Labour party in Wales in the selection a leader to head Labour in Wales in the 1999 assembly elections (McAllister 2003). The introudction of a proportional system of seat allocation also helped Plaid Cymru in gaining Assembly seats.

Given the fact thatPlaid Cymru, is now attempting to re-brand itself as 'The National Party of Wales', the challenge is to define the criteria for inclusion and exclusion which can incorporate the contradictory influence of the language to the idea of exclusive Welshness. The trade-off between emphasizing the language and placing the focus on other criteria is not easy to estimate, but it is a task that fits into the way problems in economics are often addressed.[19] In the following section, we describe the changing fortunes for Labour and Plaid Cymru in Wales during the last decade.

[19] The renowned biologist Nathan Keyfitz (1994:25) once asked the Nobel laureate Robert Dorfman to underline the principles that underlie economics. Amongst the three principles that Dorfman mentioned is the calculation of the trade off between pairs of alternatives.

V. Election Data

From the late 1970s until 1992, the share of votes for Plaid Cymru remained around 10 per cent of the ballots cast in Wales in General Elections to select members to sit in the Westminster parliament. Under the first past the post system of elections, based on parliamentary constituencies with well-defined geographical boundaries, minority parties do not fare well because their support is scattered amongst constituencies. Plaid Cymru was an exception to this rule because it enjoyed strong support in the rural agricultural areas of the north and west of Wales to compensate for scattered support elsewhere in Wales. The percentage of votes and seats in Westminster were roughly similar, around 10 per cent each, for Plaid Cymru. The picture changed in 1999, when Plaid Cymru gained support across Wales, and gained seats in the Labour heartland in the south. (See tables V.1 and V.2)

When the first elections to the Welsh assembly were held in 1999, "Plaid Cymru performed beyond even its most optimistic expectations. It gained nearly 30 per cent of the total vote … . A month later, it saw its first two MEPs elected to the European Parliament. For the first time in its history, Plaid Cymru had elected representatives at every level" (McAllister 2003:211).

Table V.1 Votes and Seats in Westminster Parliamentary Elections in 1997

Share (%) of Votes Cast for Political Parties in 1997 and % of Seats Gained by Parties					
Seats are in second row					
Regions in Wales	Labour	Plaid	Con	Lib Dem	Others
North West Wales	30.8	34.8	19.1	12.8	2.5
	25	75	0	0	0
North East Wales	53.7	5.8	26.5	10.7	3.4
	100	0	0	0	0
Mid and West Wales	39.0	17.4	21.1	19.4	3.0
	57.1	14.3	0.0	28.6	0.0
South West Wales	64.8	5.7	16.1	10.6	2.9
	100	0	0	0	0
South East Wales	58.4	1.7	24.9	10.4	4.5
	100	0	0	0	0
South Central Wales	72.1	8.2	8.0	8.9	2.7
	100	0	0	0	0
Cardiff and Glamorgan	54.9	3.6	24.2	12.6	4.7
	100	0	0	0	0
Total	54.7	9.9	19.6	12.4	3.4
	85	10	0	5	0

Table V.2 Votes and Seats in Welsh Assembly Elections in 1999

Share (%) of Votes Cast for Political Parties in 1999 and % of Seats Gained by Parties					
Seats are in second row					
Regions in Wales	Labour	Plaid	Con	Lib Dem	Others
North West Wales	23.7	52.5	14.8	7.8	1.1
	0.0	62.5	25.0	12.5	0.0
North East Wales	42.5	20.4	21.4	11.6	4.1
	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Mid and West Wales	27.0	32.9	15.6	18.6	5.9
	27.3	36.4	18.2	18.2	0.0
South West Wales	41.7	26.0	12.0	11.9	8.4
	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
South East Wales	40.7	10.4	26.6	12.9	9.5
	50.0	16.7	33.3	0.0	0.0
South Central Wales	44.8	35.4	5.9	10.1	3.8
	55.6	33.3	0.0	11.1	0.0
Cardiff and Glamorgan	43.0	17.9	20.5	17.0	1.6
	35.7	28.6	21.4	14.3	0.0
Total	37.7	28.3	15.9	13.3	4.8
	46.7	28.3	15.0	10.0	0.0

