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The Irish and their Nation: A Survey of Recent Attitudes

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Introduction

In a series of essays published in the months preceding the Easter Rising of 1916, Pádraic Pearse expressed his thoughts about the Irish people and their nation. Echoing a sentiment that many in his day embraced, he wrote, 'Irish nationality is an ancient spiritual tradition, and the Irish nation could not die as long as that tradition lived in the heart of one faithful man or woman' (1924: 304). As in previous armed rebellions, the 1916 Easter Rising failed to force the British from Ireland, and Pearse, who had proclaimed himself president of the provisional Irish government during the five-day insurrection, was ultimately executed along with fifteen other rebel leaders. Despite its lack of immediate success, the Easter Rising is now viewed as the event marking the beginning of the end of British rule, and Pearse has since taken his place in the pantheon of Irish heroes alongside such figures as Wolfe Tone, Robert Emmet, Daniel O'Connell, Thomas Davis, and Brian Boru, the first High King of Ireland. Pearse's reflections on the nation are important not only for their historical significance within Ireland, but because they also reflect the sentiment associated with national identity everywhere: self-sacrifice, pride, community, history, rebirth, and popular participation. Throughout the world, nations remain objects of affiliation, and, as this study reveals, the Irish people continue to display a strong attachment to their nation, much as Pearse foretold in his early twentieth-century essay.

The concept of the modern nation has generated extensive and lively discussions among scholars at least since the publication of Ernest Renan's influential 1882 essay (1990). One current area of debate concerns the way in which key terms such as the nation, national identity, and nationalism are to be defined (Isijiw 1974; Richmond 1987; LeVine 1997; Tilley 1997). There are now countless and often contradictory definitions of these basic concepts, leading some to conclude that there may be as many definitions as there are those who study the phenomena (Sugar 1981: 67). Connor (1978, 1987, and 1993) has been the most persistent in highlighting this 'terminological chaos', insisting that clear definitions be adopted which distinguish 'the nation' and its affiliated concepts from other phenomena. Smith's (1991) definitions of the basic terms are helpful for this study because they are comprehensive, widely-cited, and largely absent the ideological bias associated with so many other conceptualizations (Billig 1995). National identity is conceived of as a collective identity characterized by a historic territory, common myths and memories, common mass public culture, common legal rights, and common economy and territorial mobility. A nation is a human population sharing that collective identity, while nationalism is 'an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population deemed by some of its members to constitute an actual or potential nation' (pp. 14, 73).

Aside from the terminological debate, the most enduring discussions, and arguably the most influential, have cantered on the origin and fundamental essence of the nation. The 'existence' of nations has been linked to such diverse phenomena as naturally occurring biological, psychological, and sociological human needs (Shils 1957; Rothschild 1981; Van den Berghe 1981), various social, economic, or political processes (Geertz 1963; Haas, 1964; Deutsch 1966; Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1990; Smith 1994), social construction and imagination (Anderson 1991; Brass 1991; Chatterjee 1993), and economic cleavages (Hechter 1975; Nairn 1977). Similarly, another debate has concerned attempts to categorize nationalism based upon its internal characteristics and/or ideology. The most commonly embraced typology, found in such classic works by Hayes (1931), Kohn (1967), and Smith (1983), is that which distinguishes between a rational/civic/French/Western form of nationalism and an emotional/ethnic/German/

Eastern type. Typically, value labels are associated with this dichotomy whereby the rational/civic type becomes viewed as the 'good' nationalism and the emotional/ethnic type as the 'bad' nationalism (Brown 1999).

The aforementioned debates have been productive, but whatever the fundamental nature of nationalism or the nation may be, it is clear that individuals manifest an attachment to the national collective rivalling the salience of any other individual-group bond. As a result, there is a continuing need to focus on other issues such as the essence, depth, and attraction of the bond between the individual and the nation (Stern 1995). This area of inquiry is especially important because as Druckman (1994: 44) notes, 'the feelings of attachment that comprise loyalty for many are not whimsical but are generally basic to the individual's definitions of themselves. Loyalty to a group strengthens one's identity and sense of belonging.' The nation has proven to be such an important object of attachment that alone or in tandem with the state, it is treated as a political entity, political leaders regularly invoke its name, and people express a willingness to sacrifice their lives for it. While this study is not an attempt to explain how the nation emerged, how it endures, or whether national identity or nationalism is good, bad, rational, or irrational, it does endeavour to examine the nature of national attachment by exploring the salience of national identity in Ireland and the place that particular national characteristics have in conceptions of Irishness.

The Irish nation, like most others, has been the subject of extensive scholarly attention. Much of that effort has focused on the evolution of Irish nationalism, the historical development of the Irish nation, and the composition of Irish identity. Boyce (1995) and Kee (1972) provide perhaps the most comprehensive historical accounts of Irish nationalism from the time of the ancient Celts to the present conflict in Northern Ireland. Their research illustrates the integral role of nationalism in the long struggle for Irish independence, the influence of nationalism on Irish politics, and the evolution of Irish national identity. A similar work by Rumpf and Hepburn (1977) examines the interaction between nationalism and socialism in twentieth century Ireland, addressing the effect these two ideological movements have had on Irish politics.

Other studies have concentrated on the composition of Irish nationalism or the nature, traits, or symbols of both the past and present Irish nation. Alter (1974) explores a pivotal period in Irish history known as the Home Rule Movement (1870-1918) and identifies several national symbols of the time including the green flag, the harp, and national festivals. For Archer (1984), the Easter Rising is a major national symbol, and he contends that Irish nationalism has been shaped by distorted images the Irish have of themselves and of the English. Cronin (1983) outlines five nationalist currents in Irish history: traditionalist nationalism, constitutional nationalism, physical-force republicanism, radical republicanism, and cultural nationalism. Bromage (1968) suggests language, religion, and land are the central components of traditional Irish identity, while McCaffrey (1989) concurs and adds ethnic origin as an additional characteristic. Girvin (1986) too cites religion and the language as symbols of the Irish nation and national identity. White (1996) describes an historic Irish national identity shaped by mythical Gaelic origins, devout Catholicism, and agrarianism. Furthermore, White concludes that contemporary Irish identity is a product of socio-economic modernization, and thus a blend of the traditional identity with more secular, cosmopolitan, European, and materialistic ideas. Similarly, Hutchinson (1987) stresses that the character of the modern Irish state has been shaped by a cultural nationalism, which is agrarian, Catholic, and Gaelic in nature. Cullen (1980) describes Irish nationalism as 'narrow and inward looking' and a 'product of colonialism' (p. 104-105). O'Mahony and Delanty (1998) identify two strands to Irish national identity: it is backward looking, seeking a return to traditional, Catholic Ireland; it is also forward looking in the sense of adapting to ongoing social change. Finally, Garvin (1996) contends that Ireland is now in a post-nationalist

stage in which most of the fundamentalist rhetoric associated with early independence has been abandoned.

