

On the Endogeneity of Ethnic Secessionist Groups

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Abstract

Ethnicity has recently become a popular field of study in political economy literature. However, some scholars have argued that much of this literature does not sufficiently appreciate the endogeneity of ethnicity to external phenomena, a position that has become known as constructivism. Yet constructivists have largely failed to assess the degree to which ethnicity is endogenous. In this paper we test constructivism in regards to secessionism, by both examining how ethnic secessionist groups are formed and by investigating the endogeneity of ethnic secessionist groups to economic phenomena. We argue that ethnic secessionist groups cannot invent themselves when it is economically advantageous to do so, and that, once in existence, ethnic secessionist groups are actually much less endogenous than constructivists suggest.

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On the Endogeneity of Ethnic Secessionist Groups

1. Introduction

Ethnicity has been a major subject in the social sciences for the past several decades. First appearing in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1972, it has recently become a source of debate in the field of political economy, where many scholars have investigated the relationship between ethnicity and civil war, growth, institutions and violence using econometric tools. However, recently academics have criticized this literature for relying on primordialist assumptions about ethnicity, namely that ethnic identity is both singular and relatively exogenous to outside events. Instead, Kanchan Chandra, David Laitin, Daniel Posner and other scholars rather argue that ethnicity is multiple, fluid and endogenous to external factors, a position that has become known as constructivism.²

Chandra correctly notes that the constructivist school has 'by now become conventional wisdom within the literature on ethnogenesis,'³ especially in recent literature on secessionist movements and civil wars. However, this literature has largely taken for granted the endogeneity of ethnicity and failed to assess the degree to which ethnicity is endogenous to outside phenomena. In this paper we test constructivist theories of ethnicity in regards to ethnic secessionism, first by examining how ethnic secessionist groups are formed and second by investigating the endogeneity of extant ethnic secessionist groups to economic phenomena. We

² Kanchan Chandra, 'Cumulative Findings in the Study of Ethnic Politics', *APSA-CP*, 12 (2001): 7-11; David Laitin and Daniel Posner, 'The Implications of Constructivism for Constructing Ethnic Fractionalization Indices', *APSA-CP*, 12 (2001): 13-17.

³ Kanchan Chandra, 'Ethnic Bargains, Group Instability and Social Choice Theory', *Politics and Society*, 29 (2001): 337-362, p. 337.

argue that ethnic secessionist groups cannot ‘invent’ themselves when it is economically advantageous to do so, and that, once in existence, ethnic secessionist groups are actually much less endogenous than constructivists suggest. Thus, for the study of ethnic secessionism to advance, we claim that the ‘constructivist findings’ lauded by Chandra must be tempered with what may be termed the more ‘perdurabilist findings’ of this paper.⁴

The paper is organized as follows. In section two we examine the ongoing debate between primordialist and constructivist theories of ethnicity and nationalism. In section three we consider the creation of ethnic secessionist movements and their relationship to economic inequality. Section four examines ethnic secessionist movements once they exist, with a focus on the case study of Scottish secessionism and international oil prices. Finally, in section five we conclude.

2. Theories of Ethnicity and Secession

Up until around 1970, the primordialist paradigm of ethnicity held dominance among academics and the general public. Most famously laid out by Clifford Geertz,⁵ this thesis held that individuals are born into ‘tribes’ to which they will belong for their entire lives. These ‘tribes’ have a relatively fixed identity over long periods of time and are not easily created or recreated. Thus for scholars who examine ‘tribes’ over a relatively short period of time, it is safe to assume a fixed identity for the group in question.⁶

⁴ Chandra, ‘Cumulative Findings in the Study of Ethnic Politics’, p. 7; Henry Hale, ‘Explaining Ethnicity’, *Comparative Political Studies* 37, 4 (2004), 458-485, p. 462.

⁵ Clifford Geertz, ed., *Old Societies and New States* (New York: Free Press, 1963).

⁶ Steven Van Evera, ‘Primordialism Lives!’, *APSA-CP*, 12 (2001): 20-22.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, anthropologists such as Fredrik Barth, Abner Cohen and Peter Gutkind took the lead in suggesting that ‘tribes’ – which they suggested should henceforth be known as ‘ethnic groups’ – were in fact of modern origin.⁷ Similarly, scholars of nationalism like Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner and Eric Hobsbawm suggested that nations and national identities were a product of modernity.⁸ In both cases these theories, known as constructivist in the former case and modernist in the latter, suggested that ethnic and national identities were endogenous to social phenomena such as mass politics and capitalism, both in how and when they were created and in the nature of their existence.

More recently this paradigm has been taken up in studies of secessionism and civil war. Paul Collier, Anke Hoeffler and others have argued that what were formerly known as ‘ethnic’ conflicts should rather be seen as more motivated by ‘greed’ than ‘grievance,’ and that the ‘ethnic’ aspect of conflict that is given so much importance in the mass media is merely a means by which rebels gain support and legitimacy for their own purposes. Specifically, Collier and Hoeffler argue that greed, or economic motives, creates ethnic grievance in rich regions, using Buchanan and Faith’s theory of ‘tax exit’ among the rich⁹ to claim that ‘secessionist political communities invent themselves when part of the population perceives secession to be economically advantageous.’¹⁰

⁷ Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland, 1969); Abner Cohen, *Custom and Politics in Urban Africa A Study of Hausa Migrants in Yoruba Towns* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969); Peter Gutkind, *The Passing of Tribal Man in Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 1970).

⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983); Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁹ James Buchanan and Roger Faith, ‘Secession and the Limits of Taxation: Toward a Theory of Internal Exit’, *American Economic Review*, 77, 5 (1987): 1023-1031.