To consolidate the gains in non-traditional areas of support would require a redefinition of the idea of Welshness away from an exclusive focus on the language. Dilution of the focus on the language would cost support amongst the traditional voters. Success also meant that the Party could not fully exploit problems within Labour. Labour was denied a clear majority in part due to the enormous success of Plaid Cymru in 1999. "It had grown accustomed to the pluses and minuses of being the perennial 'minority party'." Now it could offer coalition to Labour and become "central to the workings of a new multi-level political settlement with its 17 AMs [Assembly Members] occupying a pivotal position in the Assembly" (McAllister 2003:211). Plaid took the plunge, reducing emphasis on Welsh language, but with mixed success for its long-term electoral prospects. Many of the gains made in 1999

were reversed in the Assembly elections in 2003, and many of the seats gained in 1999 were lost. However, the support for the party is still higher than it had been before 1999, and the support is not confined to the north. The proportional system of seat allocation translates votes into seat more efficiently for Plaid and the Conservative party at the expense of the Liberal Democrats and also the small parties on the fringe of mainstream politics.

Table V. 3 Votes and Seats in Welsh Assembly Elections in 2003

Share (%) of Votes Cast for Political Parties in 2003 and % of Seats Gained by Parties					
Seats are in second row					
Regions in Wales	Labour	Plaid	Con	Lib Dem	Others
North West Wales	25.6	43.9	20.9	9.0	0.6
	16.7	50.0	16.7	16.7	0.0
North East Wales	38.8	15.0	25.0	11.2	10.0
	62.5	12.5	12.5	0.0	12.5
Mid and West Wales	25.6	30.3	19.6	22.0	2.5
	27.3	27.3	27.3	18.2	0.0
South West Wales	46.3	18.0	16.0	14.1	5.6
	60.0	20.0	10.0	10.0	0.0
South East Wales	41.1	7.8	34.5	12.3	4.3
	37.5	12.5	37.5	12.5	0.0
South Central Wales	57.6	20.9	7.4	7.6	6.4
	77.8	11.1	11.1	0.0	0.0
Cardiff and Glamorgan	42.2	12.6	23.6	18.2	3.4
	62.5	12.5	12.5	12.5	0.0
Total	40.0	21.2	19.9	14.1	4.7
	50.0	20.0	18.3	10.0	1.7

What is more interesting is that the Plaid share of the total votes cast is not a monotonic function of the density of Welsh speakers in the regions. The support for Plaid weakened in the second Assembly elections, but the decline was not uniform throughout Wales. The pattern of decline is described in Table IV.4 below.

Table V.4: Votes Cast in Assembly Elections in 1999 and 2003

Share (%) of Votes Cast for Political Parties in 2003 and 1999						
Regions in Wales	Year	Labour	Plaid	Con	Lib Dem	Others
North Wales	2003	25.6	43.9	20.9	9.0	0.6
	1999	23.7	52.5	14.8	7.8	1.1
North East Wales	2003	38.8	15.0	25.0	11.2	10.0
	1999	42.5	20.4	21.4	11.6	4.1
Mid & West Wales	2003	25.6	30.3	19.6	22.0	2.5
	1999	27.0	32.9	15.6	18.6	5.9
South West Wales	2003	46.3	18.0	16.0	14.1	5.6
	1999	41.7	26.0	12.0	11.9	8.4
South East Wales	2003	41.1	7.8	34.5	12.3	4.3
	1999	40.7	10.4	26.6	12.9	9.5
South Central Wales	2003	57.6	20.9	7.4	7.6	6.4
	1999	44.8	35.4	5.9	10.1	3.8
Cardiff & Glamorgan	2003	42.2	12.6	23.6	18.2	3.4
	1999	43.0	17.9	20.5	17.0	1.6
Total	2003	40.0	21.2	19.9	14.1	4.7
	1999	37.7	28.3	15.9	13.3	4.8