Rather than hypothesizing about the nature of Irish national identity or examining the influence of nationalism on political events in Ireland, this study utilizes public opinion survey data to explore the appeal, depth, and composition of Irish national identity. First, data from a 1995 International Social Survey Programme survey are examined to assess the salience of Irish national identity, levels of pride in various national characteristics, and the importance of certain criteria for being considered a member of the Irish nation. With data gathered from twenty-three countries, the attitudes found in Ireland are also compared to those from the other surveyed countries. Then, Eurobarometer public opinion data collected over the past two decades are analyzed to assess levels of national pride and collective self-identification in Ireland and how such attitudes compare with those found throughout other European Union countries. Public opinion data on the subject of national identity are limited, especially the cross-national variety, and thus these surveys provide a unique opportunity not only to examine Irish opinion, but also to place it within a comparative context. This twofold analysis, while not intended to prove or disprove any specific theory of national identity, adds to the wider body of knowledge by providing a greater understanding of the nature of Irish identity and the relevance of the nation within the Republic today.

ISSP Analysis

The International Social Survey Programme designs and coordinates annual cross-national surveys, each of which focuses on a single theme in the social sciences such as religion, family, work, or the environment. In 1995, ISSP developed a questionnaire dealing exclusively with national identity and its many facets including attachment to the nation, national pride, and national symbols and characteristics. The survey was administered that year to nearly 31,000 individuals in twenty-three countries throughout Europe, North America, and the western Pacific.[1] Of particular interest in that survey were questions dealing with feelings of closeness to the nation, the importance of certain national traits, and feelings of pride in political, social, and economic components of the nation.

Among all of the questions included on the survey, perhaps the most fundamental for assessing levels of national attachment was:

How close do you feel to Ireland?[2]

Participants could choose from one of the following responses: *very close*, *close*, *not very close*, and *not close at all*. Clearly, the proportion of those who indicated that they felt *very close* to their nation provides a good indication of the depth of national identification. Among those surveyed in Ireland, over one-half of the respondents, 53.8%, expressed this strongest feeling of attachment to the nation. By comparison, only 45.5% of the entire ISSP survey population held that same view. Ireland's figure ranked ninth highest among the twenty-three countries with Hungary having the largest proportion at 79.6% and the Philippines the fewest at 21.9%. Further discussion of the general attachment to the Irish nation is found below in the analysis of the Eurobarometer data.

[1] The survey was administered in Australia, Austria, Bulgaria, Canada, the Czech Republic, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, Ireland, Japan, Latvia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, the Philippines, Poland, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the United States. The sample size in each country varied from a low of 994 in Ireland to a high of 2,438 in Australia.

[2] Each question examined will be presented as it appeared on the Irish questionnaire. On other questionnaires, the appropriate country/nationality label was used consistent with the survey location.

The ISSP survey is helpful in other respects because it provides an opportunity to examine what have been described earlier as features or symbols of the Irish nation. Within that body of literature, religion, land, and the Gaelic tradition emerge as the most commonly agreed upon characteristics of the Irish nation. Collectively, these represent what Smith (1991) described as the attributes of an ethnic nation as opposed to institutional or legal characteristics which would define a civic nation. A number of ISSP survey questions address these national components, thereby providing an opportunity to assess the importance of them to the Irish people. Before proceeding however, it must be noted that the following analysis is not an attempt to test whether these previously cited elements are fundamental to the conception of the Irish nation. The ISSP survey was not designed for that purpose, nor is a survey necessarily the best way to accomplish such a task. The examination of this data simply provides a contribution to the ongoing effort to understand the nature and appeal of the Irish nation.

The first characteristic of the Irish nation to be explored is religion. In the minds of many, a link between Catholicism and the Irish nationalist movement extends back at least to the early nineteenth century and the political movement led by Daniel O'Connell. Since then, religion has been cited by politicians, scholars, nationalists, and others as a core component of Irish national identity (Murphy 1988). John Dillon (1851-1927), a prominent Irish nationalist and member of the British Parliament, spoke of this connection in 1890:

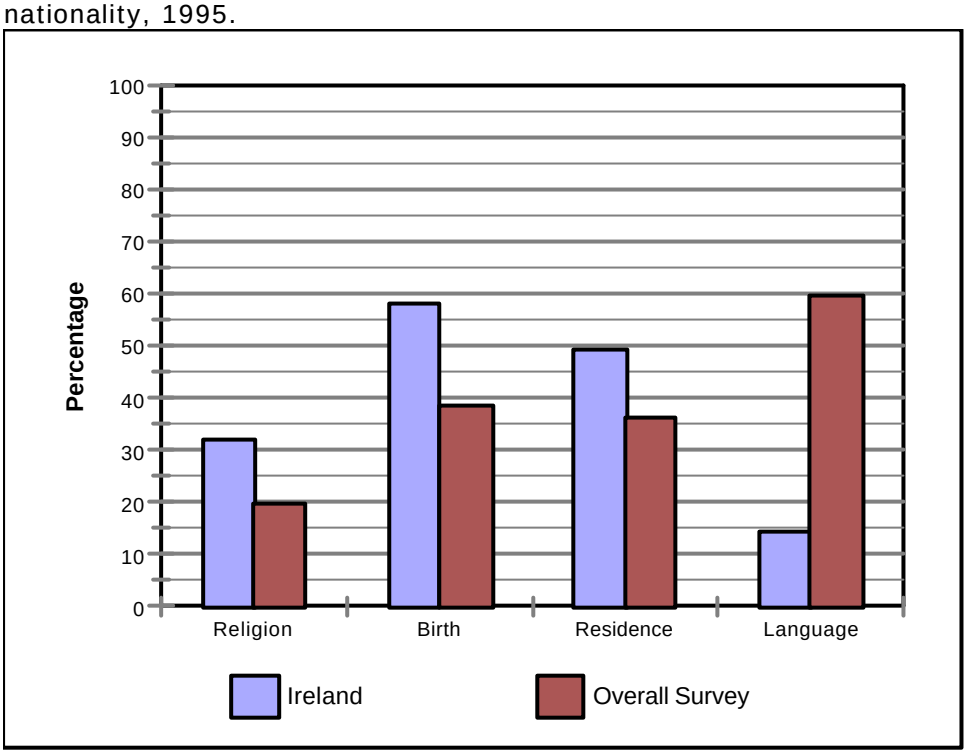
> The day is gone by and I thank God for it, when anyone can sow dissension between the religion of the Irish people and the nationality of the Irish people, which it has always been our proudest boast have been kept in harmony, bound together by links which no Government and no coercion can tear asunder. The religion and nationality of the Irish people are bound today by stronger bonds than ever, which no power, whether it be a Catholic bishop or a Coercion Government, will ever sunder. (Boyce 1995: 219-220)

Sentiment of this sort still prevails today, and it may be attributed to the historically active role of the Church in Irish politics, frequent references to Catholicism in nationalist discourse, a population which today is nearly 95% Catholic, and a church attendance rate which is the highest in Europe. In identifying Catholicism as a core component of the nation, the assumption is that the people themselves perceive being Catholic as a compatible with, if not altogether necessary for, being Irish. This proposition, along with the general relationship between religion and national identity, is explored through the following ISSP survey question:

To be truly Irish, how important do you think it is to be a Catholic?
Of the four possible responses to this question (*very important*, *fairly important*, *not very important*, and *not important at all*), nearly one-third of Irish respondents, 32.1%, indicated that they thought it was *very important* to be a Catholic in order to be truly Irish. Among all those surveyed by ISSP, the proportion of respondents who held that belonging to their nation's dominant religion or denomination was very important for nationality was only 19.7% (see Figure 1). Thus, the proportion of Irish embracing that view was over 60% higher than the corresponding figure for the entire survey population, and Ireland ranked third behind Bulgaria (45.5%) and the United States (38.6%) among countries having the largest proportion of respondents with such an opinion. The lowest figures were found in the Netherlands (3.3%), Sweden (7.5%), and Norway (9.7%). If the respondents who indicated that religion was *fairly important* are included with those who thought is *very important*, the proportion of Irish who viewed Catholicism as being linked to Irishness was 54.4%, nearly 50% higher than the corresponding overall survey figure of 36.9%. This finding appears to support the contention of those such as Bromage (1968), Girvin (1986), Hutchinson (1987),

McCaffrey (1989), White (1996), and O'Mahony and Delanty (1998) who identify religion as a primary element in Irish national identity. The data also seem compatible with Smith's (1991) contention that a common mass public culture, of which religion is a part, is a fundamental element of national identity in general.

Figure 1 percentage of respondents viewing selected criteria as very important for nationality, 1995.



Source: International Social Science Programme

Turning next to land as a national characteristic, as noted previously some have suggested that the Irish nation has long been associated with agrarian and rural qualities. This emphasis would seem appropriate given the historically rural nature of Irish society and the central role that farmers and peasants played in uprisings against British rule. More generally though, the essential point is the notion of land itself being integral to the conception of the nation, whereby territory becomes the 'homeland' and individuals associate their national belonging with being born and/or residing for extended periods within those boundaries. The strength of such a bond cannot be overestimated; within nearly all nations, substantial emphasis is placed on the territorial boundaries demarcating one's nation from others. Such a view is often accompanied by some historical claim to that land and a distinction between those who are tied to it and those who are not. Eamon de Valera (1882-1975), the most important twentieth-century Irish political leader, reflected this sentiment when he stated:

> We were originally Celts here with an ancient civilization and systems of laws. The Norsemen and the Normen [sic] were invaders. They secured the supreme political power but, underneath, the overwhelming majority of our own people – the great body of the nation – adhered to their own way of thought and preserved their original Celticity. (Bromage 1968: 25)

His contention that 'we' (the Irish) were 'here' (in the territory) before the 'invaders' (them) illustrates the way in which territory and the possession of it becomes imbedded in conceptions of nationhood.

The ISSP survey focuses on this relationship between land and national identity with two survey questions. The first looks at the significance of birthplace and its connection to perceptions of national belonging.

To be truly Irish, how important do you think it is to have been born in Ireland?
Available responses to this question were identical to those associated with the previous question on religion, and thus those who thought it was a *very important* criterion for nationality is again of most interest. The proportion of respondents who indicated that being born in Ireland was very important for being considered Irish was 58.1%. In contrast, the proportion of all those surveyed who viewed birth location as very important for nationality was 38.7% (see Figure 1). As with the preceding question on religion, the percentage of Irish attaching great importance to this characteristic was higher than the overall survey figure by more than 50%. Among all countries in the ISSP survey, the largest proportions of respondents expressing this strong view regarding birth and nationality were found in the Philippines (70.9%), followed by Bulgaria (58.6%) and then Ireland. The Netherlands (23.4%), Canada (24.7%), and Sweden (27.3%) had the lowest figures.

The second survey question addressing land as a component of national identity involves the importance placed on living within the national boundaries.

To be truly Irish, how important do you think it is to have lived in Ireland for most of one's life?
Among the Irish, 49.3% indicated that they believed to be truly Irish it was *very important* to have lived in Ireland most of one's life. This figure was considerably greater than the level of 36.4% found for the entire survey population (see Figure 1). When compared to all twenty-three countries in the survey, Ireland ranked fourth behind the Philippines (57.6%), Bulgaria (50.5%), and Austria (49.9%) in having the largest proportion of respondents holding this view. The lowest levels were found in the Netherlands (21%), Canada (23.3%), and Australia (26.7%). It is intriguing that such significant numbers of Irish would hold these opinions considering the nation's long and well documented history of emigration. One might have hypothesized that the Irish would be less concerned about linking birth or residence with nationality since millions of Irish over the last century and a half were compelled to live abroad, in many cases permanently, because of poor economic conditions in the country. Overall though, these responses reflect, as Bromage (1968), Hutchinson (1987), McCaffrey (1989), and White (1996) noted, the integral role of territory in forming the bond between individual and the Irish nation, as well as Smith's (1991) assertion that an historic territory is one of the core components of national identity.

The final characteristic of the Irish nation often mentioned by scholars might be broadly described as the Gaelic tradition. It is comprised of at least three components – language, history, and culture – and is that aspect of nationality which, in the minds of many, truly distinguishes the Irish from all other nations. As Douglas Hyde (1860-1949), later to become the first president of the Irish Republic, asserted in 1897, 'I believe it is our Gaelic past which, though the Irish race does not recognize it just at present, is really at the bottom of the Irish heart, and prevents us becoming citizens of the empire' (O'Donoghue 1999: 139).

The first element of the Gaelic tradition, the Irish language, is perhaps the most commonly mentioned attribute of the Irish nation. It was spoken by the majority of the

population well into the nineteenth century, but beginning around the 1840s, the number of Irish speakers began a rapid and steady decline due to the establishment of national schools, in which instruction was primarily in English, and mass emigration during the Famine (Comerford 1989; Johnson 1993). Since independence, there has been an ongoing effort to preserve and expand Irish language use, and according to the most recent census figures, 43% of the population claim to be able to speak Irish and approximately 10% of the population indicate that they speak it on a daily basis. However, these figures are self-reported and it is generally assumed that the actual number of native Irish speakers is lower. In the ISSP survey, the following question addresses the place of language in the conception of nationality:

To be truly Irish, how important do you think it is to be able to speak Irish?
Among those surveyed in all twenty-three countries, 59.6% felt that it was *very important* to be able to speak their language to be considered a member of their nation. The highest proportions were found in Hungary (79%), the Czech Republic (74.4%), and Norway (73.7%). By contrast, only 14.5% of Irish respondents indicated that they felt that it was *very important* to be able to speak Irish in order to be considered Irish (see Figure 1). Not only was the proportion of Irish with that attitude less than one-fourth of that for the overall survey population, it was by far the lowest among all countries. Spain, which had the second lowest proportion of respondents attaching great significance to the language, had a figure, 32.4%, which was still double that found in Ireland. On this national characteristic, Irish attitudes were dramatically different from those in any other surveyed country.