¹⁰ Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, ‘The Political Economy of Secession’, in Hurst Hannum and Eileen F. Babbitt, eds, *Negotiating Self-Determination* (Lanham MD: Lexington Books,

This paradigm, known generally as instrumentalism, can be said to have two variants, namely an elitist and a mass school. The first category, into which Collier and Hoeffler fall, generally assumes a divide between crafty rebel leaders and the masses, whose ‘popular ignorance’ facilitates the leaders’ ability to manipulate ethnic identity.¹¹ By creating and shaping these ethnic hatreds, the rebel leaders thus also create and reshape ethnic groups as well. The second variant, which is perhaps more accurately described as a rational choice model, ascribes power to all members of a given ethnic group, who collectively choose to associate based on the material benefits they can potentially possess as a group.¹² As this model is also reliant upon the ability or desire of people to ‘rationally’ choose to emphasize their ethnicity due to external phenomena, it too assumes the endogeneity of ethnic groups. In other words, instrumentalism in its two forms should be considered a subfield of constructivism, as it rests on the inherent endogeneity of ethnic identity, here in reference to the actions of internal ethnic leaders or members rather than external phenomena.¹³

Ethnic or nationalist secessionism has not, however, only been analyzed by instrumentalists. Many other constructivists and modernists view secession as inherently dependent on external phenomena. This argument is most prominent in relation to the economic benefits that would accrue to a newly independent state, especially in the case of natural resources. Much recent political economy work has been done linking the prevalence of civil war and/or secessionist movements to the

forthcoming), pp. 1-37, at p. 3. Currently available as a mimeo at <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~ball0144/self-det.pdf>.

¹¹ Collier and Hoeffler, ‘The Political Economy of Secession’, p. 2.

¹² Robert Bates, ‘Modernization, Ethnic Competition and The Rationality of Politics in Contemporary Africa’, in Donald Rothchild and Victor Olunsorola, eds, *State versus Ethnic Claims: African Policy Dilemmas* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1983), pp. 152-171.

¹³ Ian Lustick, ‘Agent-Based Monitoring and Constructivist Identity Theory’, *APSA-CP*, 12 (2001): 22-25, p. 22.

prevalence of natural resources within a given territory,¹⁴ where diamonds, oil, drugs and other highly profitable and ‘lootable’ commodities not only increase the likelihood of civil war but also its length. In light with rational choice theory, quite often the natural resources appeal not only to rebel leaders but to members of the potential secessionist group more generally, who can foresee the economic benefits of political independence when they are allowed to control the production of whatever valuable commodity they possess. Yet these ‘lootable’ natural resources, like other profitable commodities, often fluctuate wildly in price. Thus, if ethnic identities are indeed endogenous to external phenomena, one would expect ethnic secessionist movements to be endogenous not only to the existence of natural resources but also their price.

In conclusion, if constructivist theory is to apply to the study of ethnic secessionism, it should confirm two hypotheses: first, that ethnic secessionist movements are likely to form among people who will benefit economically from independence, and second, the popularity of these movements should correlate with the prices of valuable commodities in the region in question. In other words, when prices are high, ethnic secessionist movements should enjoy higher support, and when prices are low that support should drop. However, these two hypotheses, as logical as they sound, are not born out by history, as we show in the next two sections.

3. The Invention of Secessionist Political Communities

¹⁴ Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, ‘On Economic Causes of Civil War’, *Oxford Economic Papers*, 50 (1998), 563-573; Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, ‘Greed and Grievance in Civil War’, *Oxford Economic Papers*, 56 (2004), 563-595; James Fearon, ‘Why Do Some Civil Wars Last So Much Longer Than Others?’, *Journal of Peace Research*, 41 (2004), 275-301; Michael Ross, ‘What Do We Know About Natural Resources and Civil War?’, *Journal of Peace Research*, 41 (2004), 337- 356.

As noted above, constructivist theory would predict the formation of secessionist groups among people who would benefit economically from independence. In this context we can examine two different types of groups, namely those who feel that they have been disadvantaged by the state of which they are currently a part and those whose natural resources have suddenly become valuable enough so that they see the benefit of secession. We examine each in turn.

3.1. Rich and Poor Secessions

Constructivist theory suggests that people may choose to create an ethnopolitical identity around a region when circumstances change to the point where the region would be economically better off as an independent state. Thus people from rich regions who feel that their government is transferring their wealth elsewhere may wish to secede, as seen in the case of Croatia and Slovenia, which seceded from Yugoslavia after the centralization of economic policy in the late 1980s led to an increased transfer of resources from Ljubljana and Zagreb to Belgrade.¹⁵ Similarly, after partial industrialization under Italian colonial rule, Eritrea was incorporated into Ethiopia, which subsequently transferred revenues away from Eritrea and thereby contributed to the beginning of a long and eventually successful secessionist struggle. The same argument can apply to poorer regions which feel that their poverty is due to an unfair transference of wealth to other regions, as seen in the

¹⁵ Collier and Hoeffler, 'The Political Economy of Secession', p. 21; Milica Z. Bookman, 'War and Peace: The Divergent Breakups of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia', *Journal of Peace Research*, 31 (1994), 175-187, p. 177.

example of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), whose jute export revenue was transferred to industries in (West) Pakistan before seceding in 1971.¹⁶

The case of Eritrea alone would seem to support constructivism, as Eritrean identity cannot be said to exist before its incorporation into Ethiopia.¹⁷ However, there is a logical flaw to this line of argumentation, as to test this theory one should examine cases where rich or poor regions do not ‘invent’ a political identity. If, as claimed, these ‘secessionist political communities’ can merely invent themselves when it is ‘economically advantageous,’¹⁸ the number of potential secessionist movements would run into the thousands, if not even millions. Indeed, it is in fact hard to count the number of communities some of whose residents believe that they would be economically better off on their own. Two recent examples from the US include the citizens of Islesboro, ME and Killington, VT, who both in 2004 voted to secede from Waldo County, ME and the state of Vermont, respectively, due to a common consensus that they were paying too much in taxes and receiving too little in return.¹⁹ For the same reasons citizens of San Fernando Valley, CA and Avalon Manor, NJ, attempted but failed to secede from Los Angeles in 2002 and Middle Township, NJ, in 2004, respectively.²⁰ There are undoubtedly many more such places where residents harbor dreams of economic autonomy.

¹⁶ Collier and Hoeffler, ‘The Political Economy of Secession’, pp. 20-22; Donald Horowitz, ‘Patterns of Ethnic Separatism’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 23 (1981), 165-195, p. 177; Glenn V. Stephenson, ‘Pakistan: Discontiguity and the Majority Problem’, *Geographical Review*, 58 (1968), 195-213, p. 203.