What is clear is that Plaid has gained a significant foothold in areas where the Welsh language does not have a significant presence, and the share of Plaid votes in these regions is growing at the expense of Labour. However, within the areas where the Welsh language is still strong (especially the North West and the North East) support

has marginally declined since the heady days following the Assembly elections in 1999.

There is no useable information in the BHPS data to test for factors which determine how the feeling of Welshness is translated into votes for a Wales-based political party, but it would not amount to wild speculation to suggest that economic issues are important for getting votes especially in areas in the south where English is the primary of not the only language. To the extent that concentration on these issues dilutes attention to the pressure group politics in support of the Welsh language,[20] the trade-off between the language and other perhaps economic factors that has to be understood if a National Party of Wales was to emerge to replace Labour as the dominant political force in Wales. In its economic policy, Plaid stands some distance from New Labour in London, but the distinction between the economic policies of Plaid and Labour are less distinct at the Welsh level.

VI. Economics and Politics of Nationhood

Before we conclude with a note of what is done here, it is important to explain something about what is not done. We do not settle the question of what is a nation. There is a consensus in the literature that all definitions of group identity are inherently ill defined but there is also a consensus that national identity is possible to define. We do not resolve these contradictions, and we simply describe the evolution of the debate about Welsh identity with a view to outlining the impact of economic changes on nationalist politics. Nationalist politics as it continues to unfold in the post-devolution era in the 21st century may depart from the resistance to taking economic changes on board. This is a tentative prediction based on the observation that the vehicle of nationalist politics, Plaid Cymru, is beginning to distance itself from its historical pre-occupation with language and culture in search of a wider electoral base, by re-inventing itself as The national party of Wales, that appears to be within its grasp. It is in the nature of the subject matters that predictions can only be

[20] For example, new investment projects are often examined for their impact on 'language and culture', the assumption being that the preservation of the above is desirable. The extent to which it is deemed desirable will come to depend on the electoral impact of prosperity versus preservation of culture much the way that it has come to depend in much of the hitherto closed economies in the developing world. Plaid, if it is to become a governing party, may have to make choices and justify the trade-off entailed in making choices that it never had to make when it was a pressure group in opposition.

tentative because the question of what is a nation remains as yet unresolved. We offer a pragmatic view from an historian, that a nation is a process rather than a place (Jones 1982:20):[21]

> Wales exists because nationalism says that it exists. In this sense Wales becomes a process rather than a place, and thus a fit subject of history.

The idea of collective identity is a difficult concept and it is especially difficult within the theories of neo-classical economics. Neoclassical theories in economics, starting as they do from the postulate of rational choice by individual actors, often underlie a view of liberty that is incompatible with the existence of collective identity.[22] The methodology of neo-classical entails the testing of prediction based on postulates of individuals as the seekers of self-interest (Friedman 1953). Within this framework, collective identity is understood only as the opportunity for individuals for seeking rent. Thus the claim to nationality is a vehicle for seeking a greater share of the national wealth (Breton 1964) by defining nations and nationality to one's advantage. The data as available in the British Household Panel Survey do not allow for identification by individuals of special economic advantage that the claim to Welsh nationality might be perceived to bring. Thus a test of the economic model of national identity as a rent seeking opportunity is not possible. Instead we take a more eclectic view of economics, by borrowing from a wider range of the literature, in analyzing the economics and politics of nationalism in Wales.