In literature, song, and political discourse, the Irish language is framed as an integral component of the nation. Arthur Griffith (1871-1922), recognized as one of the founders of the Irish Republic, remarked that without the Irish language 'there will never be seen again, on this planet, an independent Irish nation, or indeed an Irish nation of any kind' (Boyce 1995: 296). Despite sentiment such as this, the response level associated with the previous survey question highlights a paradox associated with the link between language and nationality, something which has long been recognized by even the most ardent nationalists. The Irish may embrace the general premise that their language is a primary national characteristic, yet the vast majority of them can't speak it fluently or don't speak it on a regular basis. Thus when pressed about its connection to nationality, as in the above question, the majority of people simply cannot require mastery of the Irish language as a necessary criterion for belonging to the nation. If they did, there would be far fewer individuals who could be considered truly Irish. These findings though do not necessarily contradict the position of those who specifically identify language as a vital component of Irishness (Bromage 1968; Girvin 1986; McCaffrey 1989). It appears as if the Irish language can be a characteristic of both the nation and national identity, so long as it is embraced as a 'symbolic' rather than a 'functional' element.

The second part of the Gaelic tradition is history. For all nations, history entails the perception that the community is hundreds or thousands of years old, or even so ancient that its origin has been lost in the mist of time. Such a collective is comprised of members bound together by common memories and a shared historical experience which differentiates their nation from all others. It matters little whether this history is grounded in fact or myth or some mixture of the two. The important point of history is that this shared memory and experience generates a sense of legitimacy, continuity, and permanence to the nation, thereby providing the basis for the claim that the nation exists and will exist because it has always existed.

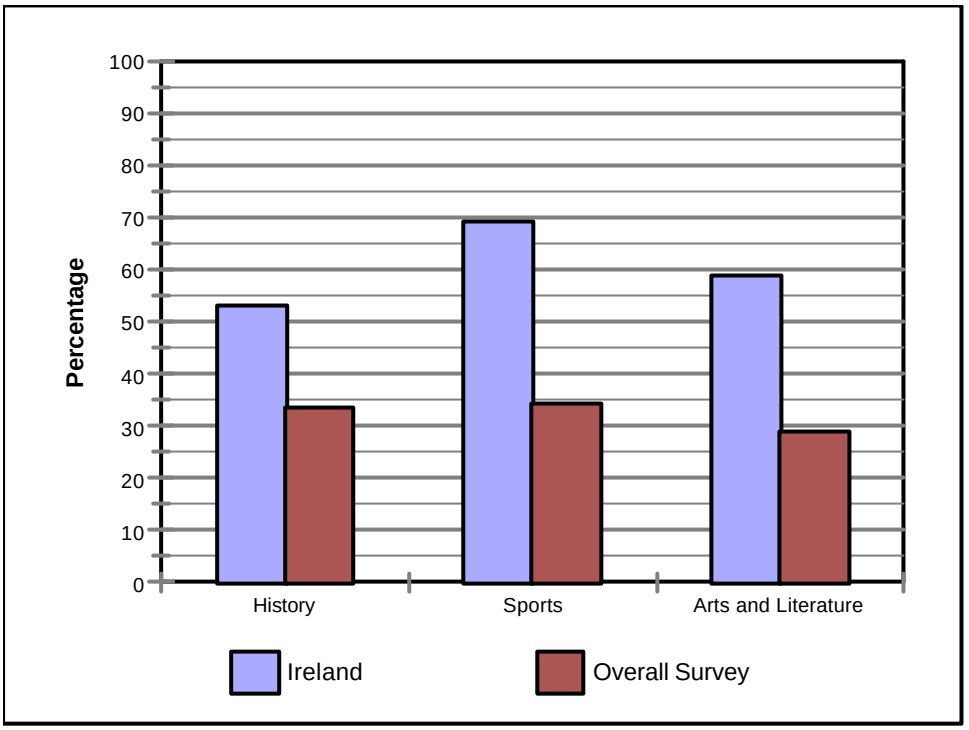
The ISSP survey addresses both history and the final component of the Gaelic tradition, culture, through a series of questions probing levels of pride in those national

characteristics. While national pride is not necessarily synonymous with national identity or nationalism, it reflects individual sentiments toward the nation in much the same way. As evident from Smith's (1991) definitions of national identity and nationalism noted above, the link between all three of these concepts rests with the bond between individual and nation, and national pride has rightly been treated as manifestation of national attachment (Terhune 1964; Rose 1985; Kosterman and Feshbach 1989; Larsen, et al. 1992; Dogan 1994; Kowalski and Wolfe 1994; Mummendey, Klink, and Brown 2001). Moreover, previous research on the same ISSP national pride questions considered below revealed that national pride could be grouped into two categories approximating Smith's (1991) distinction between civic and ethnic national identity. Furthermore, that research also indicated that each type of pride and its national identity counterpart were associated with similar levels of xenophobia (Hjerm 1998). Thus, these studies confirm the reliability of national pride as an indicator of national identity.

Returning to the analysis of the ISSP data, the survey provides insight into the place of history as a part of the Gaelic tradition with the question:

How proud are you of Ireland's history?
With available responses ranging from *very proud* to *not proud at all*, those who indicated that they were *very proud* of their history represent the strongest bond between individual and nation. The proportion of Irish with such an attitude was 53.2%, while just 33.5% of the entire survey population held that same view. Thus, the proportion of Irish expressing this highest level of pride in their nation's history was nearly 60% above the corresponding figure for the survey population (see Figure 2). Bulgaria (64.6%) had the highest proportion of respondents with that opinion and Ireland was second followed by the Czech Republic (50.1%). The lowest levels were found in Germany (8.7%), Sweden (17.3%), and the Netherlands (19.5%). Thus, the data support the claim that history is an element of Irishness (Archer 1984; White 1996), and they reflect Smith's (1991) proposition that common myths and memories are fundamental to the composition of national identity.

Figure 2: Percentage of respondents who are very proud of selected national characteristics, 1995



Source: International Social Science Programme

The final component of the Gaelic tradition is culture, which includes elements such as the arts, literature, and sports. While arts and literature are rather straightforward in their relationship to culture, uniquely Irish sports such as hurling and Gaelic football are also part of the Irish tradition. Such games are widely played and followed throughout Ireland today, and they have long been part of the Irish experience; Gaelic football dates to at least the seventeenth century and hurling has been played in one form or another for over one thousand years. The Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), which is responsible for promoting and regulating these games, illustrates this link between sports and national identity. Beyond its sporting responsibilities, the GAA has deliberately cast itself as a defender of the Gaelic tradition and maintained close ties to various nationalist political movements since its founding in 1884 (Mandle 1987; Cronin 1999). Sean McCague, the president of the Gaelic Athletic Association, celebrated the importance of culture when remarking, 'There is unity of mind in being Irish. Our games, our heritage, our music, dance and our built and green heritage are all part of what we are' (Logue 2000: 137).