¹⁷ J. Sorenson, ‘Discourses on Eritrean Nationalism and Identity’, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 29 (1991), 301-317.

¹⁸ Collier and Hoeffler, ‘The Political Economy of Secession’, p. 3.

¹⁹ See *New York Times*, 5 November 2004. Vermont is the 22nd richest state in the US in terms of per capita income while New Hampshire is the 6th richest. Robert L. Brown, G. Andrew Bernat, Jr. and Adrienne T. Pilot, ‘Comprehensive Revision of State Personal Income: Preliminary Estimates for 2003’ (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2004), p. 31.

²⁰ See *Los Angeles Times*, 21 July 2004; *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 16 August 2004.

In the four examples given above, however, none involves the secession of an ethnically/nationally-defined group from a political entity marked by ethnic/national identity. It is highly likely that the number of such non-ethnic attempts at ‘tax exits’ exceeds the mere ‘hundreds of romantic secessionist groups’ whose claims are overtly ethnically based. Indeed, far from ethnic secessionist groups’ claims encompassing ‘most areas of the earth,’²¹ there are large areas of the planet with no such secessionist movements. For example, there is a distinct lack of such a movement among the citizens of the geographically contiguous states of Connecticut, Massachusetts and New Hampshire, which rank first, third and sixth, respectively, in personal income per capita in the US and which all pay more in federal tax dollars than they receive.²² Furthermore, the three states are part of a larger area with a coherent and long-standing culture, namely New England, whose residents have a famous history of revolting against governments accused of overtaxing them.

Other examples outside the US abound: for every example of residents of a disproportionately rich or poor region like East Pakistan, Punjab or Quebec attempting to secede for economic benefit, there are many other rich and poor states and regions where there is no significant secessionist movement: examples include two of the richest states in India, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, who receive 103 per cent and 27 per cent fewer rupees per capita from the central government, respectively, than the much poorer state of Bihar.²³ The reason, of course, is that the population of these states either do not see themselves as members of the same ethnic

²¹ Collier and Hoeffler, ‘The Political Economy of Secession’, p. 16.

²² Brown et al., ‘Comprehensive Revision of State Personal Income’, p. 31; Tax Foundation, ‘Federal Spending in Each State per Dollar of Federal Taxes,’ 2005, <http://www.taxfoundation.org/research/show/266.html>. Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Hampshire are ranked 44th, 48th and 49th in the US in the net amount of federal spending per state.

²³ Finance Commission of India, http://fincomindia.nic.in/st_fprof_data/tctr.pdf, and 2001 Indian Census, http://www.censusindia.net/data/ppt_t1.PDF.

group or nation or see themselves as part of a greater ethnic group or nation.²⁴ In other words, the potential economic advantages of secession can only go so far in spurring on a secessionist movement. One need merely remember Walker Connor's criticism of 'the tendency to stress economic forces' in the study of nationalism 'can be viewed as one manifestation of a broader tendency to mistake the overt characteristics of a nation for its essence.'²⁵ Indeed, the problem with such an economic analysis is that 'defining ethnonational conflicts in terms of economic inequality is a bit like defining them in terms of oxygen: where you find the one, you can be reasonably certain to find the other.'²⁶ In other words, all countries have richer and poorer regions who may feel some sense of economic maltreatment by the central government, only a fraction of which tend to coincide with ethnic groups to produce secessionist movements.

Thus, in order to account for both the prevalence of 'tax exit' strategies among citizens of Islesboro, ME, Killington, VT, and other similar towns as well as the lack of any such movements among federal states in the US, India and elsewhere, the only possible conclusion is that 'secessionist political communities' can indeed 'invent themselves when part of the population perceives secession to be economically advantageous,'²⁷ but only when secession does not have an

²⁴ Caste politics has continued to stymie ethnic secessionism in Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and India more generally; see John Harriss, 'Whatever Happened to Cultural Nationalism in Tamil Nadu? A Reading of Current Events and the Recent Literature on Tamil Politics', *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 40 (2003), 97-117; Dietrich Reetz, 'In Search of the Collective Self: How Ethnic Group Concepts Were Cast through Conflict in Colonial India', *Modern Asian Studies*, 31 (1997), 285-315, p. 293. A Tamil secessionist/nationalist movement did enjoy support in the 1950s, when Tamil Nadu was much poorer than it is now, partly due to attempts by the central government to impose Hindi as the sole national language. See Atul Kohli, 'Can Democracies Accommodate Ethnic Nationalism? The Rise and Decline of Self-Determination Movements in India', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 56 (1997), 325-344.

²⁵ Walker Connor, *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 145.

²⁶ Connor, *Ethnonationalism*, p. 147.

²⁷ Collier and Hoeffler, 'The Political Economy of Secession', p. 3.

ethnic/national element. Conversely, contra such constructivist ‘underdevelopment’ theorists as Michael Hechter and Tom Nairn as well as Collier and Hoeffler,²⁸ even when it is economically advantageous for a region to ‘invent’ itself as a political community and then pursue secession from a ethnically/nationally-defined entity, very few such regions actually do so, even if they already possess some type of communal identity like New England. As shall become apparent in Section 4, one potential example of such a group invented for economic purposes, namely Scotland, turns out to be neither ‘invented’ nor dependent on the economy for its continued existence.

3.2. Natural Resource Secessions

While various scholars (as detailed by Michael Ross)²⁹ have shown the relationship between natural resources and conflict, they have not, however, shown any relationship between high international prices for natural resources and attempts at secession. As noted above, much of the current political economy literature on civil wars has focused on the role of primary commodities, especially oil, in promoting secession. In his analysis, Collier claims that ‘the creation of a political community for the control of a region’s natural resources may also create a political community for the ethnic group,’³⁰ citing as an example the electoral breakthrough of the Scottish National Party (SNP) in 1974 shortly after Scottish oil became valuable. Echoing his aforementioned argument that economic reasons can lead people to

²⁸ Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536-1966* (London: Routledge, 1975); Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism* (London: New Left Books, 1977).