In sociological theory, the definition of what is a nation often gets confounded with what ought to be a nation. The definition of a nation may get entangled in a language extolling the nation.[23] The definition of what is a society often gets confused with "the question of the appropriate 'arrangements' for managing such a society" (Barry, 1983:122). Politics is often informed by ill-defined categories into which people are located. States conduct census of population using categories that "inculcate the idea that national societies are bounded wholes, composed of discrete, mutually exclusive, ethnic, racial, or cultural groups" (Brubaker *et al.* 2004:34). Political theory then has

[21] Quoted by Day (2002:230-231).

[22] For example, central European liberal thinkers such as Karl Popper regard it dangerous to think of a collective identity that might transcend the interest of individuals who comprise the nation (Popper 1962).

[23] See Smith (1994).

to address the question of whether behavioural norms for the conduct of social relations amongst individuals that might explain the emergence of "ethnic" groups that lay claim to distinctness (Kuran 1998:623). There are attempts at articulating an idea of nation as a civil society that confers social capital[24]. None of these arguments provide a clinching definition of a nation, and there is awareness in the literature on nationalism about the problem of the defining a coherent national interest, as there is in the tradition of social choice theory in economics, but the idea of collective identity is still taken for granted in the literature on nationalism. Day (2002:241) explains:

> Yet, despite their disagreements about the origins and nature of nationality, the main theoretical approaches to nationalism have tended to take for granted the essential uniformity of national identity towards which nationalism is directed. In other words, they have assumed that the nation means the same thing for all those involved, and the various rituals and symbols of nationhood carry identical meanings for everyone who responds to them; nationality then forms the basis of a more-or-less homogeneous identity.

We start with the claim that ideas of Welsh nationalism as they developed in the 20th century remained oblivious to economic changes that transformed Wales in the 19th century (Williams 1985). A static view of culture as expressed through the medium of the Welsh language assumed a central importance in the definition of Wales as a nation than it might have otherwise. It now appears that, after the process of devolution of power away from London began in 1999, the hitherto nationalist party, Plaid Cymru, has made inroads into areas where the Welsh language is barely alive. An analysis of the BHPS data on questions about the perception of identity suggests that there is strong national sentiment that may allow Plaid Cymru to harvest. If it chooses to do so perhaps at the cost of distancing itself from its traditional supporters, and public choice literature indicates that political parties change their platform to suit the median voter so as to improve their chances of being elected, the development of Welsh nationalism in the 21st century might follow an opposite path to that outlined in Williams. It would be interesting to see how economic policies that require making choices[25] between the preservation of the notion of language and culture and the

[24] See Patterson and Jones (1999) for a discussion of the concept of civil society in Wales

[25] We do not suggest that all economic policies entail making that choice but many do.

generation of economic prosperity impact on the development of national identity in the coming decades.

[National] “identities are names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past” (Hall 1990:225). The economic upheavals of the process of industrialization had markedly different impact between the south and, especially, the northwest of the country, but the narrative of Welsh nationalism of the 20th century did not. The process of industrialization in Wales during the 19th century created an increasing distance between the Wales of "the imaginative will" and the Wales as it "existed on the ground" (p. 181). The imagined will and the reality on the ground may begin to converge in the 21st century. The narrow base of nationalist support is beginning to grow into a wider political movement whereby political parties begin to compete on Welsh-wide basis. A new challenge will arise of articulating an ideology of nationalism based on the idea of a civil society.

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Appendix

Share of agriculture and public sector as percentage of total employment

Welsh Regions	Share of agriculture and public sector employment			
	Agriculture		Public sector	
	1991	2000	1991	2000
North West Wales	4.4	0.6	33.3	37.1
North East Wales	2.8	0.5	23.8	27.8
Mid and West Wales	9.2	0.8	31.6	35.8
South West Wales	1.5	0.4	29.9	33.7
South East Wales	1.4	0.3	28.6	33.7
South Central Wales	2.3	0.9	27.0	29.0
Cardiff and Glamorgan	0.4	0.2	30.9	38.1
Total	3.0	0.5	29.2	33.6

Source: Labour Force Survey 1991 and 2000