The relevance of games for conceptions of Irishness is evident from the response to the ISSP question:

How proud are you of Ireland's achievements in sports?
Among the Irish, 69.1% indicated that they were *very proud* of their nation's achievements, a figure which was double the response of 34.4% for the entire survey population and the highest of all the twenty-three countries surveyed (see Figure 2). Other high levels of pride were found in New Zealand (66.4%) and Bulgaria (65.9%), while Poland (8.0%), Slovakia (19.0%), and the Czech Republic (19.2%) had the lowest levels.

The other element of culture, the arts and literature, was addressed with the following survey question:

How proud are you of Ireland's achievements in the arts and literature?
Among the Irish, 58.9% indicated that they were *very proud* of achievements in this area, while only 29.1% of the total number of respondents held that opinion (see Figure 2). As with pride in sports, the proportion of Irish respondents expressing this strongest level of pride in arts and literature was double the figure for the entire survey population and the highest among all countries. Italy (47.4%) and Bulgaria (46.7%) ranked just behind Ireland. The Netherlands (12.4%), Poland (14.1%), and Sweden (15.6%) had the smallest proportion of respondents with that view. Overall, these attitudes toward sports, arts, and literature in Ireland are compatible with the claim that Gaelic culture is a vital ingredient in the conceptualization of the Irish nation (Bromage 1968; Archer 1984; Hutchinson 1987; McCaffrey 1989; White 1996; and O'Mahony and Delanty 1998). These results also seem to support Smith's (1991) identification of a common mass public culture as a basic element of national identity.

The ISSP data examined above reveal that strong levels of national affiliation, including feelings of closeness to the nation and pride in national history, arts and literature, and sports, were consistently greater in Ireland than for the survey population as a whole. Additionally, certain national characteristics such as birth, residence, and religion were deemed more essential by the Irish for their conception of nationality than was the case for the overall survey population. Overall, these findings demonstrate that a considerable bond exists in Ireland between the individual and nation, and that most of the commonly described national characteristics are indeed part of the foundation of Irish national identity.

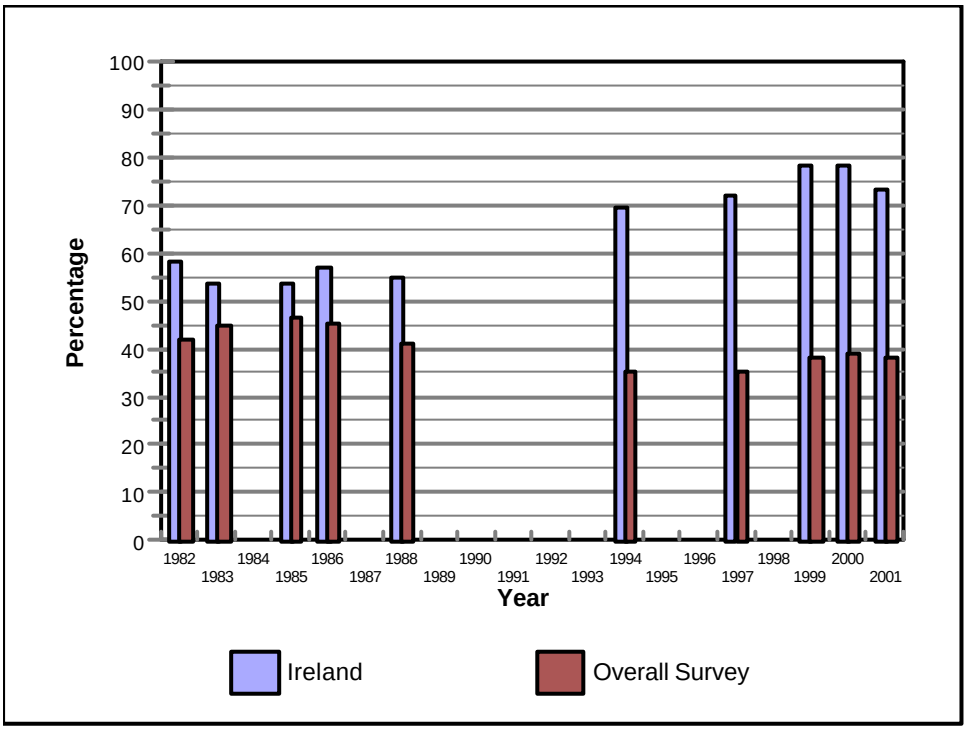
Eurobarometer Analysis
Additional insight into Irish national identity is also possible through an analysis of data from a biannual survey, Eurobarometer, administered by the European Union in all member states.[3] While its primary purpose is to measure attitudes regarding European integration and EU institutions and policies, this survey provides a wealth of data on a wide range of political, social, and economic issues. Two questions in particular address national identity and offer an opportunity to evaluate Irish attitudes and compare them to opinion found in the other member states. Moreover, these questions have been included in most of the surveys over the two decades, thereby permitting an examination of the evolution of national identity in Ireland and the rest of the EU. The first of these questions, appearing for the first time in 1982, probes national pride and provides a good indication of the degree to which the Irish are attached to their nation.

Would you say that you are very proud, fairly proud, not very proud, or not at all proud to be Irish?[4]
Consistent with the approach taken in the earlier analysis of the ISSP national pride questions, those who indicated that they were *very proud* to be Irish is of most interest. This type of sentiment suggests a strong attachment to the nation and provides a means for understanding the depth of Irish identity. The question appeared with some consistency between 1982 and 1988 and again between 1994 and 2001, but was not included between 1989 and 1993. Consequently, it is perhaps most useful to consider the data in these two time frames, 1982-1988 and 1994-2001.

[3] The regular Eurobarometer survey sample size is approximately 1,000 individuals in each country with the exception of Luxembourg (600 respondents), the United Kingdom (1,000 respondents in Great Britain and 300 respondents in Northern Ireland), and Germany (1,000 respondents in the former East Germany and 1,000 respondents in the former West Germany).
[4] In each European Union country, the appropriate nationality is used in place of the word 'Irish'. All Eurobarometer questions examined in this study are similarly treated.

The data from the period between 1982 and 1988 reveal that on every occasion, except 1984 and 1987 when the question was not included on the survey, a majority of Irish respondents expressed the strongest level of affinity for their nation. Those indicating that they were *very proud* to be Irish ranged from a low of 53.4% in 1985 to a high of 58.2% in 1982. In comparison, the proportion of all survey respondents with that opinion ranged from a low of 41.2% in 1988 to a high of 46.5% in 1985 (see Figure 3). Thus from 1982 to 1988, the Irish expressed a level of national pride consistently above that found throughout the European Union overall.