²⁹ Ross, ‘What do we know about Natural Resources and Civil War?’, p. 339.

³⁰ Paul Collier, ‘Ethnic Diversity: An Economic Analysis’, *Economic Policy*, 16 (2001), 127-166, p. 147.

‘invent’ themselves as a secessionist community, Collier argues that the Scottish and other such ‘people who live above the oil acquire an identity – we are the people sitting on top of the oil. There is always some ethnic group sitting on top of the oil and so they get a political agenda: we are different, we could be rich.’³¹ More specifically,

In electoral terms Scotland as a political community only dates back to 1974. Something happened between 1970 [when the SNP received 11.4 per cent of the vote] and 1974 [when it received 30.4 per cent] as a result of which many people in Scotland switched to imagining themselves as part of a geographic community, as opposed to their previous class-based political identification. There is little doubt as to the cause, i.e., the dramatic rise in the international price of oil as a result of the Yom Kippur war of 1973.³²

This dramatic rise in support for the SNP is well documented, as is the rise in the world price of crude oil at the same time. Yet it is hard to argue that ‘Scotland as a political community’ dates back only to the early 1970s. Indeed, John Breuilly has argued that contemporary Scottish nationalism is partially a result of regional aid programmes in the 1960s, when ‘SNP success began... Only because of a fairly good showing before 1971 was the party in a position to exploit the discovery of oil.’³³ Breuilly and other scholars also look back to the Act of Union in 1707, which

³¹ Paul Collier, ‘Keynote Address: Petroleum and Violent Conflict’, paper presented at World Bank Group Workshop on Petroleum Revenue Management, Washington, D.C., 2002.

³² Collier and Hoeffler, ‘The Political Economy of Secession’, pp. 6-7.

³³ John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp. 320-326.

left Scotland with its own church as well as a separate university, legal and banking system, all of which helped to create or maintain a separate national identity.³⁴

In other words, it is impossible to create a secessionist movement on the basis of a sudden rise in the value of a commodity without some sense of prior history. This statement can be confirmed by the information presented in Appendix 1, where we have collected data from thirty-seven different violent attempts at secession, as measured by the VINC Project at the University of Indianapolis.³⁵ We included all attempted secessions where the region in question had a significant quantity of either oil or a mineral resource,³⁶ and studied the history for that commodity to see if its price, as measured in real dollars, had risen in the five or ten years prior to the onset of rebellion. Constructivist theory would, of course, suggest that there would be some relationship between rising commodity prices and the onset of rebellion. However, our analysis shows that only 47 per cent and 50 per cent of violent secessionist movements began after the commodity in question rose for the five and ten years prior to the onset of rebellion, respectively, despite the fact that, weighted according to the number of observations in the study, real prices for the commodities in question rose as a whole by 53 per cent during the period in question and for which there is available data (1945-1998).³⁷ The study reveals some surprising

³⁴ While there was no SNP or general elections allowing the scholar to assess Scottish nationalism electorally in the 18th century, Linda Colley nonetheless argues that, 'for many poorer and less literate Britons [in the 18th century], Scotland, Wales and England remained more potent rallying calls than Great Britain, except in times of danger from abroad.' Adrian Hastings similarly claims that Scottish nationalism was already a potent force by the time of the Act of Union. Linda Colley, *Britons, Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 8; Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 61-62.

³⁵ <http://facstaff.uindy.edu/~bayres/vinc.htm>.

³⁶ Information from the CIA World Factbook, <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>. Of course, some regions like Katanga in eastern Congo have more than one mineral resource; in such cases we examine each mineral separately.

³⁷ The study is actually biased towards constructivist theory in two ways. First, it does not include secessions like Eritrea where there was no natural resources to speak of. Second, prices

results, as with the attempted secessions of oil-rich Biafra from Nigeria in 1967 and of Katanga Province from the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1960, both of which are often cited in support of constructivist theory.³⁸ Yet neither exhibits any relationship between the onset of rebellion and commodity prices, as in the former case world crude oil prices fell every year from 1958, the year oil was first exported from Nigeria,³⁹ through 1970, while in the latter case world cobalt and tin prices declined over the course of the 1950s and world copper prices fell in the late 1950s.

Thus, despite constructivist claims to the contrary, it is difficult to argue that secessionist groups are endogenous to petroleum or mineral resource prices. The next section explores the fate of secessionist groups once in existence.

4. The Fluidity of Secessionism: The Case of Scotland

Once they exist, secessionist movements are difficult to measure in their popularity, as most do not take place in regions with regular elections or opinion poll surveys. Yet one case study, namely Scotland, presents itself as ideal in this context for three reasons. First, it not only has regular elections and surveys but is also, unlike other secessionist groups in western democracies, historically dependent on a

for the weighted group of commodities have most likely risen much more than 53 per cent if one brings the data from 1998 closer to the present, as crude oil prices, which account for 20 of the 53 observations, rose by 130 per cent from 1998 to 2003. Energy Information Administration, 'Crude Oil Domestic First Purchase Prices, 1949-2003', <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/aer/txt/stb0518.xls>.

³⁸ Collier and Hoeffler, 'The Political Economy of Secession', pp. 17-19; Nicholas Sambanis, 'Using Case Studies to Expand Economic Models of Civil War', *Perspectives on Politics* 2 (2004), 259-279, p. 266.

³⁹ Sambanis writes that 'there had been no demands for self-determination of the eastern regions before the discovery of oil' in Biafra (in 'Using Case Studies', p. 266), without mentioning that oil was actually discovered in eastern Nigeria four years before the country attained independence in 1960. See Josephine O. Abiodun, 'Locational Effects of the Civil War on the Nigerian Petroleum Industry', *Geographical Review*, 64 (1974), 253-263, p. 253.

single commodity, namely oil.⁴⁰ Second, unlike in the Canary Islands, Corsica or other similar secessionist regions, the SNP is the sole secessionist party in Scotland,⁴¹ thereby making it easier to track electoral support for secession over time. Third and finally, the SNP has continuously referred to the potential economic benefits of independence as regards oil revenues since the 1970s, beginning with its famous ‘it’s Scotland’s oil’ campaign in 1974 through more recent claims from party leader Alex Salmond in the 2005 general election:

Prime Minister Tony Blair is nicking our oil, while only the SNP want to invest it in Scotland’s future. With the current average price of oil at \$45 per barrel and 30 years worth of oil and gas left to exploit, Scotland stands to benefit from our North Sea resources to the tune of 1 trillion dollars in the future.⁴²

Yet despite these links between the SNP and oil in Scotland, fluctuations in oil prices have not been paralleled by a similar fluidity in Scottish secessionism, as measured both by SNP electoral support and opinion polls. In the first case, despite the aforementioned rise in both SNP support and oil prices in the early 1970s, there has been no relationship between oil prices and SNP electoral support since 1974, as seen in general election results (Figure 1) and European election results (Figure 2). When oil prices reached their lowest mark in a quarter-century in the late 1990s, the

⁴⁰ Quebec, for instance, is well endowed with iron ore, gold and niobium, among other minerals. See Ministère des Ressources naturelles et de la Faune, ‘Mining in Quebec,’ <http://www.mrn.gouv.qc.ca/english/mines/quebec-mining/index.jsp>.

⁴¹ Jason Sorens, ‘The Cross-Sectional Determinants of Secessionism in Advanced Democracies’, *Comparative Political Studies*, 38 (2005), 304-326, pp. 324-325.

⁴² SNP Press release, ‘SNP Pose Trillion Dollar Question On Scotland’s Oil’, February 8, 2005; <http://www.snp.org/html/news/newsdetail.php?newsID=2810>.

SNP held on to 22.1 per cent in the 1997 general elections, more than it had won in general elections in 1992 (21.5 per cent) or 1987 (14.0 per cent). Furthermore, in the early 1980s when oil prices skyrocketed due to the Iran-Iraq war, the SNP only received 11.7 per cent in the 1983 general election, or only 0.3 per cent more than it received in 1970.

[Figure 1 about here]

Figure 1 (Sources: Energy Information Administration, US Department of Energy. World Oil Prices are the First Purchase Prices for Crude Oil in nominal dollars per barrel)

[Figure 2 about here]

Figure 2 (Sources: See Figure 1)

If one is to agree with Collier and Hoeffler's statement that a Scottish secessionist movement 'only dates back to 1974,'⁴³ there are then three possible explanations for this result: either 1) a Scottish secessionist movement temporarily ceased to exist when SNP support dropped below a certain threshold, i.e., some number between 11.7 per cent and 14 per cent,⁴⁴ 2) it continued to exist since the threshold was between 11.4 per cent and 11.7 per cent, or 3) once created in the early 1970s, it has continued to exist since then independent of SNP results. Certainly the first two explanations are nonsensical, as they rely on the existence of some arbitrary threshold measuring the existence of a secessionist movement. The third explanation, while not as bad as the first two, is nonetheless contradictory: if one can attribute the birth of a Scottish secessionist movement to the early 1970s based on

⁴³ Collier and Hoeffler, 'The Political Economy of Secession', p. 6.

⁴⁴ If this threshold were to be at 14 per cent or above it would also indicate that a secessionist movement did not exist in the 1987 general election.

the increase in SNP support, why should one then neglect SNP results thereafter? Of course, this argument, the only of the three that makes sense, is more primordialist than constructivist, since it states that a Scottish secessionist movement, once it came into being in the early 1970s, has not fluctuated significantly since then. This point is echoed by Steven van Evera, a self-declared primordialist, who writes ‘ethnic identities, while constructed, are hard to reconstruct once they form.’⁴⁵

Of course, one should not only examine SNP support across all of Scotland but also in those areas that have the greatest claim to the North Sea oil. Most North Sea oil that makes its way to Scotland arrives one of three terminals, namely Cruden Bay in the constituency of Banff and Buchan (which received 43.8 per cent of all offshore oil in 2000), Sullom Voe in the Shetland islands (35.9 per cent) and Flotta in the Orkney islands (10.7 per cent).⁴⁶ Residents of all three areas could logically claim that the oil is ‘theirs’ and would therefore be expected to vote more for the SNP when oil prices are high than other parts of Scotland that see little direct benefits from the oil industry.

Yet, as Figure 3 shows, electoral support for the SNP in the two constituencies of Banff and Buchan and Orkney and Shetlands has hardly followed the price of oil since 1970; indeed, if anything, it has had an inverse relationship in Banff and Buchan, with the exception of the period 1970-1974.

[Figure 3 about here]

Figure 3 (Sources: See Figure 1. The SNP failed to field a candidate in the Orkney and Shetlands constituency in 1970, 1974 and 1987.)

⁴⁵ Van Evera, ‘Primordialism Lives!’, p. 20.

⁴⁶ Department of Trade and Industry. *Development of the Oil and Gas Resources of the United Kingdom 2001*. <http://www.dbd-data.co.uk/bb2001/>.

Similarly, if we examine European elections between 1979 and 1992,⁴⁷ in which the Orkney and Shetland islands formed part of the Highlands and Islands constituency while Banff and Buchan was subsumed in North-East Scotland, it is obvious that SNP support again shows little relationship with the price of oil, as seen in Figure 4.

[Figure 4 about here]

Figure 4 (Sources: See Figure 1)

Using SNP electoral support as a proxy for support for secessionism in Scotland is, however, slightly misleading, as SNP support can and has wavered due to factors other than Scottish nationalism, obvious examples include the Kilbrandon Royal Commission report of 1973, the establishment of the Scottish Constitutional Convention in 1989 or referenda on devolution in 1979 and 1997. In other words, even if one were to agree that ethnic/national identity is as fluid as constructivists claim it to be, this fluidity would nevertheless remain very difficult to measure with electoral data. As Donald Horowitz writes, ‘party politics is thus not a perfect reflection of ethnic conflict.’⁴⁸

An alternative to SNP election results that can be considered more reliable is polling data, which is available for the period 1985-1999 on the questions of Scottish independence and devolution (i.e., a separate Scottish Parliament).⁴⁹ The results,

⁴⁷ The UK changed to a proportional representation system for European elections after 1992, whereby Scotland now consists of a single constituency.