Figure 3: Percentage of respondents indicating they are very proud to be Irish (or appropriate nationality in other EU countries)



Source: Eurobarometer

The differences between attitudes in Ireland and those for the entire survey population become even more pronounced between 1994 and 2001. Among all surveyed countries in 1994, 1997, and 1999, Ireland had the greatest proportion of individuals indicating that they were very proud of their nationality, and in 2000 and 2001 only Greece had a larger proportion. Given that this question was not included on surveys conducted in 1995, 1996, and 1998, Ireland between 1994 and 2001 ranked either first or second among all European Union countries each surveyed year. Those in Ireland responding that they were very proud of their nationality ranged from a low of 69.5% in 1994 to a high of 78% in 1999 and 2000. These figures represent a substantial increase from the levels found between 1982 and 1988. Moreover, in each survey the proportion of 'very proud' respondents among the entire survey population was well below that for Ireland, ranging from a low of 35.1% in 1994 to a high of 39% in 2000 (see Figure 3). When compared to the European Union overall, Irish respondents were twice as likely to be very proud of their nationality, and Great Britain and Finland, the two countries with the next highest proportion of 'very proud' respondents during this time, were generally some fifteen to twenty percentage points behind Ireland and Greece. Quite simply, Irish and Greek respondents expressed levels of national pride which were substantially above that found for any other European Union country.

The second Eurobarometer survey question addresses respondent self-identification rather than national pride, but it too provides insight into the salience of Irish identity. The question used between 1983 and 1992 was:

Do you ever think of yourself as not only Irish, but also European?
Following a change in wording in 1992, the question became:
In the near future do you see yourself as Irish only, Irish and European, European and Irish, or European only?
Despite that shift in emphasis from present to future self-identification, both versions of the question deal with the same underlying sentiment of primary collective attachment and the balance between national identity and European identity.

The question used from 1983 to 1992 inquired whether people ever perceived themselves to be European in addition to their own nationality. Among the three available responses, *often*, *sometimes*, and *never*, those who never thought of themselves as European, but only as Irish, is of most interest as it represents the strongest level of national attachment. In the reworded version used since 1992, the focus turns to future identity with specific national and supranational identification response options provided within the question. Here, the response of *Irish only* reflects that same strong expression of affinity for the nation.

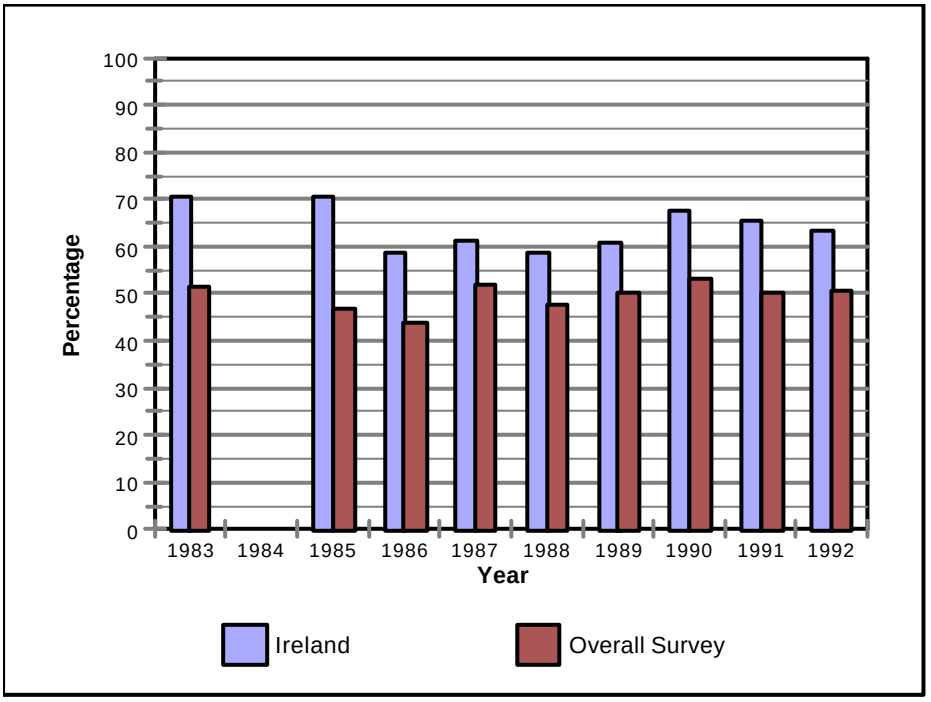
With the development of the European Union over the past few decades, it may be hypothesized that the responses to these questions are shaped largely by opinion toward EU political institutions and the process of European integration. Indeed, many facets of public opinion, including some where a connection to EU policy or activity is not directly apparent, have been affected by attitudes regarding this international institution. Nevertheless, negative attitudes toward the EU are not necessarily accompanied by high levels of national pride or a propensity toward national self-identification. In the case of Ireland, it may be helpful to note that strong support for the EU coexists with the high levels of national pride identified above. For instance, a 1998 Eurobarometer survey revealed that 82% of Irish believed that it was good for their country to be a member of the European Union, while the corresponding figure for the entire survey population was just 51%. Among all fifteen European Union countries, Ireland had the largest proportion of respondents expressing this favourable attitude toward the organization with Luxembourg (81%) and the Netherlands (71%) ranked second and third. The United Kingdom (29%), Sweden (37%), and Austria (42%) had the lowest figures in the European Union. Additionally, 88% of Irish respondents indicated that their country had benefited from membership in the European Union, while only 46% of all those surveyed held that same view. Here again, Ireland had the highest figure among all countries with Portugal (77%) and Luxembourg (72%) ranking second and third. The United Kingdom (29%), Sweden (29%), and Denmark (37%) had the smallest proportion of people indicting that their country was better off because of EU membership (European Commission 2001c: 20-23). A more detailed examination of the relationship between national identity and support for international institutions is beyond the scope of this study, yet the data illustrate that insight into the salience of Irish identity can be gained from questions probing national versus supranational self-identification.

In the case of responses to the Eurobarometer question as used from 1983 to 1992, it becomes clear that the pattern of above average Irish national affinity associated with the national pride question is present again. Among the entire survey population, the proportion of respondents who indicated they thought of themselves only in terms of their own nationality, never as European, ranged from a low of 43.9% in 1986 to a high of 53% in 1990. In comparison, the proportion of Irish who held that same view ranged from low of 58.5% in 1988 to a high of 70.5% in 1983 (see Figure 4). In every surveyed year, the Irish were ten to twenty percentage points above the survey population in

rejecting the label 'European' for themselves and embracing instead an attachment only to the national collective. Throughout this ten-year period, Ireland generally was second only to the United Kingdom in having the largest proportion of respondents with this view, except in 1987 and 1989 when Ireland ranked third behind the United Kingdom and the Netherlands.

The responses following modification of the question in 1992 are similar in that the data reveal levels of national attachment among the Irish again to be above the overall Eurobarometer survey figures. Between 1992 and 2001, the proportion of Irish who indicated that in the near future they would consider themselves only Irish, not as European or some combination of Irish and European, fluctuated between a low of 38.5% in 1994 and a high of 56% in 2000.[5] Among the entire survey population, the proportion of respondents indicating that they would identify themselves exclusively by their own nationality ranged from a low of 33% in 1994 to a high of 46% in 1998 (see Figure 5). Thus from 1992 to 2001, the proportion of Irish defining themselves solely by their nationality was consistently five to ten percentage points higher than corresponding figure for the survey population. During this period, Ireland ranked between third and sixth among European Union countries in having the largest proportion of respondents who would define themselves solely by their nationality.