⁴⁸ Donald Horowitz, ‘Structure and Strategy in Ethnic Conflict’, paper presented at Annual World Bank Conference on Development Economics (Washington, D.C., 1998), p. 27.

⁴⁹ Pollsters gave the public four choices: devolution, independence, no change or don’t know. The last three dates are from MORI (<http://www.mori.com/polls/scotland.shtml>); the rest are from Herald/ICM polls (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/politics97/devolution/scotland/briefing/scotpolls.shtml>).

plotted in Figure 5, show two things, both of which already confirm the SNP results discussed above. First, there is again no relationship between oil and secessionism in Scotland, measured either on the basis of support for independence or devolution. Second, support for devolution and independence varied very little over the period in question, much less than both SNP support *and* oil prices.⁵⁰

[Figure 5 about here]

Figure 5 (Sources: See Figure 1 and Footnote 49)

Thus one can safely conclude that, over the past few decades, Scottish secessionism has remained unaffected by oil prices and, if one is to extrapolate from the opinion poll data, relatively unchanged in intensity.⁵¹ Such a result would be hardly surprising to a non-constructivist, who would merely note the way Scotland – which was traditionally divided between Gaelic-speaking Highlanders and Scots-speaking Lowlanders, among other divisions – has been able to forge and maintain a strong national identity since at least the nineteenth century. Indeed, as already noted, Scottish nationalists have been able to build upon a common history dating back to 1707 and even before.

3.3. Conclusion

⁵⁰ This point is confirmed by Jack Brand et al., who write that ‘there seems to have been no relation between this proportion [of around 20 per cent support for independence] and the percentage which voted SNP.’ Jack Brand, Duncan McLean and William Miller, ‘The Birth and Death of a Three-Party System: Scotland in the Seventies’, *British Journal of Political Science*, 13 (1983), 463-488, p. 465.

⁵¹ Brand et al. write that ‘research has shown that the level of support for home rule has been remarkably steady since at least the late 1940s’ (in ‘The Birth and Death of a Three-Party System’, p. 465).

In our examination of recent political economy literature we have shown how constructivists have overestimated both how easy it is for people to ‘invent’ themselves as a political community when it is economically advantageous and how endogenous the identities of these communities are to economic factors when they do exist. In particular we examined the influence of commodity prices on both the onset and popularity of ethnic secessionist movements, with particular attention given to the case of Scotland, finding that there was little to no relationship between commodity prices and ethnic secessionism.

Yet what are the implications of this paper? Should we discard constructivism altogether and agree with the primordialists that ethnicity does indeed have a central, unchanging core? This option seems a bit extreme, especially as primordialists themselves have long ago given up trying to justify unchanging and eternal ethnic identities.⁵² Rather, it is important to try and find a middle ground between primordialism and constructivism along the lines of Douglas North’s statement that, while ‘the cultural characteristics of a society change over time,’ they nonetheless remain persistent ‘in the face of changes in relative prices, formal rules or political status.’⁵³ This approach has, as noted above, been coined ‘perdurabilism’ by Henry Hale, whereby ethnicity is ‘highly durable (perdurable) once constructed.’⁵⁴ The evidence presented here suggests that, at least in the case of Scottish secessionism, ethnic identity can often be durable over a period of decades or even a couple generations. If so, this would suggest a re-examination of

⁵² See Pierre van den Berghe, ‘Does Race Matter?’, in John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith, eds, *Ethnicity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 57-63, at p. 59.

⁵³ Douglas C. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 87.

⁵⁴ Hale, ‘Explaining Ethnicity’, p. 462.

Chandra's 'constructivist findings,'⁵⁵ as it is therefore possible that ethnicity is more durable than other economic, political and social phenomena and can therefore in many contexts be regarded as fixed relative to other factors.⁵⁶ We can only suggest that more research into other phenomena be undertaken in order to assess the endogeneity and durability of ethnicity in a variety of settings.

⁵⁵ Chandra, 'Cumulative Findings in the Study of Ethnic Politics', p. 7.

⁵⁶ Daniel Posner has indeed found ethnicity to be relatively exogenous in relation to economic growth in a cross section of countries between 1960 and 1992; see Daniel Posner, 'The Implications of Constructivism for Studying the Relationship between Ethnic Diversity and Economic Growth', paper presented at Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association (Chicago, 2004).

Tables and Figures

Figure 1

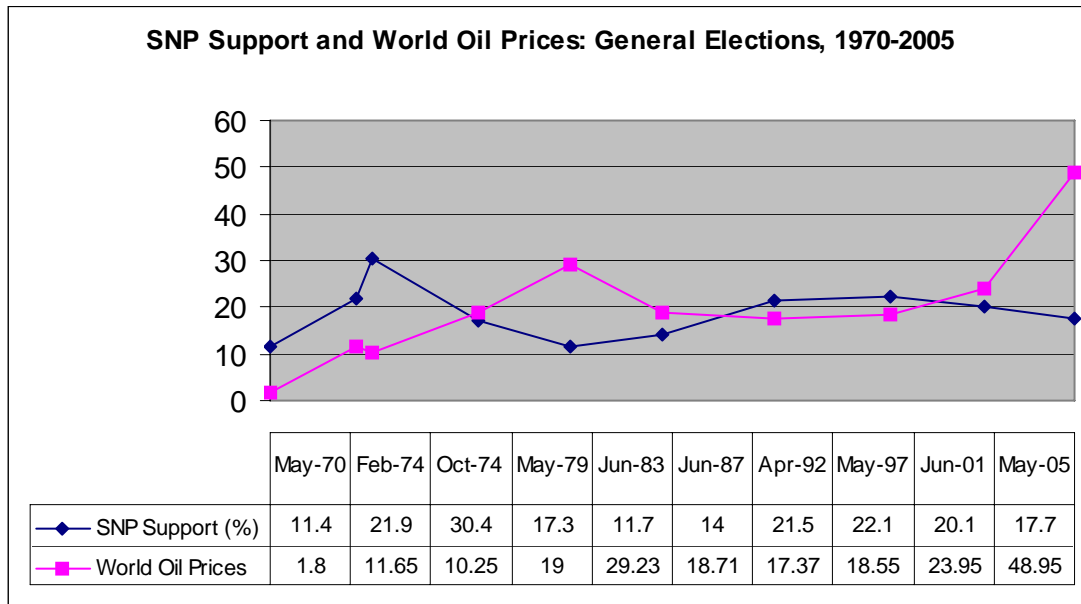


Figure 2

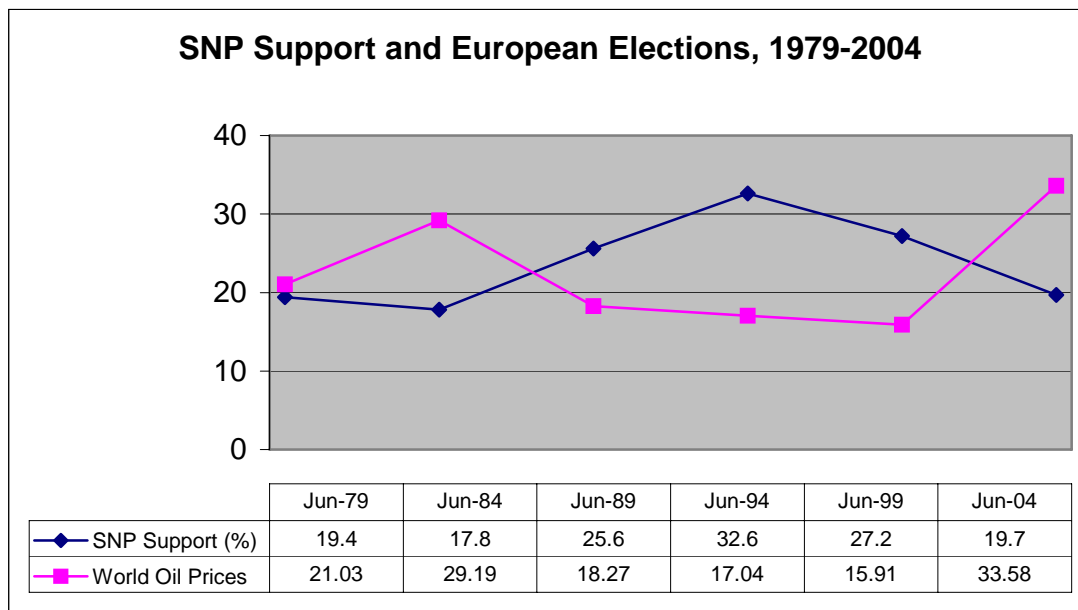


Figure 3

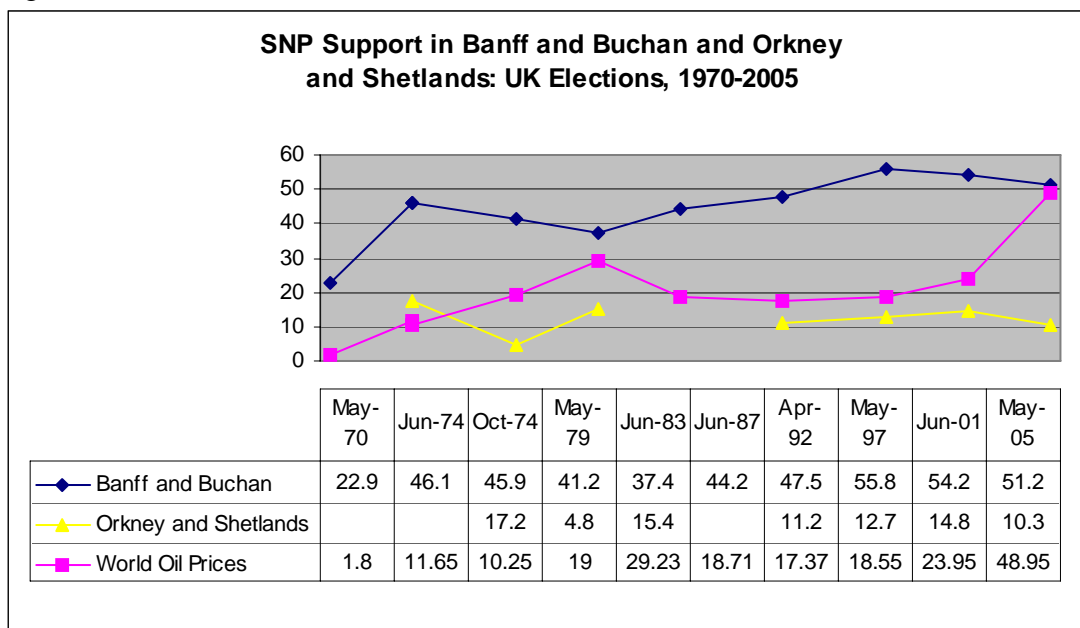


Figure 4

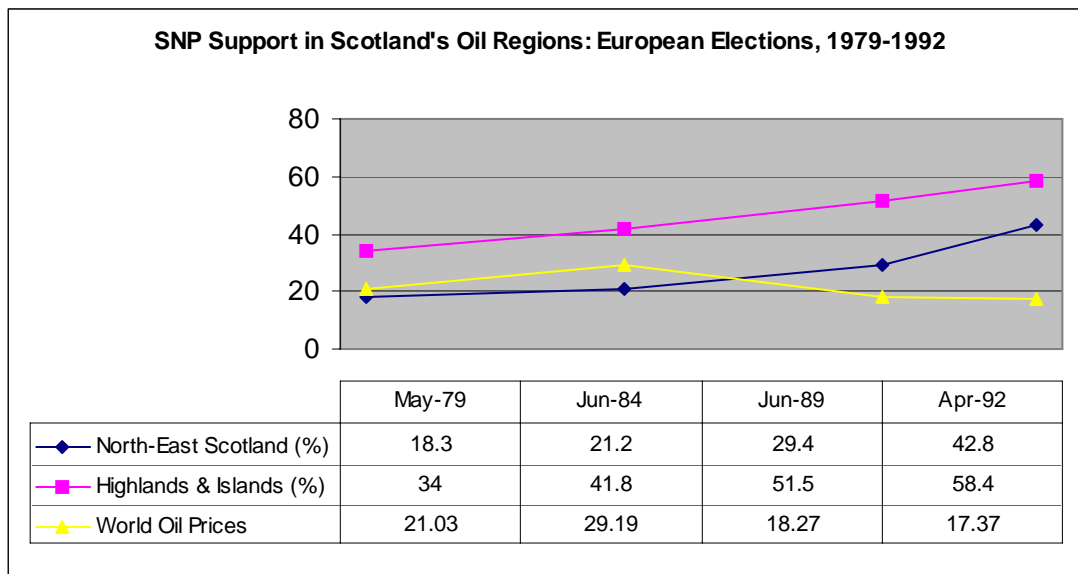


Figure 5

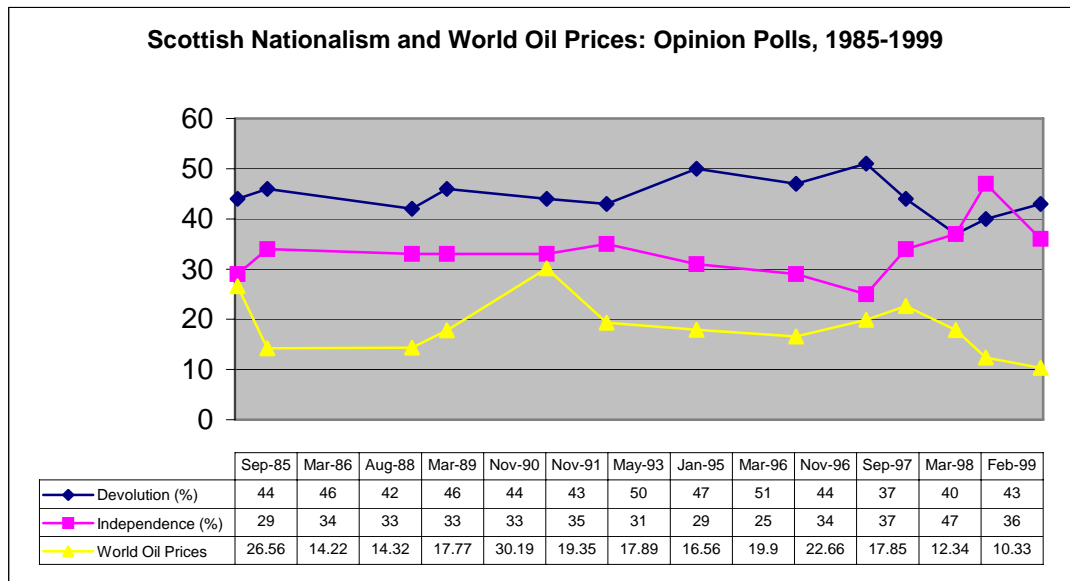


Table 1

Country yr. P.R. ⁵⁸	Secessionist Group	Commodity	Conflict Start	5 yr. P.R. ⁵⁷		10
Burma	Arakanese I	natural gas	1948	no	no	
	Arakanese II	natural gas	1960	yes	yes	
	Kachins I	gold	1949	no	no	
	Kachins II	gold	1961	no	no	
China	Tibet I	chromite	1949	no	no	
	Tibet II	chromite	1956	yes	no	
	Tibet III	chromite	1966	no	no	
	Tibet IV	chromite	1987	no	no	
		lithium	1987	yes	yes	
Ethiopia	Eritreans	gold	1961	no	no	
India	Assam	oil	1985	no	yes	
		natural gas	1985	yes	yes	
India	Nagas	oil	1956	no	yes	
		natural gas	1956	yes	yes	
		oil	1978	yes	yes	
	Tripuras	oil	1978	yes	yes	
		natural gas	1978	yes	yes	
Indonesia	Aceh	natural gas	1975	yes	yes	
	East Timor	gold	1975	yes	yes	
		oil	1975	yes	yes	
		natural gas	1975	yes	yes	
	Papuans	gold	1963	no	no	
		copper	1963	yes	no	
Iran	Kurds I	oil	1945	no	no	
	Kurds II	oil	1979	yes	yes	
Iraq	Kurds I	oil	1961	no	no	
	Kurds II	oil	1972	no	no	