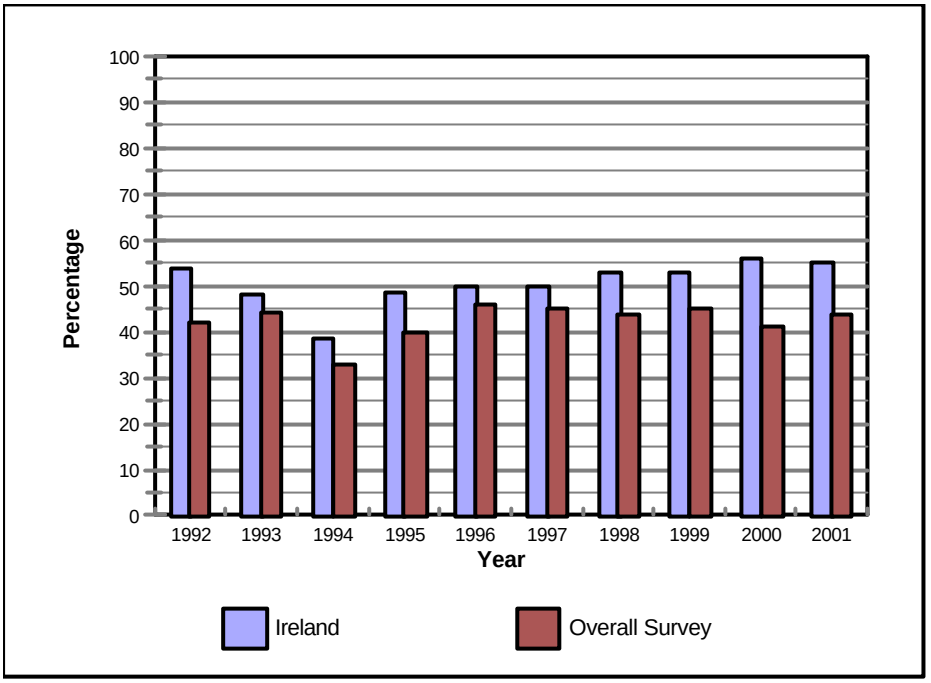
Figure 4: Percentage of respondents who never view themselves as European



Source: Eurobarometer

[5] It should be noted that the figure of 38.5% in 1994 appears unusually low given that in the other survey years the proportion never fell below 48%. For the entire survey population, the response of *nationality only* given in 1994 was also dramatically below that for any other year. Consequently, the data associated with the 1994 survey question are perhaps best viewed with a degree of caution.

Figure 5: Percentage of respondents who, in the near future, only see themselves as Irish (or appropriate nationality in other EU countries)



Source: Eurobarometer

The data associated with both versions of this Eurobarometer question on national/supranational identity reveal a few interesting trends. Obviously, the differences between Irish opinion and overall European Union opinion were generally greater between 1982 and 1992, after which the gap between Irish opinion and overall EU survey opinion narrowed in response to the reworded question. A more careful analysis however reveals that the proportion of individuals defining themselves solely by their nationality in Ireland, and likewise among the survey population as a whole, reached their lowest levels between 1993 and 1995. Since then, the proportion of Irish defining themselves by their nationality has followed an upward trend, rising from 38.5% in 1994 to 55% in 2001. During that period, the proportion of all those surveyed in the EU who expressed this 'nationality only' self-definition also rose between 1994 and 1996, but has since remained relatively steady at approximately 45%. Whereas Irish figures were some four to nine percentage points higher than the corresponding survey figures between 1993 and 1999, the disparity between Irish and overall attitudes has increased since 1999. In 2000 and 2001, the proportion of Irish expressing this exclusively national self-definition was between ten and fifteen percentage points above the proportion of all those surveyed; a pattern similar to that found between 1982 and 1992. Irish attitudes on this issue are not only different from overall European Union opinion, but the differences between Ireland and the larger EU population have been increasing.

Several conclusions can be drawn from these data. First, identification with the nation is comparatively stronger in Ireland than in the European Union as a whole, particularly with regard to levels of national pride which rank among the highest anywhere in the EU. Second, an increasing proportion of the Irish population is identifying with the nation. Levels of national pride and national self-identification have been rising in Ireland since the mid-1990s. And finally, the differences between Irish opinion and overall EU opinion in the area of national identity are widening. The percentage of respondents throughout the EU who define themselves solely by their nationality has remained relatively stable since the mid-1990s while the proportion of Irish with that view has been increasing. Generally, these conclusions parallel those found from the ISSP survey data discussed

previously, reaffirming the existence of a salient and relatively strong bond between the individual and the Irish nation.

Conclusion

For many, the use of the words 'nationalism' and 'Ireland' together tend to be associated with the troubles in Northern Ireland; an understandable tendency given the visibility of that ongoing conflict. However, as this study confirms, the nation is also a relevant concept south of the border in the Republic of Ireland. The data explored here indicate that the Irish exhibited among the highest level of national pride throughout the European Union and were less likely to identify themselves as European and more likely to define themselves solely by reference to their nationality. Additionally, the depth and scope of that attachment extended to national characteristics to a degree not present in most other surveyed countries. The Irish placed a greater emphasis on the importance of religion, birthplace, and residence for their conception of nationality, and they expressed among the highest levels of pride in their nation's history, arts and literature, and sports.

Both the salience and composition of that identity raise questions about the impact this national attachment may have on major political issues in Ireland such as European Union membership and the conflict in Northern Ireland. As noted earlier, Irish attitudes toward the European Union are overwhelmingly favourable. Some might find it difficult to reconcile strong levels of national attachment with widespread support for this international institution, yet as Laffan (2002) notes regarding Ireland's entry into the European Union, 'The renewed link with continental Europe resonated with Catholic Ireland. EU membership implied a re-joining of Europe in an important sense' (p. 86). More importantly for many Irish, membership in the European Union provided the means by which the nation could alter its historical dependence upon Great Britain and establish itself as a strong and fully independent state. In this way, Laffan notes 'EU membership appealed to the old concern of Irish nationalism – "how to deal with Britain" and the new concern – how to make Ireland prosperous. The EU offered liberation not containment' (2002: 86).