	Kurds III	oil	1980	yes	yes	
	Kurds IV	oil	1991	yes	no	
	Kurds V	oil	1995	no	no	
Nicaragua	Miskito	gold	1981	yes	yes	
		silver	1981	yes	yes	
Nigeria	Ibos	oil	1967	no	no	
Pakistan	Bengalis I	natural gas	1947	no	no	
Pakistan	Bengalis II	natural gas	1969	no	yes	
P. New Guinea	Bougainvilleans	gold	1988	no	no	
		copper	1988	yes	yes	
Philippines	Moros	cobalt	1978	yes	yes	
		nickel	1978	no	yes	
		oil	1991	yes	no	
Russia	Chechnya II	oil	1999	yes	no	
Sudan	Southerners	oil	1983	yes	yes	
Turkey	Kurds I	oil	1975	yes	yes	

⁵⁷ Five Year Price Rise (in real dollars for the commodity).

⁵⁸ Ten Year Price Rise (in real dollars for the commodity).

USSR	Kurds II	oil	1984	yes	yes
	Azeris	oil	1989	no	no
	Ukrainians	oil	1945	no	no
natural gas		1945	no	no	
manganese		1945	yes	yes	
Yugoslavia	Kosovo	lead	1981	yes	yes
		zinc	1981	no	yes
Zaire/Congo	Croatians	oil	1990	no	no
	Katanga Province	cobalt	1960	no	no
		copper	1960	no	yes
		tin	1960	no	no
Total yes				25	26
Total all				52	52
Percentage yes				48%	50%

Sources: CIA World Factbook; Energy Information Administration, US Department of Energy; US Geological Survey; VINC Project (University of Indianapolis)