In June 2001, it may have appeared as though this compatibility between Irish national identity and membership in the European Union had finally ended. The Treaty of Nice, which restructured the European Union to facilitate the admittance of future members from Central and Eastern Europe, was rejected in an Irish referendum by 54% of the voters. While this marked the first time Irish voters failed to approve a European Union treaty, those voting 'no' in EU referenda over the past three decades has steadily risen from the 16.9% in 1972 who opposed Ireland's joining the EU to the majority who opposed the Nice Treaty in 2001. These developments would seem to indicate a steady transformation in Irish attitudes toward the European Union. Yet as Sinnott (2001) notes, these figures are misleading due to substantial declines in voter turnout. In EU treaty referenda, voter turnout in Ireland fell from high of 71% in 1972 to a low of 35% in 2001. Thus when this decline is taken into account, the proportion of the entire Irish electorate actually voting 'no' in EU referenda has only increased from 12% in 1972 to a high of 21% in 1998. In the 2001 referendum on the Nice Treaty, the 'no' vote as a proportion of the entire electorate actually declined to 18.5%, but when combined with the low voter turnout, it was enough to defeat the measure.

Sinnott's opinion survey found that a lack of information and lack of understanding of the issues surrounding the Nice Treaty were the most common explanations given by those who abstained, as well as by those who voted 'no'. The Irish government, embarrassed by the public's rejection of the Treaty, called for another vote and campaigned aggressively to ensure passage. In the subsequent October 2002 referendum, voter turnout increased to nearly 50% and the Treaty was approved with 63% of the vote.

There may be a growing complacency or indifference among the Irish electorate, but as discussed earlier, strong levels of national identification have not proven to be incompatible with what remain overwhelmingly favourable attitudes toward membership in the European Union.

Among all issues though, none has been more enduring or more closely linked with national identity than the partition of Ireland following the Government of Ireland Act of 1920. The resulting separation of the Irish people into a state (the Republic of Ireland) and a de-facto state (Northern Ireland), as well as the conflict between Republicans and Unionists in the North, figure prominently in the political dialogue, and have shaped public attitudes in the Republic. With respect to the unification of North and South, a majority of Irish between 1970 and 1991 indicated that a united Ireland was 'something to hope for'; the proportion ranged from a low of 61% in 1974 to a high of 82% in 1991 (Hayes and McAllister 1996: 78). Additionally, a survey conducted in 1983 revealed that 63% of respondents in the Republic believed that the Irish nation consisted of all 32 counties of Northern Ireland and the Republic (Cox 1985). These attitudes seem appropriate considering the nature of Irish national identity discussed above, yet other opinion stemming from the North-South division seems at odds with conventional wisdom. For instance, in that same 1983 survey, less than half of those in the Irish Republic, just 41%, viewed the people of Northern Ireland as Irish (Cox 1985). Another comprehensive survey of Irish attitudes, administered in the Republic in 1988 and 1989, also revealed less than overwhelming affiliation with those in Northern Ireland. While 49% of respondents agreed that Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic were two separate nations (an increase of ten percentage points from a 1972-1973 survey), only 42% disagreed with such an assertion (Mac Gréil 1996). One might be tempted to conclude that these attitudes are due to the fact that the majority of the population in Northern Ireland is Protestant and thus viewed as different by almost the exclusively Catholic population in the Republic. Most remarkably, however, in that same survey a plurality of those in the Republic, 45%, indicated that Catholics in Northern Ireland have more in common with Northern Protestants than they have with Catholics in the South.

Although large proportions in the Republic indicated that Irish unification was something to hope for, attitudes changed when it came to practical political solutions for Northern Ireland. For example, those in the Republic who believed Irish unity was a solution for the problems in Northern Ireland fell steadily from 72% in 1984 to 41% in 1991 (Hayes and McAllister 1996: 76). In a 1996 *Irish Times* survey administered less than one year after the ISSP survey discussed above, only 30% of respondents in the Republic wanted Northern Ireland to become part of a united Ireland; 29% wanted Northern Ireland to be linked to both the United Kingdom and Ireland; and 22% wanted Northern Ireland to become independent. This evidence highlights the divergence in opinion over the desire for Irish unification versus its utility in solving the dispute (Hayes and McAllister 1996: 77)

Attitudes within the Republic toward Northern Ireland have clearly evolved from the days when the border between North and South was viewed as a temporary and artificial boundary between all Irish people. A greater proportion of people are more likely to perceive differences between North and South and less likely to see a united Ireland as a solution to the Northern Ireland problem; views which surveys confirm are more prevalent among the young and those living in urban areas. Some have attributed these changing attitudes to the physical separation between North and South:

> The state has become synonymous with popular feelings of nationhood, even if this is anathema in constitutional terms. The longevity of partition has led to a situation where the vast majority in the South cannot remember Ireland united

> and have known nothing other than the twenty-six county state. (Cochrane 1994: 390).

Given Ireland's continued urbanization and a population which is the youngest in Europe, this attitudinal transformation, noted in Garvin's (1994) examination of Irish identity, will likely continue. Such an opinion shift was most dramatically emphasized in the referendum on the 1998 Good Friday Agreement where 94% of Irish voters approved amending the Irish Constitution to remove the Republic's territorial claim to Northern Ireland. This overwhelming level of support 'not only provided a popular mandate for the settlement but also symbolically revoked what fundamentalist republicans had regarded as the irrevocable decision of the Irish people in 1918 in favour of an independent, united Irish republic' (Coakley 1999: 49-50). Thus, while national unity has been prominent within twentieth-century Irish political discourse, the physical border created between the North and South has slowly been incorporated into conceptions of Irish national identity.

Future research involving a comprehensive statistical analysis of Irish data from the Eurobarometer and ISSP surveys will likely provide additional insight into the nature of Irish national identity, yet this study still contributes to the body of knowledge in a number of ways. First, it demonstrates that identification with the nation can be revealed, measured, and interpreted with survey data. Second, it builds upon past work on Irish national identity by analyzing the depth and composition of that attachment. And finally, the study confirms that the nation remains a prominent feature of the Irish political and social landscape. As Collins and Cradden (2001) assert:

> For Ireland, nationalism is the dominant ideology. It binds diverse individuals into 'a people', acts as a motive for economic, cultural and sporting achievement, and provides a source of genuine pride and sympathy. The nation has become the highest affiliation and obligation of the individual, and through it a significant part of personal identity is formed. (p. 150)

Perhaps it should not come as a surprise to find that these findings reaffirm the prevalence and strength of the bond between the individual and the Irish nation. After all, the great events throughout Irish history including the Civil War (1922-23), the Easter Rising, the Home Rule movement, the Repeal movement (1829-1843), and the Rebellions of 1798 and 1641 were infused with national sentiment and propelled by an attachment to the nation. The manner in which the Irish nation is conceptualized has changed over the course of Irish history, and Ireland today is politically, socially, and economically different from the Ireland of just a generation ago. Yet even with the passage of time, the nation endures as an object of affiliation and remains a central force in Irish politics. Bertie Ahern, the current Taoiseach (prime minister of Ireland), touched upon this when he remarked, 'The one constant over many generations and centuries through all tribulations has been our pride in being Irish' (Logue 2000: 1). While it is often tempting to dismiss such a statement when it comes from a political leader, this study confirms that the Taoiseach's sentiment is shared by most others who, like him, are members of the Irish nation.

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